

Enhancing Municipal Capacity to Support Agriculture in the Greenbelt



INTRODUCTION

This document summarizes research by Dr. Wayne J. Caldwell (Project Director), Elise Geschiere, Emily Sousa, and Regan Zink examining how municipalities in Ontario's Greenbelt can strengthen their ability to support agricultural and agri-food priorities.

Agriculture faces new and emerging challenges and opportunities—from climate change and diverse on-farm enterprises to market access and rural economic vitality. Municipal governments play a critical role in shaping the decisions and services that influence farm viability, landscape integrity, and food security.

ABOUT THE RESEARCH



This study assessed the capacity of 66 upper-, single- and lower-tier municipalities in Ontario's Greenbelt to address agricultural and agri-food issues. Capacity is the ability to use internal and external resources—available formally or informally—at all levels of government and in the community to respond effectively.

We combined quantitative data (e.g., staffing levels, budgets, committee structures) and qualitative insights (e.g., interviews with planners and elected officials) to understand how capacity shapes outcomes. Findings are based on surveys of municipal planning departments and elected officials, Financial Information Return (FIR) data, and semi-structured interviews.

WHAT WE LEARNED

- 1 Capacity varies widely**
Municipalities differ in staffing, budgets, access to expertise, and internal tools to support agriculture.
- 2 Committees make a difference**
Agricultural advisory committees and strong relationships with farm organizations improve outcomes.
- 3 Agricultural literacy is essential**
Understanding farm needs among councils and across departments leads to better, more informed decisions.
- 4 Resources and collaboration matter**
Access to technical support, peer learning, and professional development builds confidence and consistency.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The full report is available at: www.waynecaldwell.ca/projects/municipal-capacity-rural-agri-foods-issues/

HOW MUNICIPALITIES CAN BUILD CAPACITY

Build Agricultural Expertise
Support staff and leaders who understand agricultural systems, rural issues, and emerging trends.


Strengthen Local Relationships
Engage farmers, advisory committees, and rural stakeholders to build trust and improve outcomes.


Promote Collaboration
Encourage peer learning among municipalities, the Province, OPPI, and academic partners.


KEY OPPORTUNITIES IDENTIFIED

- ✓ Municipal dialogue
- ✓ Provincial partnerships
- ✓ Professional development
- ✓ Agricultural literacy
- ✓ Farmer engagement
- ✓ Capacity reviews

WHY IT MATTERS

 Better-informed Council decisions on agricultural and rural land-use matters.

 More consistent provincial policy implementation across municipalities.

 Stronger responses to emerging rural and agricultural issues.

 Long-term viability of agriculture, rural economies, and the Greenbelt landscape.

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