

Niagara Region

Total Land Area (Census 2016)¹: 185,423 ha
Area of Census Farms (2016)²: 88,323 ha
Area of Region in the Greenbelt³: 48,048 ha
Percent of Region in Greenbelt: 25.9%
Gross Farm Receipts (2016)⁴: \$836.1 million
Value of Cash Receipts per Hectare of Census Farm: \$9,467
Population (2016)¹: 447,888



Growth Rate 2006-2011¹: 0.9 %
Growth Rate 2011-2016: 3.8%

Prime agricultural land redesignated to a development designation (including urban, residential, and employment)	943 ha
Prime agricultural area redesignated to a rural designation	240 ha
Land designated as a prime agricultural area with a site-specific amendment to allow additional uses	849 ha

Purpose of the Summary

This region summary is part of a wider study on farmland availability in Ontario. The study quantifies the conversion of prime agricultural areas based on Official Plan Amendments in upper and single-tier municipalities across the Province over a 14-year study period from 2000-2014. This summary is meant to provide detail of the findings in the Niagara Region. In conjunction with similar case studies from other counties/regions in Ontario, these findings will form the basis of the University of Guelph's *Measuring Farmland Conversion* research project.

Methods in Brief

The study involved the examination of the Niagara Region Official Plan and Regional Official Plan Amendments (ROPAs). In Niagara, the files that document ROPAs approved by the Region and/or the Ontario Municipal Board during the years 2000 to 2014 were compiled and provided electronically by staff at the Region's planning department. The assistance of staff at Niagara Region's Planning and Development Services are appreciated in making this research possible. Farmland conversion has been captured in three categories:

- 1) Prime agricultural areas redesignated to a development designation (including but not limited to urban, residential, commercial, industrial, and recreational designations);
- 2) Prime agricultural areas redesignated to a rural designation;
- 3) Land designated as a prime agricultural area with a site-specific amendment to allow additional uses.

Housekeeping type amendments and amendments to lands within the Niagara Escarpment Plan have not been tallied as contributing to farmland conversion. Housekeeping type amendments arise as Official Plan (OP) schedules are updated to align land use designations with more

accurate parcel lines, or alternatively, to reflect existing physical features that had been excluded from previous OP schedules.

While agricultural activities are also conducted within portions of the *Escarpment Rural Areas*, the intent of the Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP) is not necessarily to preserve agricultural land. Land use amendments within the NEP are subject to consideration by the Niagara Escarpment Commission and were not within the scope of this study.

Agricultural Land Use Designations in Niagara Region

In the Niagara Region, agricultural activity takes place primarily in three land use designations: *Unique Agricultural Area*, *Good General Agricultural Area* and the *Rural Area*. Prior to 2005, the designations *Good Grape Areas* and *Good Tender Fruit Areas* were also used. They were merged into a single *Unique Agricultural Areas* designation in 2005. *Unique Agricultural Lands* have the highest level of priority for protection as a specialty crop area identified by the province. The *Good General Agricultural Area* corresponds to a prime agricultural designation and includes organic soils, and CLI Class 1, 2 and 3 lands. Lands within the *Rural Area* of Niagara continue to be used predominantly for agriculture but also permit non-farm development. This study considers the conversion of the *Unique Agricultural Lands* and *Good General Agricultural Lands*, while excluding ROPAs related to the conversion of the *Rural Area* designation.

Trends in Agricultural Land Conversion

Redesignation of Prime Agriculture: Over the course of the study period, a total of 15 ROPAs pertained to the conversion of prime agricultural land in Niagara Region to a development designation. All 15 of these ROPAs were for urban area expansions on land formerly designated *Good General Agricultural Area*, *Good Grape Area*, *Good Tender Fruit Area*, or the *Unique Agricultural Area*. One of these redesignations pertained to a rehabilitated aggregate site within the *Unique Agricultural Area*, permitting a mixed urban area. This farmland conversion is captured in category 1 of **Table 1**.

Rural Agriculture: Over the course of the study period, two ROPAs redesignated *Good Agricultural Area* to *Rural Area*. This encompassed 240 hectares and is captured in category 2 of **Table 1**.

Site-Specific Amendments: Site-specific policies were used in the Niagara Region on 24 occasions during the course of this study period to allow additional uses within the prime agricultural area. Most of these uses, such as churches and home occupations, are traditional rural land uses and are necessary to the vitality of the rural community. Recreational uses, such as sports fields and golf courses, were also permitted during the study period. A motor speedway, a theme park and a long-term care facility were also permitted through site-specific policy amendments. A total of 849 hectares of prime agricultural area was converted through site-specific policy amendments, and are captured in category 3 of **Table 1**.

TABLE 1 PRIME AGRICULTURAL AREA CONVERTED THROUGH OPAs IN NIAGARA REGION BY ADOPTION DATE (2000-2014)

Year of Regional OPA adoption or approval by the OMB	Number of OPAs related to the conversion of prime agricultural areas	CATEGORY 1 Prime agricultural area redesignated to a development designation (ha)	CATEGORY 2 Prime agricultural area redesignated to a rural designation (ha)	CATEGORY 3 Land designated as a prime agricultural area with additional site-specific permitted uses (ha)
2000	9	812	225	20
2001	6	0	0	94
2002	1	0	0	65
2003	6	57	0	39
2004	3	0	0	4
2005	5	30	0	24
2006	3	0	15	119
2007	4	29	0	108
2008	1	4	0	0
2009	0	0	0	0
2010	2	0	0	343
2011	0	0	0	0
2012	1	12	0	0
2013	2	0	0	35
2014	0	0	0	0
Grand Total	42	943	240	849

*Totals may not add up due to rounding

Provincial Land Use Plans: Within Niagara Region, the Specialty Crop Area of the Greenbelt Plan covers 48,048 hectares or 26% of the Region's land area³. After the Greenbelt Plan took effect on December 16, 2004, 17 amendments were approved to redesignate prime agricultural land to other uses or permit non-agricultural uses in the agricultural designation. Of these amendments, three pertained to lands within the Greenbelt Plan, although these applications were initiated prior to the adoption of the plan and were subject to previous policies. The remainder of the ROPAs approved after 2005 pertain to lands outside of the Greenbelt Plan. The conversion of prime agricultural land organized by ROPA application date and location relative to the borders of the Greenbelt is captured in **Table 2**.

TABLE 2 PRIME AGRICULTURAL AREA CONVERTED THROUGH OPAs IN THE NIAGARA REGION BY APPLICATION DATE AND LOCATION RELATIVE TO THE GREENBELT PLAN

	Outside the Greenbelt		Within the Greenbelt		Total
	Application Date		Application Date		
	Pre 2005	2005-2014	Pre 2005	2005- 2014	
Prime agriculture area redesignated to a development or rural designation (ha)	943	10	218	0	1171
Prime agricultural area with site-specific policies allowing additional uses (ha)	182	547	120	0	849
Total	1,125	557	338	0	2,020

*Table 1 includes files based on their approval date within the 2000-2014 study time frame. Table 2 is organized based on application date so that we can determine what policy regime the approved amendments was evaluated under, and may include files that were initiated prior to the 2000-2014 study time frame.

¹ Statistics Canada. 2012. Niagara, Ontario (Code 3526) and Ontario (Code 35) (table). Census Profile. 2011 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-XWE. Ottawa. Released October 24, 2012.

² OMAFRA (adopted). 2012. Area of Census Farms (Acres) by County, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011. With data from Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture.

³ MMAH. 2005. “Greenbelt Outer Boundary” and MMAH, 2012. “Municipal Boundary - Upper Tier and District” data projected in UTM 17N.

⁴ Statistics Canada. 2014. Table 004-0233 - Census of Agriculture, farms classified by total gross farm receipts in the year prior to the census, CANSIM.