

RURAL NON-FARM DEVELOPMENT

*Its Impact on the Viability and Sustainability of
Agricultural and Rural Communities*

PROJECT DIRECTOR

Wayne Caldwell, PhD, RPP, MCIP

Professor,
School of Rural Planning and
Development
University of Guelph

CONTRIBUTING RESEARCHER

Claire Weir

School of Rural Planning and
Development
University of Guelph



RESEARCH PERIOD / DATA SOURCE

1990–2000

(Data drawn from municipal
records for the 1990s)



RESEARCH FUNDER

Ontario Ministry of
Agriculture, Food and
Rural Affairs (OMAF)



One of the most comprehensive studies of rural lot creation and its impact on agriculture in Ontario.

The research documented where and why non-farm lots were being created, examined their cumulative impact on agricultural production, and demonstrated the importance of strong land-use planning policies in protecting the long-term viability of farming and rural communities.



WHY THIS RESEARCH MATTERED



Rural non-farm development in
agricultural areas increases conflict,
raises costs, and threatens
farming operations.



Indiscriminate lot creation
fragments farmland and limits a
farmer's ability to expand or adapt.



Sound land-use planning and
strong policies are essential to
protect Ontario's agricultural
future and rural communities.



The continued viability and
sustainability of agriculture
depends on preserving the
land base and flexibility to farm.



WHAT WE DID



A two-phase research program (1990–2003)
with a 10-year update to 2009.



Compiled the first comprehensive
database of rural lot creation in
Ontario's agricultural areas
(1990–2000).



Examined trends across
34 counties and regions.



Conducted case studies in four
regions and interviews with farm
leaders and provincial commodity
organizations.



Identified policy changes, impacts
on agriculture, and recommendations
for action.



KEY FINDINGS

- 1 More than 15,000 new lots were created
on agriculturally designated land in the
1990s—almost 80% were residential.
- 2 Annual lot creation declined from
2,611 in 1990 to 905 in 2000 as
policies became more restrictive.
- 3 Residential severances remain the
dominant source of fragmentation
across Ontario.
- 4 Rural non-farm lots reduce agriculture's
ability to respond by removing land from
production, fragmenting the land base
and imposing constraints such as
Minimum Distance Separation.
- 5 *"A residential severance is a
residential severance."*
Whether described as farm-related
or non-farm-related, the agricultural
impacts are essentially the same.



A DECADE LATER: UPDATE TO 2009

An update extended the analysis through 2009 to identify
continued trends, cumulative impacts, and the ongoing
need for effective policies and tools that balance rural
growth with the long-term viability of agriculture.



FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE



- Evidence to guide provincial
policy reviews and planning
reforms.
- Helps municipalities compare
trends and strengthen
local policies.



- Informs Minimum Distance
Separation and other tools
to reduce conflicts.
- Identifies best practices from
municipalities that manage
rural lot creation successfully.
- Strengthens the sustainability
of agricultural and rural
communities.



KEY LESSON

*"Protecting farmland today
means preserving choices
for future generations of
farmers and the health
of our rural communities."*

