

# ***Community Focus Bulletin:*** ***Creating Community Conversations***



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Farms Forever for the full report go to:

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/policy/farmsforever.htm>

## **A Call to Action: supporting rural communities and their infrastructure according to the recent provincial discussion document *Farms Forever***

Maintaining sustainable farms and preserving productive farmland is another significant challenge as Ontario's agri-food industry evolves. To address these challenges, the Ontario government has prepared a discussion paper, ***Farms Forever***, to help inform policy development to support our strong and innovative agri-food sector.

***Farms Forever*** is a new initiative by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), as directed from the Premier to Minister Jeff Leal in the mandate letter in the fall 2014.

The new discussion paper outlines four policy objectives of ***Farms Forever***:

1. Help preserve the productive capacity of agricultural land close to major urban centres
2. Support the local sourcing of food
3. Strengthen Ontario's agri-food sector
4. Support young farmers and new entrants

The discussion paper stresses the importance of working with stakeholders to accomplish **the *Farms Forever*** objectives and the government is asking for feedback on the direction of this new initiative.

Our growing world population and shifting climate puts increasing pressure on agriculture and farmers to produce more food.

### **The future according to the report:**

- Agriculture and agri-food opportunities are expanding with new growth in local food, niche market products and export opportunities.
- New technological advances are on the cutting edge of agriculture, making it an exciting field in which to live and work. But many people find farming a difficult industry to enter.

- While the training and education opportunities OMAFRA delivers directly and through its partners are first class, more can be done to help new and beginning farmers position themselves to take advantage of new and evolving markets. For example, developing new business models in farm ownership could assist with identifying ways to help new entrants afford the substantial cost of farm ownership.

**The report poses the following questions:**

1. How are the demographics of farming changing in Ontario and within your sector of agriculture?
2. What new opportunities are on the horizon that new and beginning farmers can take advantage of?
3. How can potential new entrants be encouraged to consider agri-food as a future career?

**Finally the report states:**

- Farming and the agri-food sector are crucial to Ontario's long-term growth and prosperity.
- Because the sector impacts both urban and rural residents while also providing top-quality food at home and valuable commodities for export, it is recognized that everyone involved in the sector is eager to see it grow and thrive.
- Through the four policy themes outlined above, Ontario has a solid basis for growth and development. By preserving the productive capacity of agricultural land; supporting the local sourcing of food; strengthening Ontario's agri-food sector; and supporting new farmers, Ontario can look forward to a strong farming future.

The report recognizes that the future will continue to be dependent on the hard work and innovation that has always characterized the agricultural sector but it stresses that everyone with a stake in this sector's future will play an important role in the future and any successes. This discussion paper provides an opportunity to do just that.

**Note:** OMAFRA will collect and consolidate all the feedback received, and use it to inform the development of future policies and programs to support Farms Forever across Ontario.

For more information, visit the website at [www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/policy/farmsforever.htm](http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/policy/farmsforever.htm). Comments on any aspect of this paper can be provided via email at [ag.info.omafra@ontario.ca](mailto:ag.info.omafra@ontario.ca), or by mail at: Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Attention: Karla Uliana, 2nd Floor, 1 Stone Road West, Guelph, Ontario, N1G 4Y2

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### **How this supports local planning and sustainability issues:**

In 2012 Sustainable Peterborough developed a vision for a sustainable community. One of the themes for the plan is Agriculture and Local food. The Sustainable Peterborough Plan established our 25-year Vision for our region. In terms of agriculture the plan calls for us to have a sustainable community that fosters healthy environments, people, and economies by 2035. Specifically the goal will be “we will feed ourselves sustainably with local, healthy foods.”

To do this the plan calls for the following strategic directions:

- Maintain adequate farmland availability to support our sustainable agricultural needs.
- Facilitate the production, storage, processing, distribution, and marketing of local, healthy food.
- Encourage farmers to practice good environmental stewardship.

The Future of Food & Farming Working Group, a sub-committee of Sustainable Peterborough, has been moving this goal forward through consultation and research. In May the Working Group completed 2 additional significant research papers and supported the development of a local Food Charter that built on the work identified above. This work also aligns with the latest directions of the provincial and federal governments. The following three reports were presented to and endorsed by Sustainable Peterborough in June, 2017

The following reports completed by the Future of Food & Farming Working Group of Sustainable Peterborough may be found on Sustainable Peterborough’s website. The research supports and is supported by the recently released discussion document Farms Forever:

1. **“Farmland, Farmers and Food Production in Peterborough County”** (which updates the original report completed in 2012)
2. **“Cultivating a Fertile Environment for Urban Agriculture in the Greater Peterborough Area”**
3. **A Peterborough Food Charter: Healthy, Sustainable and Just Food for All**

**If we are to be successful here are questions to consider:**

1. How will directions from the province and Sustainable Peterborough be included in municipal planning documents?
2. If the direction is to be contained in municipal planning documents, should it be included in regional plans (county) or in local planning documents (townships)?
3. How will urban growth documents address agriculture and local food production issues?
4. What mechanisms need to be in place to allow potential new entrants to be financially viable in traditional farming or supporting transition to new business models or markets?
5. How will provincial ministries and their mandates work to ensure a strong and viable social and economic infrastructure for rural communities? (i.e. how can we assume that young farm families will be able to live in rural communities if schools are closed thus limiting who remains in rural communities?)

**For sources & more information go to:**

- <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/policy/farmsforever.htm>
- <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/rural/roadmap-15.htm>
- Provincial Food Security Strategy: [News Bulletin \(April 19, 2017\)](#)
- [Discussion Paper “Building Ontario’s First Food Security Strategy”](#)
- Food Security Consultation [on-line survey](#)
- <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/minister-agriculture-and-agri-food-mandate-letter#sthash.56RcjDtd.dpuf>
- <https://www.ontario.ca/page/supporting-students-and-communities#section-7>

For more information about our upcoming Community Focus Bulletins go to

<http://www.merriam-associates.com/contact-us>

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