Farmland Loss – Trends, Predictions and Potential Action

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Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance – September 26, 2017

UNIVERSITY of GUELPH

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School of Environmental Design and Rural Development

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

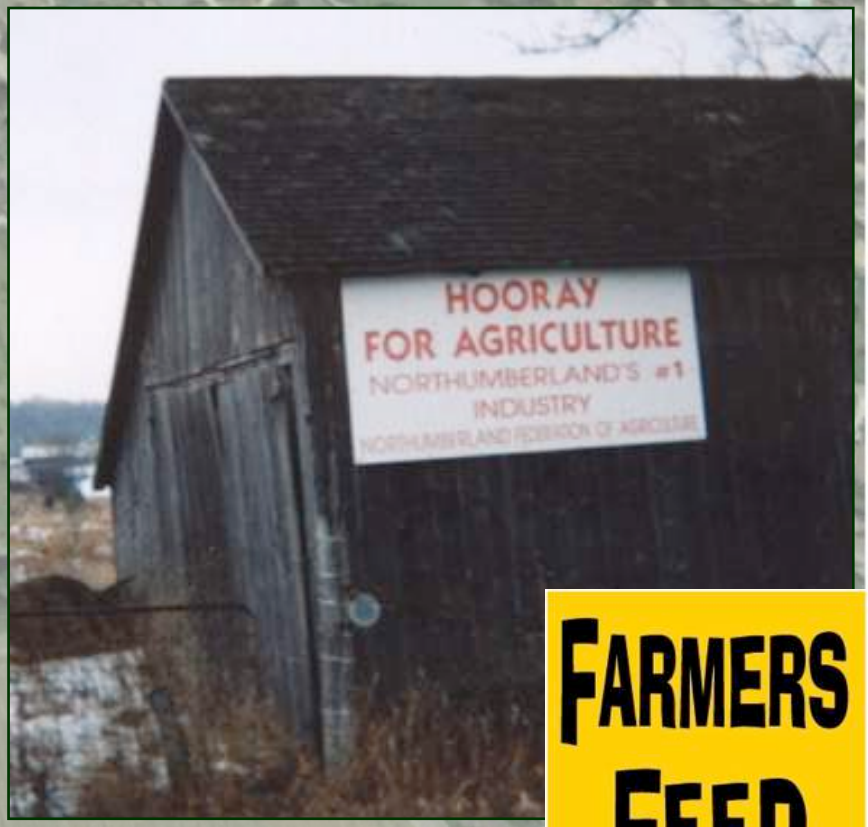
Past **Present** **Future**

Diary Entry:
June 1, 1877

Diary Entry:
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?

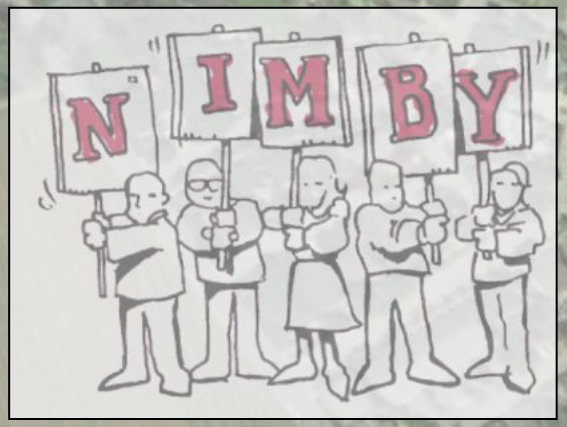
- Relatively high urban densities
- Some municipalities - very sound policies
- A relatively high acceptance of planning (and state based restrictions)
- High capability farmland and the economics of preservation
- Urban intensification, downtown renewal, etc.
- Active provincial involvement

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)

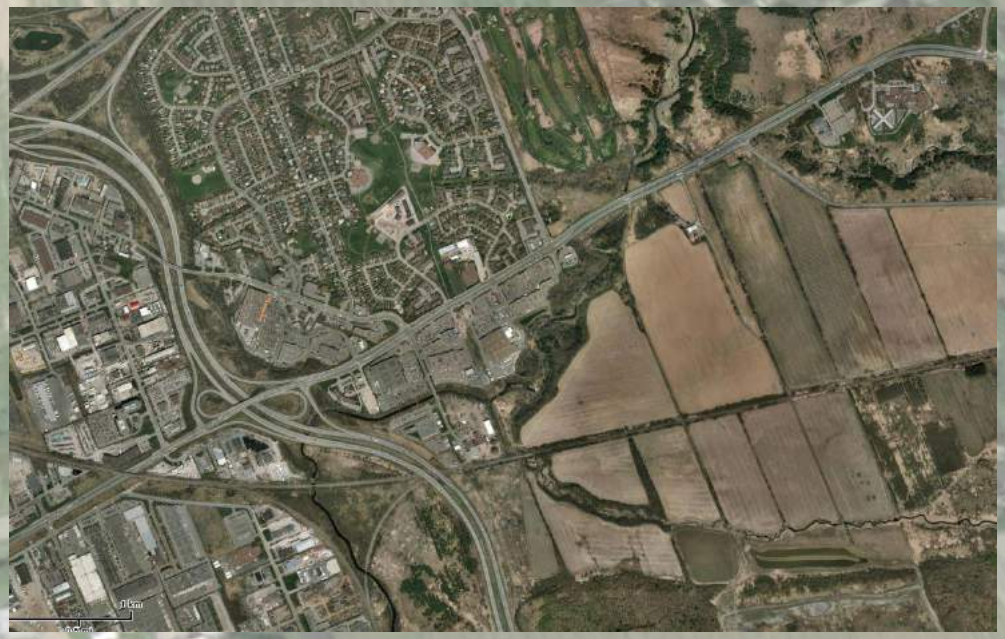
What are the Impacts of Non-farm Land uses on Agricultural Land?

- 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

TOWN OF NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE
PUBLIC NOTICE
PROPOSED SUBDIVISION
CANNERY PARK
LEGEND

CUSTOM
BUILDING LOTS
FOR SALE

NO
EXIT
DTZ
SOLD
905 384 2413

Under construction - 2017

Construction completed - 2014

Official Plan Amendments 1973 to 1981

Under construction - 2017

Research Methods

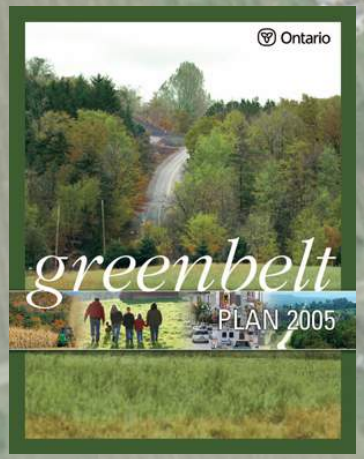
This research specifically looked at approved official plan amendments by region/county to identify the amount of land lost to urban expansion and other non-agricultural land uses.

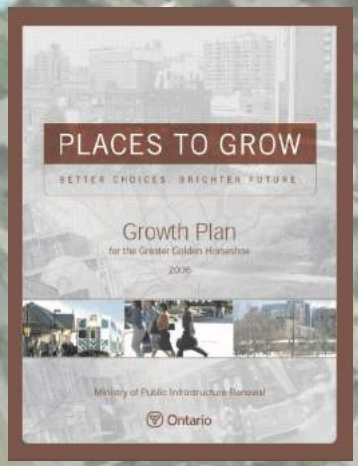
Research Methods

- 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.

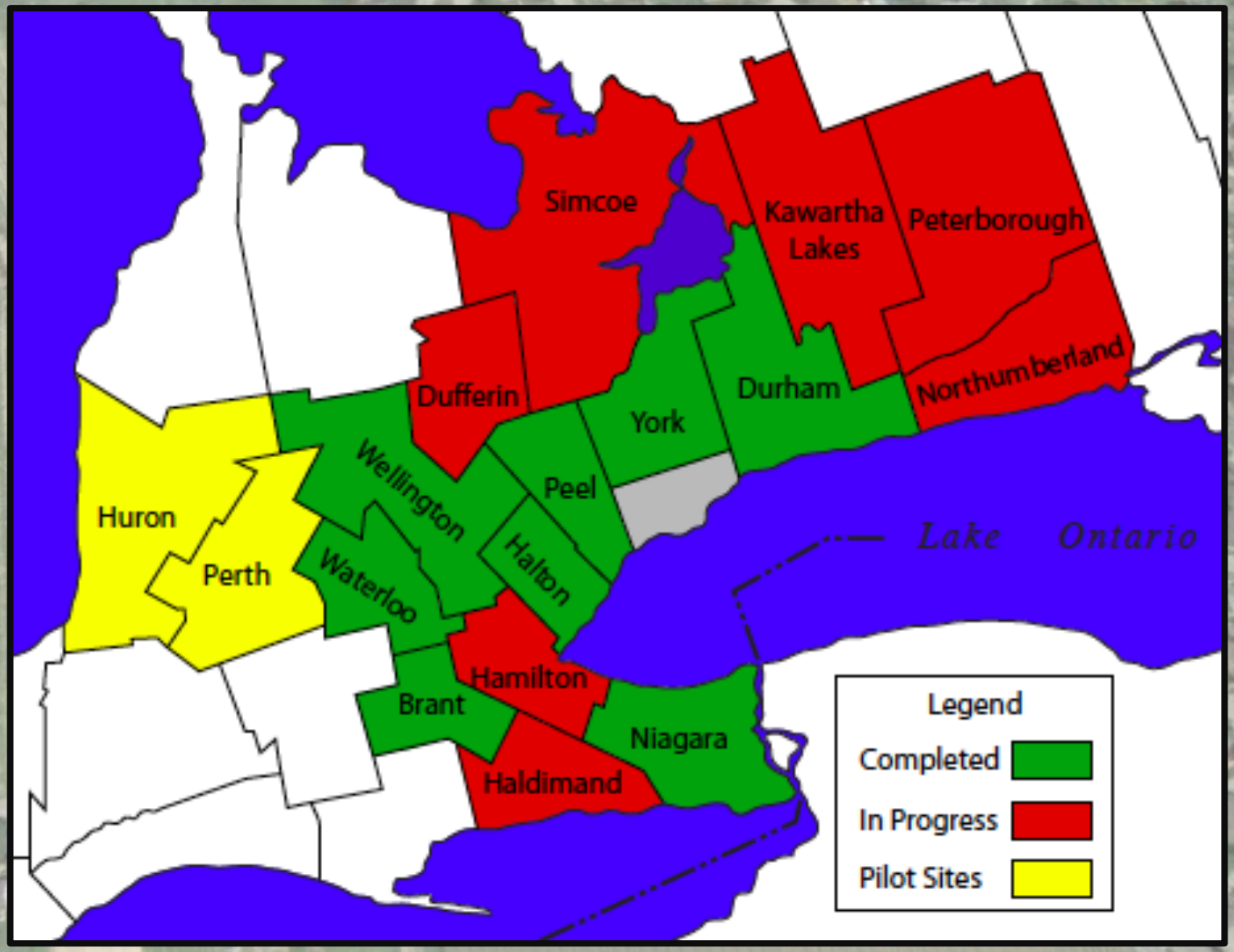
Timeframe – Research Parameters

- Start with the year 2000 to 2014
- Captured both data before the 2005 PPS and before the Greenbelt





Study Sites


Simcoe
Kawartha Lakes
Peterborough
Dufferin
Durham
Northumberland
York
Wellington
Peel
Huron
Perth
Halton
Waterloo
Lake Ontario
Hamilton
Brant
Niagara
Haldimand
Legend
Completed
In Progress
Pilot Sites

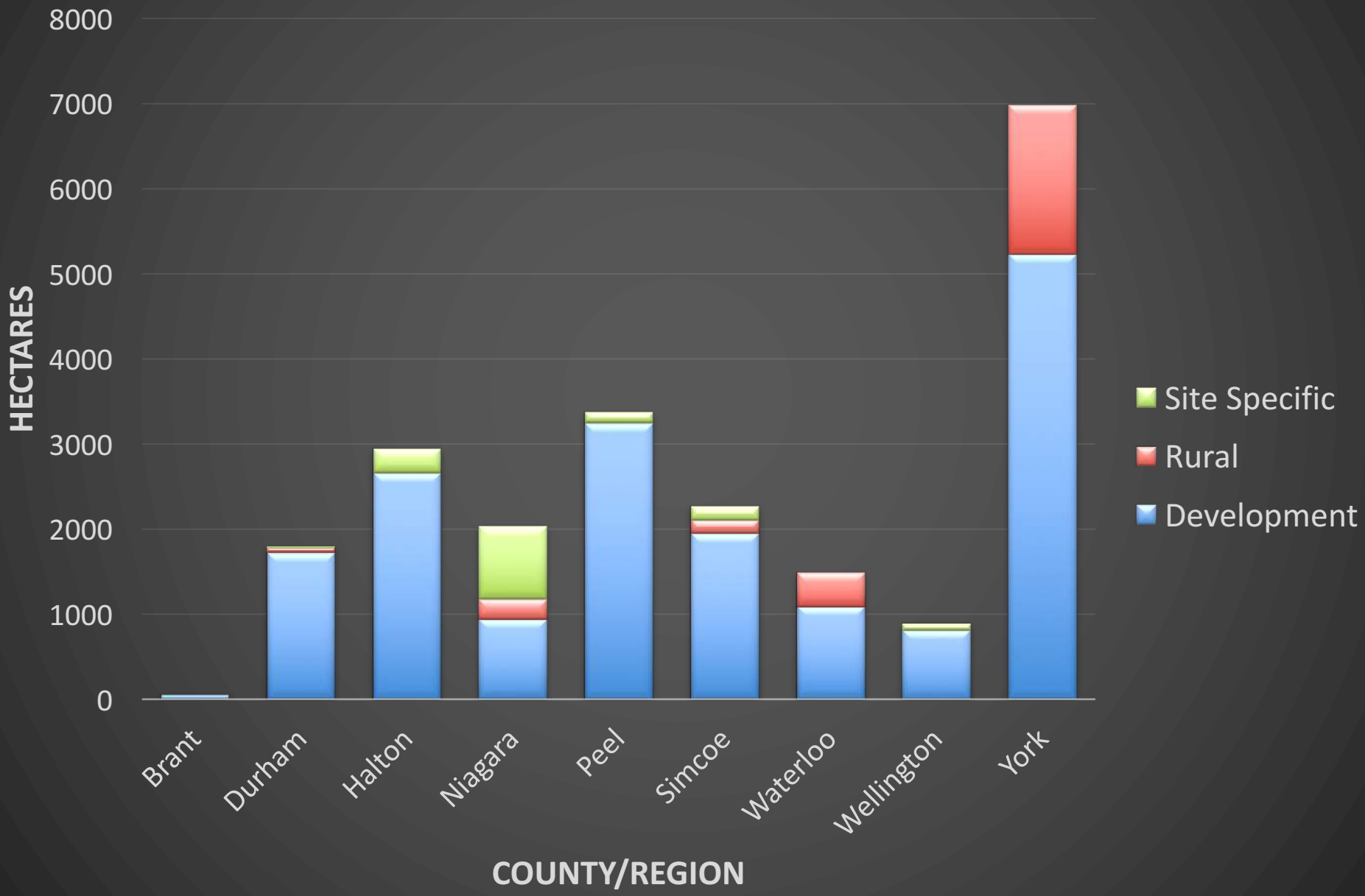
Redesignations by County/Region

County/ Region	Number of approved OPAs related to the loss of prime agriculture land	Prime agriculture redesignated for:		
		Development designation (Ha)	Rural designation (Ha)	Non-farm uses through site-specific policy amendments (Ha)
Brant	4	47	0	0
Durham	5	1,723	56	18
Halton	12	2,656	0	287
Huron	2	25	0	0
Niagara	42	944	240	851
Peel	4	3,274	0	127
Perth	57	217	0	415
Simcoe	47	2,100	82	162
Waterloo	9	1,088	400	0
Wellington	27	812	0	86
York	16	5,233	1,755	0

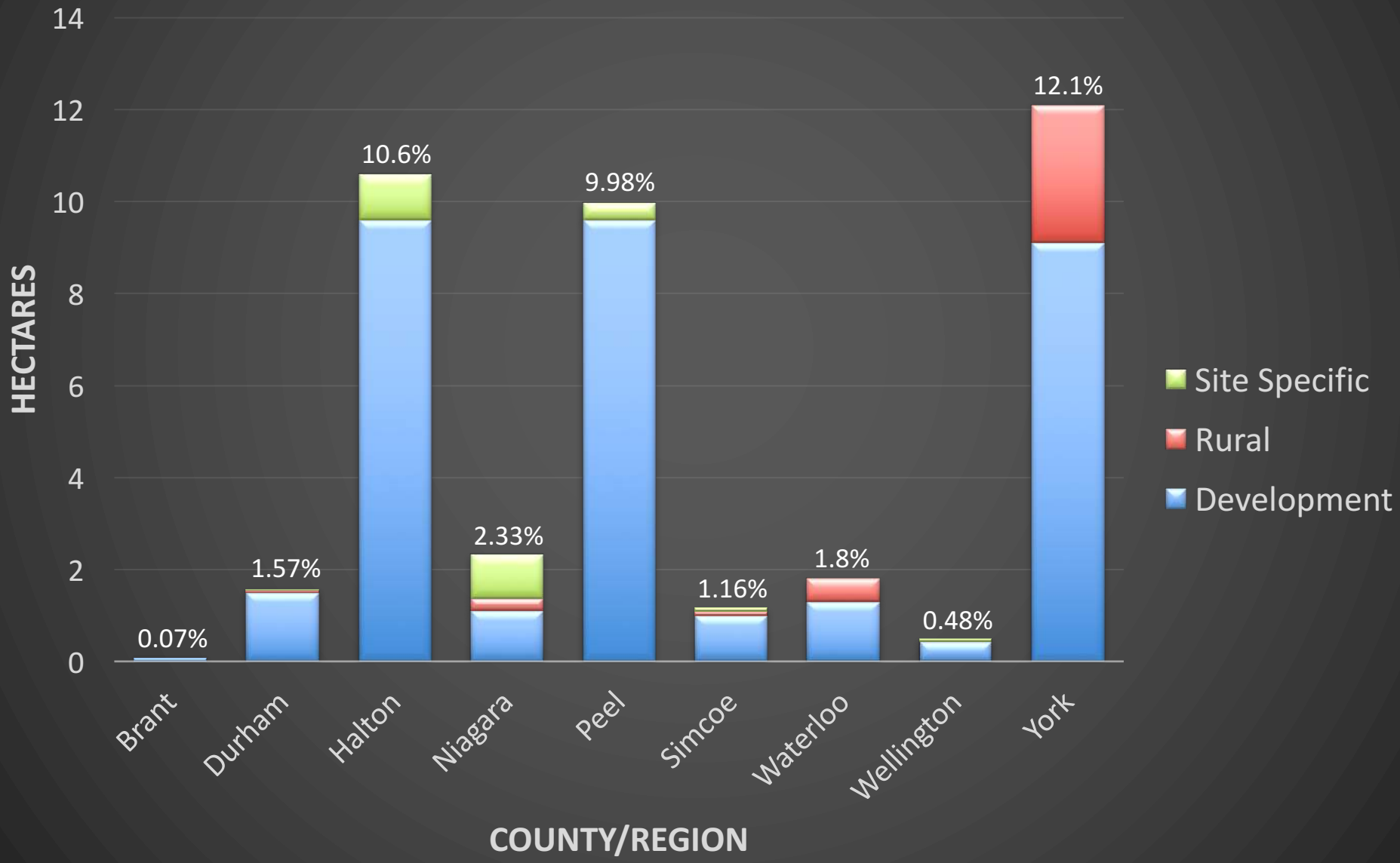
Greenbelt Area Totals

	Outside the Greenbelt Plan Area		Within the Greenbelt Plan Area		Total
	pre-2005	2005- 2014	pre-2005	2005-2014	
Prime Agriculture Land Lost (Hectares)	8,127	11,709	649	0	**20,485 ha**
Site Specific Non-Agricultural Uses (Hectares)	342	808	400	0	**1,550 ha**
Total	**8,469 ha**	**12,517 ha**	**1,049 ha**	**0 ha**	**22,035 ha**

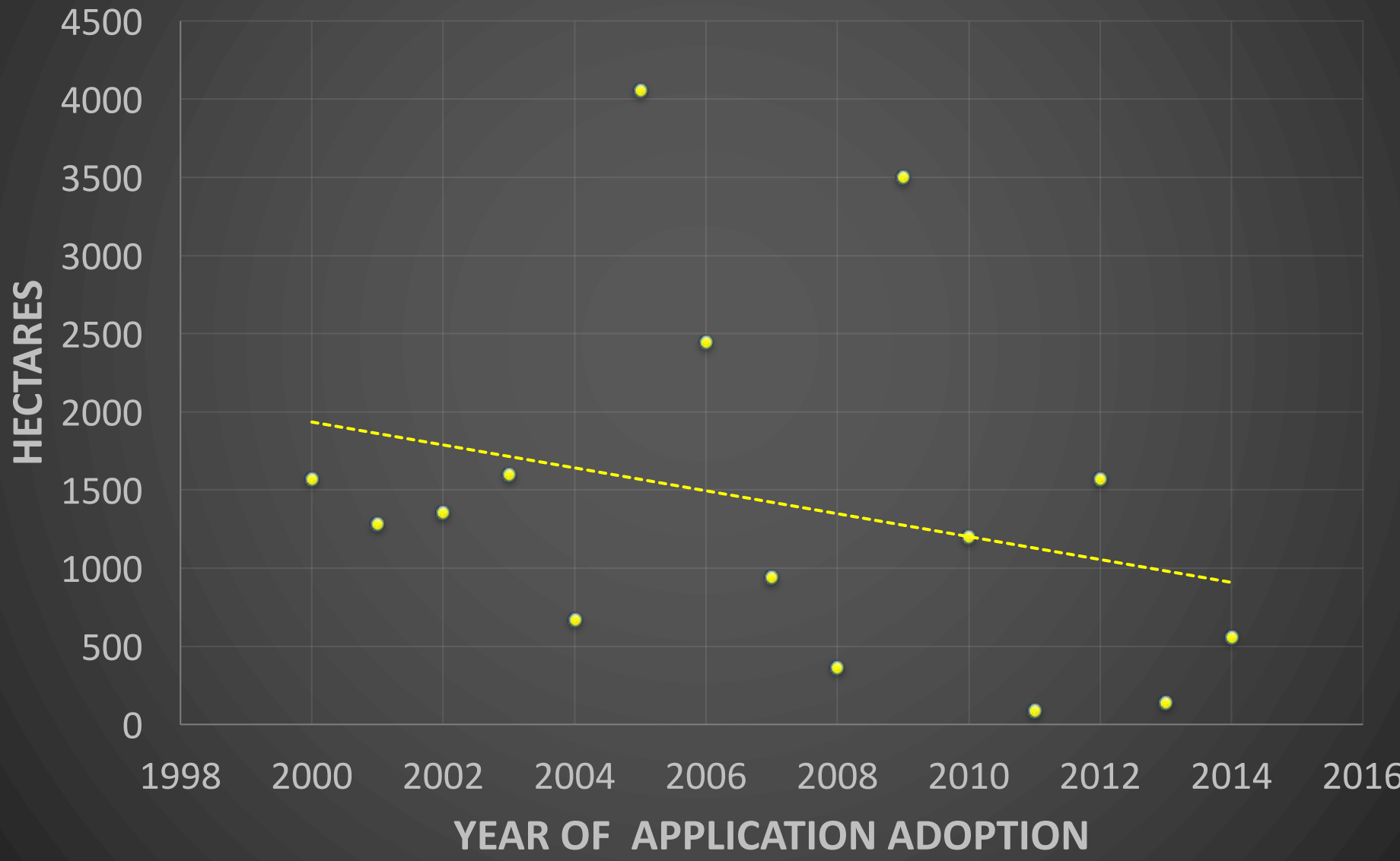
Prime Agricultural Land Redesignated (2000-2014) by County/Region within the Greater Golden Horseshoe



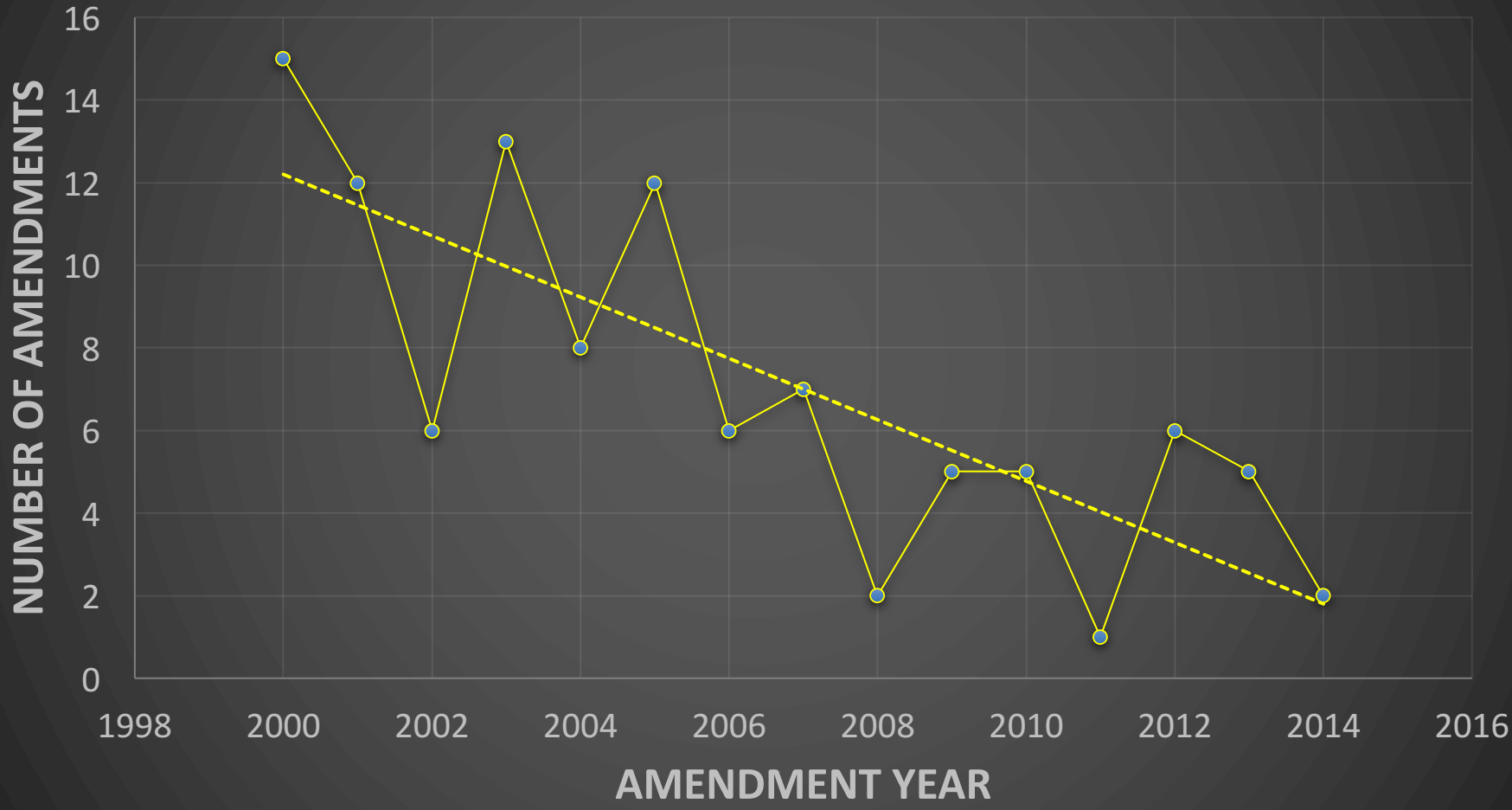
Prime Agricultural Land Redesignated (2000-2014) by County/Region within the Greater Golden Horseshoe as a Proportion of the 2016 Census Farm Area



Sum of Farmland Converted per Year within the Greater Golden Horseshoe

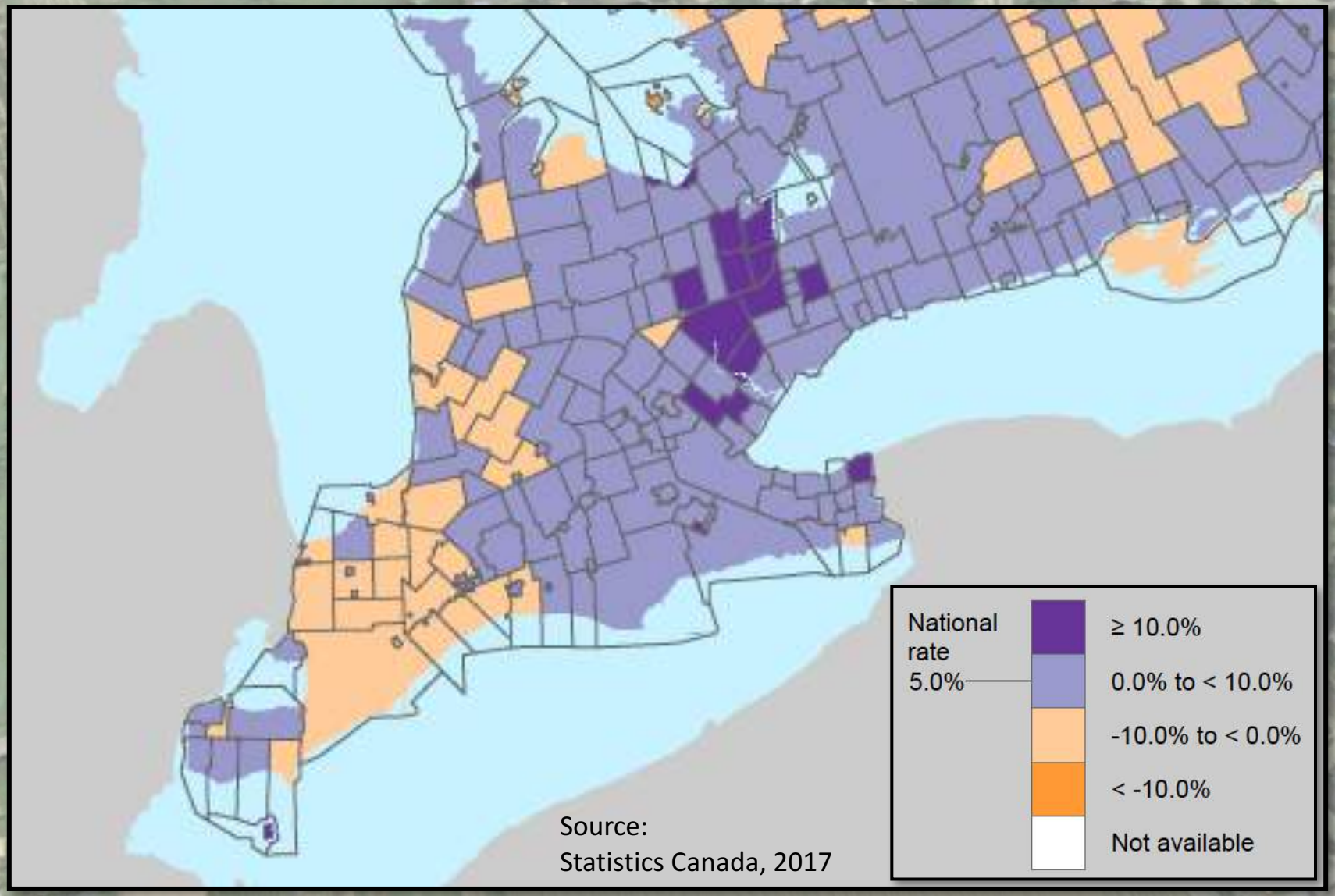


Number of Official Plan Amendments by Year

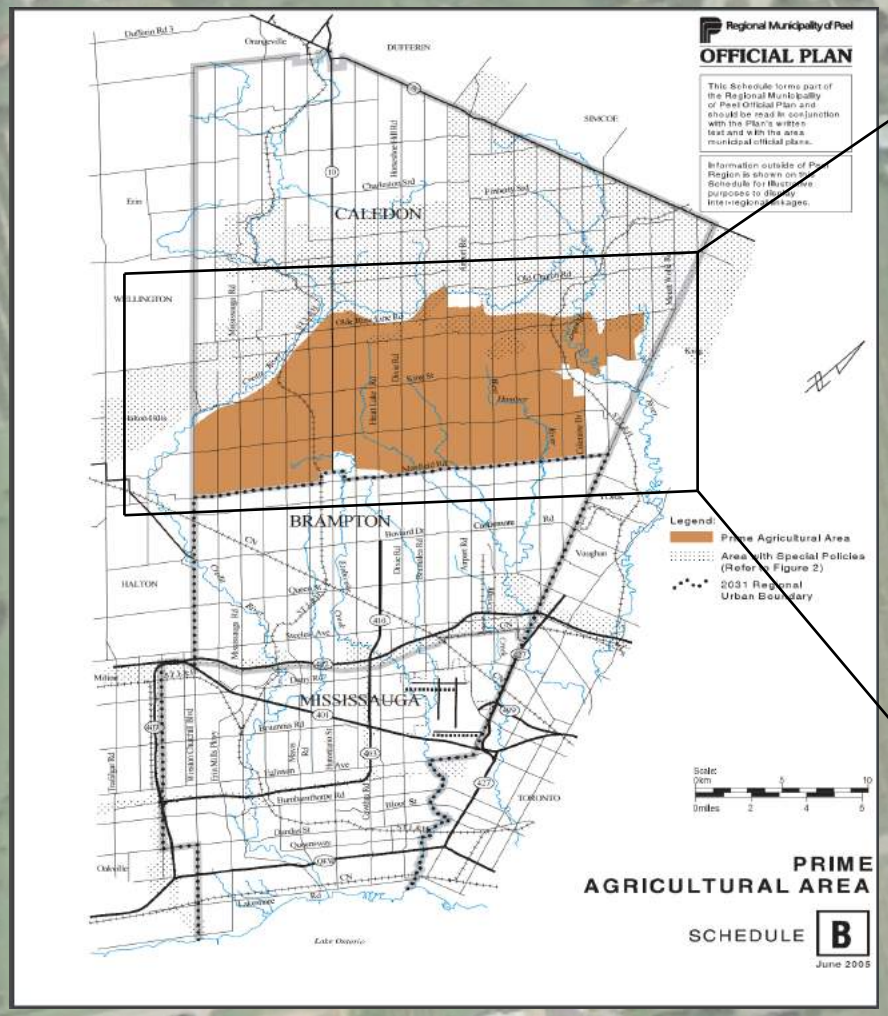


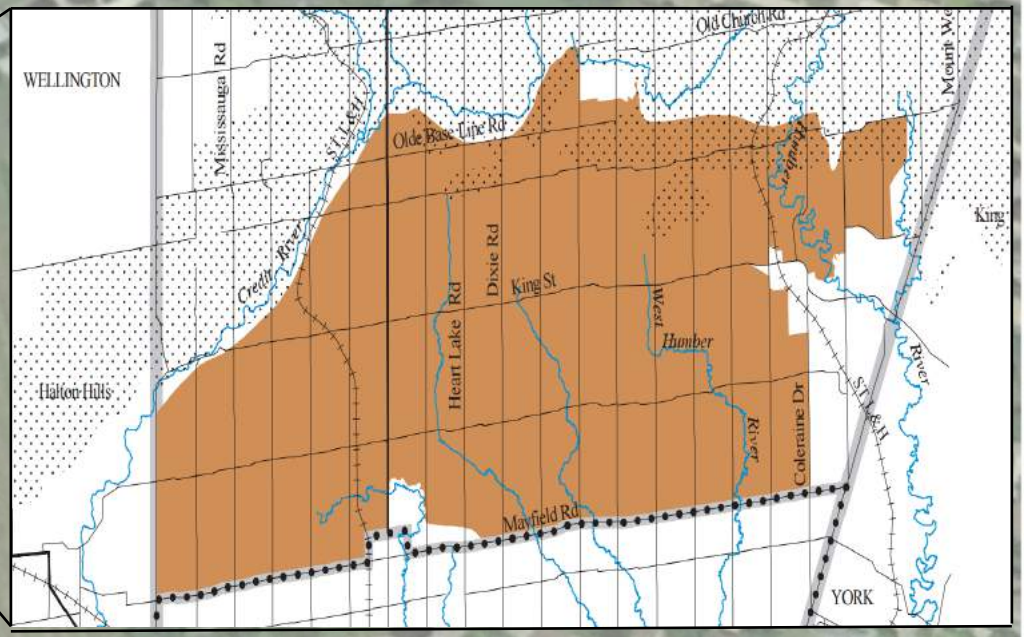
*Excludes Simcoe and Waterloo

Population Change from 2011 - 2016



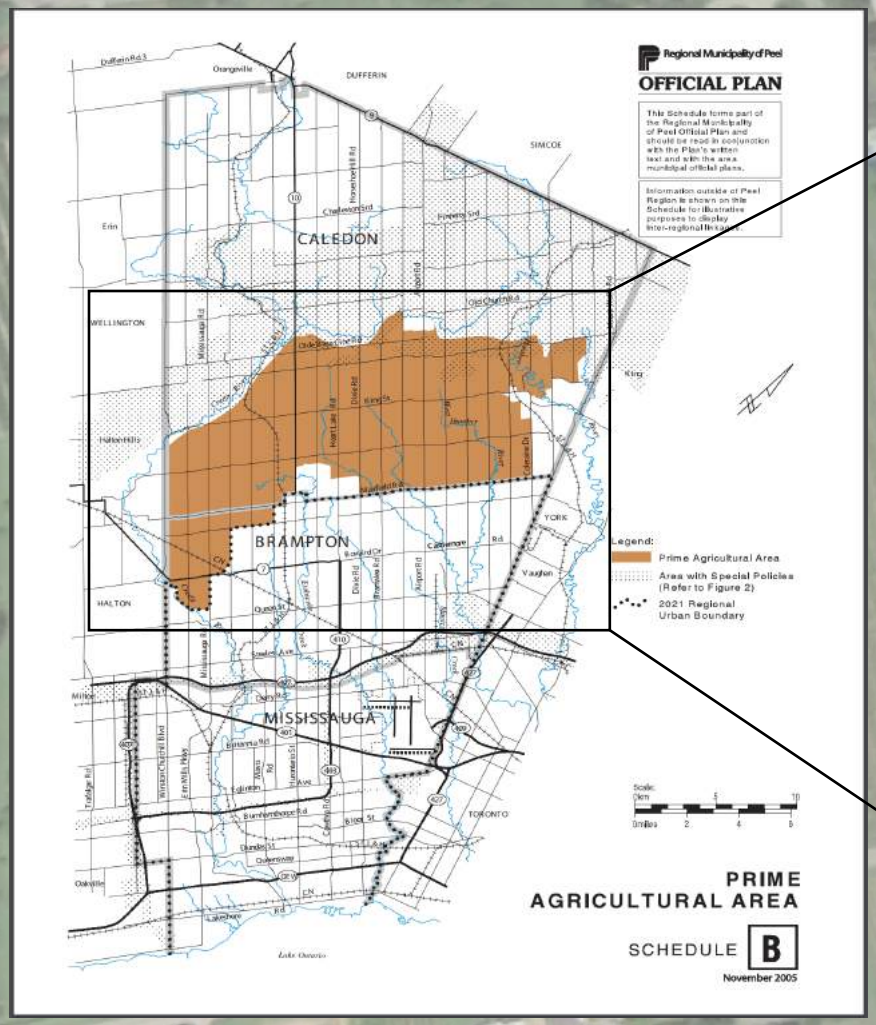
Agricultural Designations Over the Years: 2005

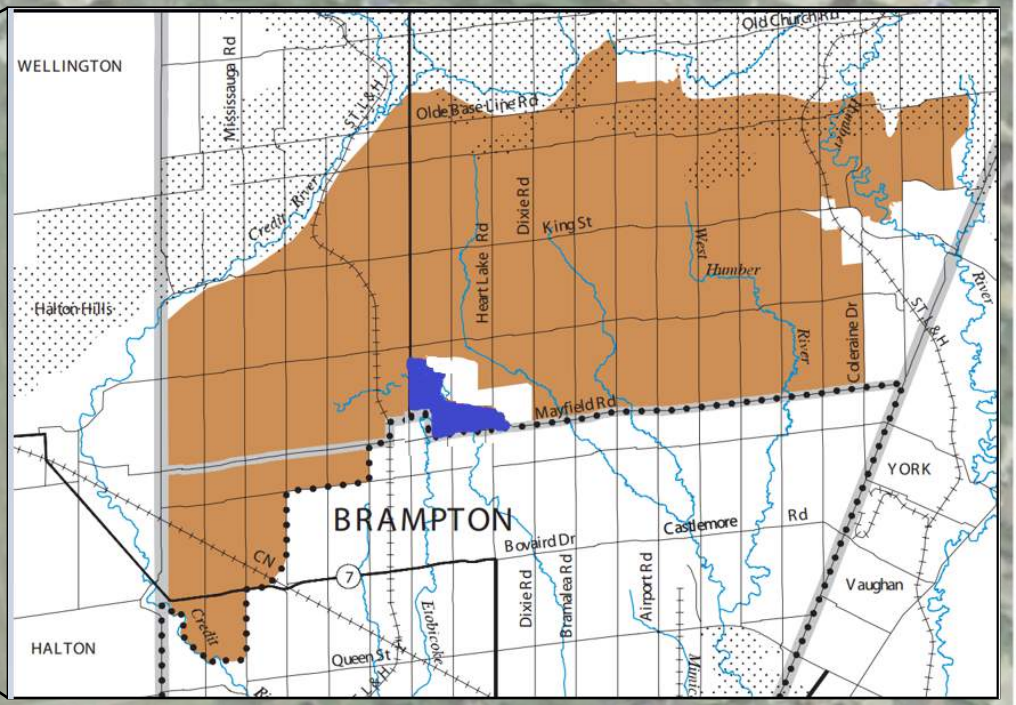




Approved by Region June 2005
Appealed to the OMB
Approved by OMB December 2006

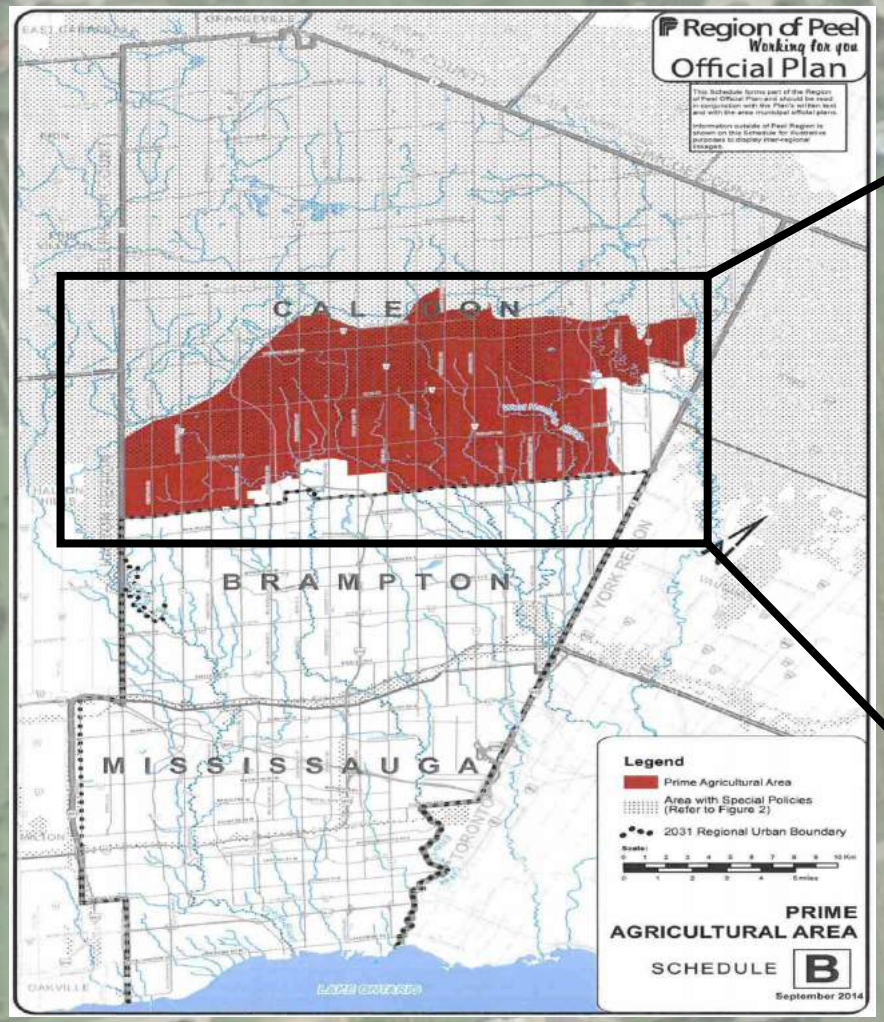
Agricultural Designations Over the Years: 2006



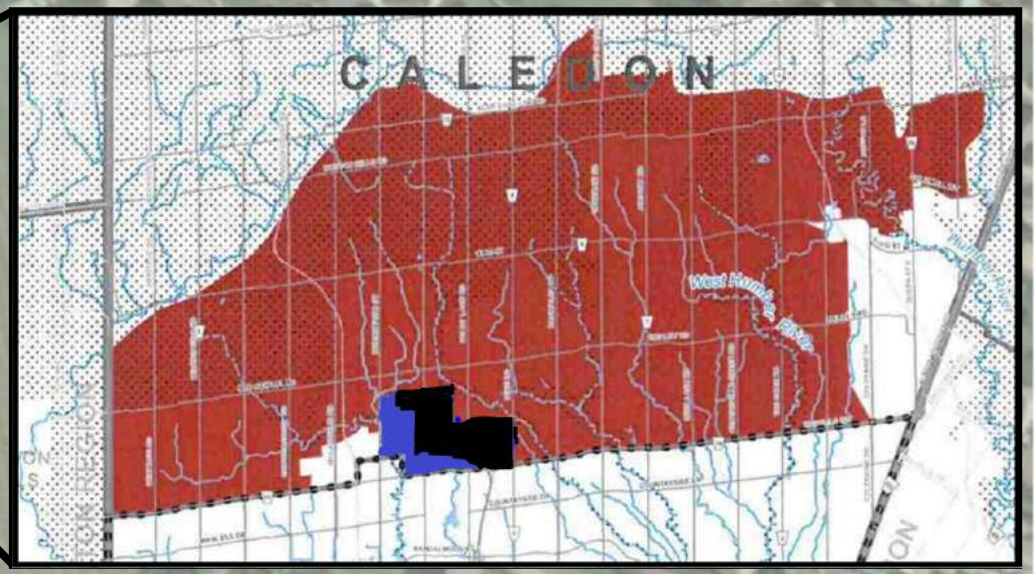


Northwest Brampton Urban Development Area – 2,428 Hectares (6,000 Acres)

Agricultural Designations Over the Years: 2014

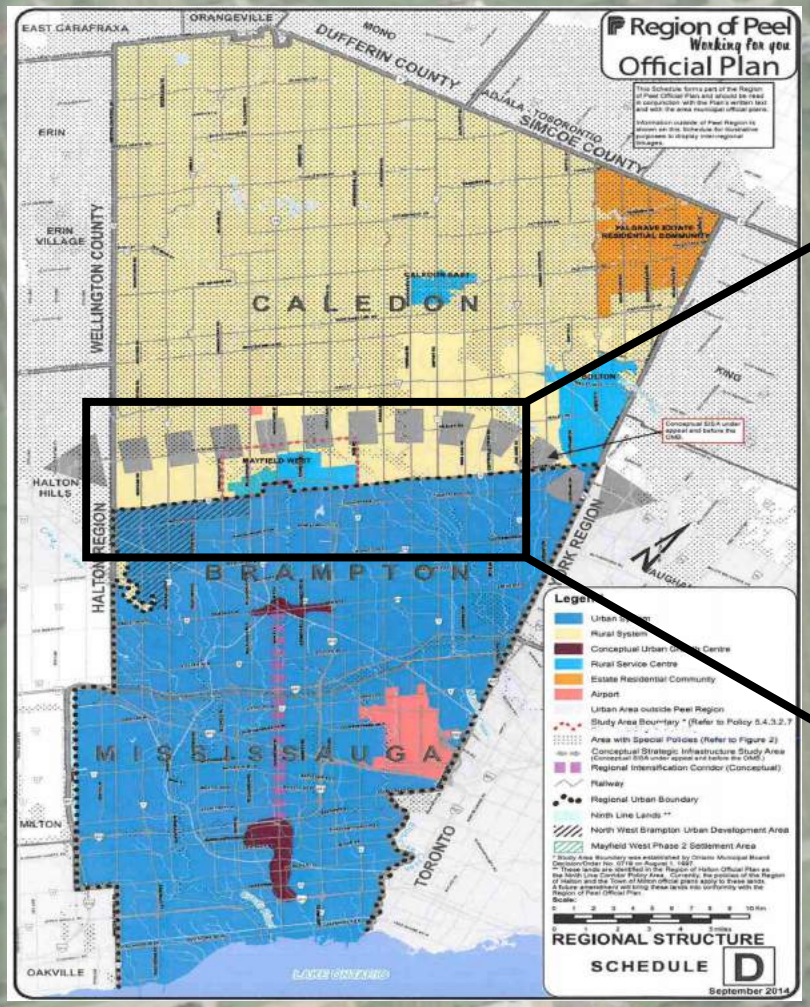


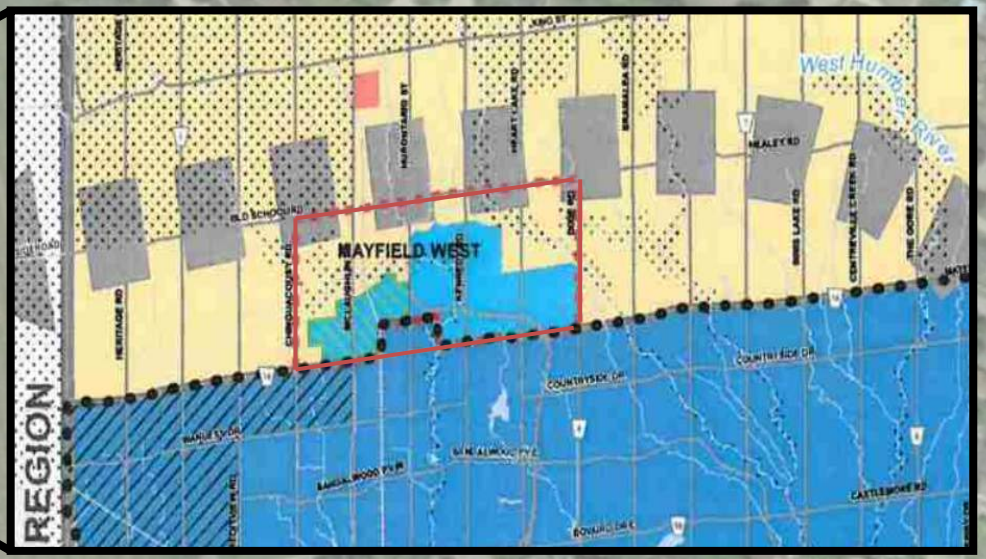
The loss of farmland has occurred in incremental stages



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
  - Ecouraging 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?