

RESEARCH SUMMARY



ASSESSING THE CAPACITY OF MUNICIPALITIES TO RESPOND TO EVOLVING RURAL AND AGRICULTURAL ISSUES

Understanding how Ontario municipalities can better support agriculture, food systems, and resilient rural communities.

Municipal governments are on the front lines of decisions that shape Ontario's agri-food systems. Through land use planning, economic development, environmental stewardship, and broader decision making, municipalities can encourage or hinder the vitality of agriculture and food systems in their communities.

This research investigates the capacity of municipalities in Ontario to pursue agri-food systems planning and identifies what is needed to strengthen their ability to respond to evolving rural and agricultural issues.

Using a mixed methods approach, **290 municipalities participated** through surveys, interviews, and secondary data. The study resulted in a new conceptual framework for municipal agri-food systems planning capacity to guide policy, practice, and future research.



290

municipalities across Ontario participated in this research

85%

of respondents indicated their municipality had less than adequate capacity to respond to agri-food issues

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WHAT WE LEARNED



Municipal capacity to respond to agricultural and rural issues varies significantly across Ontario.



Most municipalities reported insufficient staff, expertise, or resources to fully support agri-food systems.



Stronger capacity is linked to in-house planning staff, inter-departmental collaboration, council understanding, external partnerships, and a strong commitment to agriculture.



Municipal initiatives extend beyond land use planning to economic development, environmental stewardship, education, and partnerships that build local and regional agri-food systems.



Additional provincial guidance, training, funding, and peer-to-peer learning are needed to strengthen municipal decision-making and action.



A conceptual framework for municipal agri-food systems planning capacity was developed to help municipalities and partners strengthen impact.



For further information:
<https://www.waynecaldwell.ca/projects/municipal-capacity-rural-agri-foods-issues/>

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