Farmland Loss – Trends, Predictions and Potential Action

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Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance – September 26, 2017
Presentation Outline

• Farmland in Ontario
• Why protect farmland?
• Starting premise
  • Challenges with existing measurement tools
• Research method
• Initial findings
• Challenges
• Next steps
• Discussion
Farmland in Ontario

- Only 0.5% of Canada’s land area is Class 1 farmland
- Over half of the class 1 farmland is in Southern Ontario
- All of Canada’s 2 best agri-climatic zones
- 70-85% of land being urbanized is class 1
Agricultural Uncertainty

Past                        Present                       Future

Climate Change
Water Use
Peak Oil
Diary Entry:
June 1, 1877

5 generations later,
June 1, 2017
So... why Protect Farmland?

- Food production
- Food security
- Economic contributions of agriculture
- Stewardship & amenity of the countryside
- A resource for future generations
Evolving Rationale for Protecting Farmland

• Traditional reasons
  • The amenity of food
  • Global responsibility
  • Energy
  • Future Options

• Local Food
  • Connections to health
  • Local economies
  • Amenity value
  • Necessity
  • Other...
Farmland Preservation: What are the Positives in Ontario?

• Relatively high urban densities
• Some municipalities - very sound policies
• A relatively high acceptance of planning (and state based restrictions)
• High capability farmland and the economics of preservation
• Urban intensification, downtown renewal, etc.
• Active provincial involvement
Farmland Preservation: Areas of Concern

• Expansion of urban areas & loss of farmland (4 million more people anticipated in 30 years)

• Until recently, farmland preservation has had a low profile

• Farmland loss is often seen as inevitable

• Loss of farmers...but protection of farmland

• Some municipalities - poor track record (rural severances)
What are the Impacts of Non-farm Land uses on Agricultural Land?

• Introduces restrictions on farmland
• Fragment land base & consume farmland
• Potential conflict with agriculture
• Can lead to changes in the rural community
• Detract from rural aesthetic
• Environmental and servicing impacts
Measuring Farmland Conversion: Starting Premise

We are challenged by the absence of data to accurately document changes to farmland availability over time.

Source: GeoOttawa
Existing Methods Come With Challenges

• **Census** – Only documents land in production (e.g. commodity prices). It may be decades before land comes out of production following a land use decision.

• **Aerial imagery** – Varies across the province and may or may not document the impact of land use decisions.
Land Approvals and Development

• Delay between approvals and land development
  • Land often comes out of production years after approvals have been granted
  • When new houses are built a former agricultural use is visibly lost

• Assumed policy failure of Greenbelt or County or Regional Planning
  • People see houses built on prime land or “sprawl” and assume that the planning instrument isn’t working
Research Methods

This research specifically looked at approved official plan amendments by region/county to identify the amount of land lost to urban expansion and other non-agricultural land uses.
Research Methods

• Included reviewing planners' reports, official plan policies and provincial legislation
• 100s of files were reviewed on-site or when available, electronically
• Region/county staff have been consulted for aid in interpreting individual files when necessary.
Timeframe – Research Parameters

- Start with the year 2000 to 2014
- Captured both data before the 2005 PPS and before the Greenbelt
Study Sites
## Redesignations by County/Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County/Region</th>
<th>Number of approved OPAs related to the loss of prime agriculture land</th>
<th>Development designation (Ha)</th>
<th>Rural designation (Ha)</th>
<th>Non-farm uses through site-specific policy amendments (Ha)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Brant</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Durham</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1,723</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>Halton</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2,656</td>
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<td>287</td>
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<td>Huron</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Niagara</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>944</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>851</td>
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<td>Peel</td>
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<td>Perth</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>217</td>
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<td>415</td>
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<td>Simcoe</td>
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<td>2,100</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>162</td>
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<td>Waterloo</td>
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<td>1,088</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wellington</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>812</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>86</td>
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<td>York</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5,233</td>
<td>1,755</td>
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## Greenbelt Area Totals

<table>
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<th>Outside the Greenbelt Plan Area</th>
<th>Within the Greenbelt Plan Area</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pre-2005</td>
<td>2005-2014</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prime Agriculture Land Lost</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| (Hectares)                   | 8,127                           | 11,709                        | 20,485 | ha
| Site Specific Non-Agricultural Uses (Hectares) | 342                             | 808                           | 1,550  | ha
| Total                        | 8,469 ha                        | 12,517 ha                     | 22,035 | ha
Prime Agricultural Land Redesignated (2000-2014) by County/Region within the Greater Golden Horseshoe

The bar chart shows the distribution of redesignated prime agricultural land by county/region within the Greater Golden Horseshoe. The chart includes data for Brant, Durham, Halton, Niagara, Peel, Simcoe, Waterloo, Wellington, and York. The chart indicates the hectares of land redesignated for each category: Site Specific, Rural, and Development.
Prime Agricultural Land Redesignated (2000-2014) by County/Region within the Greater Golden Horseshoe as a Proportion of the 2016 Census Farm Area
Sum of Farmland Converted per Year within the Greater Golden Horseshoe
Number of Official Plan Amendments by Year

*Excludes Simcoe and Waterloo
Population Change from 2011 - 2016

Source: Statistics Canada, 2017
Agricultural Designations Over the Years: 2005

Approved by Region June 2005
Appealed to the OMB
Approved by OMB December 2006
Agricultural Designations Over the Years: 2006

Northwest Brampton Urban Development Area – 2,428 Hectares (6,000 Acres)
Agricultural Designations Over the Years: 2014

The loss of farmland has occurred in incremental stages.

Mayfield West Phase 2 Secondary Plan Settlement Area Boundary Expansion - 207.5 Hectares (512.5 Acres)
Agricultural Designations Over the Years: Future Growth Expectations

Red box indicates the Mayfield West Rural Service Study Area of approximately 2,000 hectares.
Challenges

• Regional variation
  • Site specific policies
    • Permitted uses
• Aggregate results
• Development delays
• Definition of farmland
  • Secondary agriculture and rural designations
Next Steps

• Complete case studies within the Greater Golden Horseshoe
  • Dufferin, Peterborough, Northumberland, Kawartha Lakes, Hamilton and Haldimand

• Analysis/report

• Toolkit
  • Outline of methodology
  • Encouraging practices
  • Focus group with planners, farmers and other stakeholders

• Access to data
  • Will be available on www.waynecaldwell.ca
An unwritten diary entry for June 1, 2047:
Thank You

• Questions?