

York Region

Total Land Area (Census 2016)¹: 176,213 ha
Area of Census Farms (2016)²: 57,702 ha
Area of Region in the Greenbelt³: 123,361 ha
Percentage of Region in the Greenbelt³: 70%
Gross Farm Receipts (2016)⁴: \$301.5 million
Gross Farm Receipts per Hectare of Census Farm: \$5,224
Population (2016)¹: 1,109,909



Growth Rate 2006-2011¹: 15.7%
Growth Rate 2011-2016: 7.5%

Prime agricultural area redesignated to a development designation (including urban, residential, and employment)	5,233 ha
Prime agricultural area redesignated to a rural designation	1,755 ha
Land designated as a prime agricultural area with a site-specific amendment to allow additional uses	0 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 for York 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 York Regional Official Plan (ROP) and Regional Official Plan Amendments (ROPAs). In York Region, the files which document ROPAs approved by the Region and/or the Ontario Municipal Board during the years 2000 to 2014 were accessed through the Region's online amendment document webpage. The assistance of staff at York Region's Long Range Planning Division are appreciated in making this research possible. Changes in farmland availability have 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 have not been tallied as contributing to farmland conversion. Housekeeping type amendments arise as OP schedules are updated to align land use designations with more accurate parcel lines, or to reflect existing physical features that have been excluded

from previous OP schedules. In York, changes made to the *Agriculture and Rural Land Base* map through the 2010 ROP were seen as significant and not housekeeping; further detail on these changes and how they are included in this study is provided below.

Agricultural Land Use Designations in the York Region

In York Region, agricultural activity takes place primarily in three designations: The *Holland Marsh Specialty Crop Area*, *Agricultural Areas* and *Rural Areas*. Within the Greenbelt Plan, the Holland Marsh is designated as a *Specialty Crop Area* for its black organic and muck soils suitable for a range of horticultural crops, and receives the highest level of protection for future agricultural use through the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS). Both lands designated as *Agricultural Areas* or the *Holland Marsh Specialty Crop Area* permit a range of farm practices. *Rural Areas* support agriculture as a primary use but also permit “uses such as equestrian facilities, farm markets, rural settlements, existing rural residential and estate residential development and golf courses”⁶. This study considers the conversion of the *Agricultural Area* and *Holland Marsh Specialty Crop Area* designations.

Natural Heritage System: York’s Regional Greenlands System is composed of cores, corridors, and linkages. The cores are composed of key natural heritage and hydrological features. The corridors and linkages connect the system. In the Regional Greenlands System, “the full range of existing and new agricultural, agricultural-related and secondary agricultural uses and normal farm practices is permitted”⁶. ROPAs pertaining to *Agricultural Policy Areas* within the Greenlands System were included in this study.

Trends in Agricultural Land Conversion

Development Designations: Over the course of the study period, 11 ROPAs pertained to the conversion of prime agricultural land to a development designation. These redesignations totalled 5,233 hectares and were captured in **Table 1** under category 1.

Rural Designation: Five ROPAs in York redesignated *Agricultural Areas* to *Rural Areas* for non-agricultural uses. This comprised 1,755 hectares of farmland for non-agricultural uses and is captured in category 2 of **Table 1**. Over the course of the study period, land was also gained in the prime agriculture designation from the rural designation. The 2010 York Regional Official Plan repealed the Region’s existing 1994 Agricultural and Rural Systems map. At the time of the 2010 ROP adoption, *Agricultural Areas* and the *Holland Marsh Specialty Crop Area* increased significantly in size, while the *Rural Area* decreased in size. These changes are mapped based on the results of a 2009 Land Evaluation and Area Review study for agriculture and result in a greater land area protected for long-term agricultural use. The results of these changes have been provided by staff at York Region and are tallied in **Table 2**.

Site-Specific Amendments: Site-specific policy amendments were not used in York Region’s Official Plan to permit additional uses within the *Agricultural Policy Areas*. No amendments were captured under category 3 of **Table 1**.

TABLE 1 PRIME AGRICULTURAL AREA CONVERTED THROUGH OPAS IN YORK 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 area	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	3	0	13	0
2001	2	915	0	0
2002	2	631	0	0
2003	1	620	0	0
2004	0	0	0	0
2005	3	709	46	0
2006	1	0	1,696	0
2007	0	0	0	0
2008	1	211	0	0
2009	0	0	0	0
2010	1	710	0	0
2011	0	0	0	0
2012	2	1,438	0	0
2013	0	0	0	0
2014	0	0	0	0
Grand Total	16	5,234	1,755	0

*Totals may not add up due to rounding

TABLE 2 DIFFERENCE IN AREA COVERED BY AGRICULTURAL LAND USE DESIGNATION BETWEEN ROP 1994 AND ROP 2010

	Area Included in the Agricultural Designations (ha)		
	ROP 1994	ROP 2010	Difference
Holland Marsh Area	2,885.6	4,076.4	1,190.8
Agriculture Policy Area	59,052.9	74,058.7	15,005.8
Rural Policy Area	55,836.2	33,045.1	-22,791.1

Provincial Land Use Plans: The Protected Countryside and Holland Marsh Specialty Crop Area of the Greenbelt cover 38% of the Region, while the ORMCP covers an additional 31% of the region. The ORMCP countryside designation is broad and permits a range of rural land uses including recreation and rural settlements, as specified in regional official plans. Long term protection of prime agricultural areas is required where such areas are identified by municipalities within the ORMCP. In the settlement areas, towns and villages identified in the ORMCP, urban policies of the ROP apply⁶. The policies of the ORMCP apply to applications initiated after November 17, 2001.

Within the borders of the ORMCP there were four amendments that pertained to the redesignation of *Prime Agricultural Areas* during the 2000-2014 study period. Three of these amendments were completed or initiated prior to the enactment of the ORMCP. The fourth amendment, ROPA 50 (to the 1994 Regional Official Plan) redesignated 1,696 hectares of *Prime Agricultural Area* to a *Rural Area* in 2006. The rural designation was deemed more consistent with the existing land uses in that area and consistent with the uses permitted by the ORMCP.

During the study period there were two amendments passed in the Greenbelt area: both applications were initiated prior to the December 16, 2004 implementation of the plan. Amendments to redesignate *Prime Agricultural Areas* in York Region continued in the areas outside the Protected Countryside after the implementation of the Greenbelt. Prime agricultural areas converted to non-agricultural uses, organized by application date and location relative to the borders of the Greenbelt are captured in **Table 3**.

TABLE 3 PRIME AGRICULTURAL AREA CONVERTED THROUGH ROPAS IN YORK REGION BY APPLICATION DATE AND LOCATION RELATIVE TO THE GREENBELT PLAN (THE PROTECTED COUNTRYSIDE AND SPECIALTY CROP AREAS)

	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)	2,887	3,844	257	0	6,989
Prime agricultural area with site-specific policies allowing additional uses (ha)	0	0	0	0	0
Total	2,887	3,844	257	0	69,89

*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. York, Ontario (Code 3519). 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.

⁶ York Region. 2013. York Region Official Plan 2010, Office Consolidation.