



Agriculture Matters: A guide for municipal councillors and staff

The purpose of this guide is to provide an overview of issues affecting farm businesses today, as well as identifying opportunities for local communities to support this untapped, and sometimes underappreciated, economic sector. It is available electronically at ofa.on.ca/GrowAg.

Farming is a unique sector which aims to grow plants and animals in environmental conditions that are rarely under a farmer’s control. The variable timing of planting season, the length and intensity of the growing season, as well as economic and political factors can intensify the challenges associated with operating a farm business. Farmers are willing to engage with municipalities on topics affecting the sector, however, any outreach should consider the time of year and should engage farmers early and often throughout the process.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA)’s 51 county and regional federations offer strong, grassroots leadership, and should be your first point of contact when addressing municipal issues affecting agricultural businesses in your community.

Agri-food: Driving Ontario’s economy forward

Ontario’s agriculture and agri-food sectors are leading economic drivers for the province, contributing over \$51 billion in GDP and employing over 867,000 Ontarians. OFA calls for greater investment in Ontario’s agri-food sector and rural communities as an effective strategy to deliver economic growth and prosperity for all Ontarians.

Distributing economic development will create new jobs, enable new affordable housing options, improve food security, and contribute to environmental stewardship. When we invest in our small communities, we improve the physical and social infrastructure in rural Ontario; generating new opportunities to work and live in communities across the province. This is beneficial for rural Ontario and alleviates the growth pressure in our urban communities.

The OFA proudly represents more than 38,000 farm family members across Ontario, supporting our members and the agri-food industry on issues, legislation and regulations governed by all levels of government. OFA works to ensure the agri-food sector and our rural communities are included, consulted, and considered in any new and changing legislation that impacts the sustainability of our farm businesses. We are the leading agricultural advocate for Ontario farmers, businesses, and communities.



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Table of contents

Land Use Planning and Economic Development	3	Energy and Waste	31
Agricultural Representation in Municipal Governance	3	Electricity	31
Municipal Official Plans	4	Natural Gas and Renewable Natural Gas	32
Comprehensive Zoning By-Laws	5	Community Energy and Emissions Planning	33
Farming and Food Production Protection Act and Municipal By-Laws	6	Alternative Energy Opportunities on Farms	34
Municipal Tree By-laws	7	Waste Resource Management	35
Minister's Zoning Orders	8	Food and Organic Waste	36
Rural Economic Development	9	Infrastructure and Social Services	37
Community and Regional Food Planning	10	Roads, Bridges and Traffic Circles	37
On-Farm Diversified Uses	11	Abandoned or Former Railway Rights-of-Way	38
On-Farm Housing for Agriculture Workers	12	Land Ambulance and Farm 911 Signs	39
Natural Heritage Systems	13	Broadband Internet	40
Municipal Finance	14	Rural Child Care	41
Municipal Farm Property Tax Ratio	14	Rural Schools and School Trustees	42
Taxation of On-Farm Value Added Activities	15	OFA Resources	43
Development Charges on New Farm Buildings	16	Conclusion	43
Environment and Animal Welfare	17		
Nutrient Management and Pesticides	17		
Noxious Weed Control	18		
Excess Soil and Site Alteration	19		
Backyard Livestock and Poultry	20		
Predation and Wildlife Management	21		
Livestock Guardian Dogs	22		
Provincial Animal Welfare Services (PAWS) Act	23		
Farm Trespass	24		
Biosecurity	25		
Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act	26		
Drainage	27		
Water	28		
Stormwater Management Fees	29		
Municipal Climate Change Action/Adaptation Plans	30		



Land use planning and economic development

Agricultural representation in municipal governance



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Programs and policies developed by councillors and administered by municipal staff with limited knowledge of modern agriculture can inadvertently adversely affect farmers and their operations.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Farmers are facing greater challenges when influencing local decision-making, as an increasing number of citizens have a limited understanding of agriculture.
- Municipal councillors listen to the concerns of their constituents. Since farmers are a minority, their voices may not be heard. As an integral part of our local economy, environmental sustainability, and food security, we must include the views of farmers to ensure farms are represented to remain viable and financially sustainable.
- The intensifying responsibilities of councillors today make the role a full-time job. Consequently, fewer farmers can make the necessary commitment to this role, limiting their capacity to bring their voices to the table.



How can you help?

- Engage with your farm community early and often. This can occur through public meetings, local county Federation of Agriculture meetings, or inviting representatives to speak at council meetings.
- Consult with farmers on policies and programs that may affect their farm business operations, such as new roads, bridges, and traffic circles that may impede the transportation of modern farm equipment.
- Some municipalities have an [Agricultural Advisory Committee](#) established to advise councillors and staff on local policies that affect agriculture. After discussing with the local county federation, consider the benefits of creating an Agricultural Advisory Committee to encourage regular discussion and information sharing.
- Ensure that all meetings and consultations consider the schedules of farm businesses. Planting season and harvesting season (in particular, the months of May, October, and November) are exceptionally busy and farmers may not be able to attend meetings. Flexible hours (e.g., beyond 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) and online (e.g., webinars) can also help alleviate the timing pressures.

Resources

- [OFA's Guide and Checklist to Support Agricultural Growth in Your Municipality](#)
- [AFIO Directory: Examples of Agricultural Advisory Committee Terms of Reference](#)



Land use planning and economic development

Comprehensive zoning by-laws



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Municipal governments have the responsibility to develop Comprehensive Zoning by-laws, and/or comparable Community Planning Permit by-laws to implement official plans for their areas. These two documents set out the general allocations for land use, the types of activities allowed within each designation or zone, as well as the as of right permissions to develop on the land (e.g., types of on-farm diversification that can occur and at what size and scale).
- While Official Plans outline which areas within the municipality will be designated for agricultural, residential, industrial, commercial, recreational, or institutional uses, zoning by-laws focus on specifics, such as how lands within each major designation will be used, where buildings and structures can be located on each parcel of land (setbacks from roads and lot lines), the types and sizes of buildings permitted, lot sizes and dimensions, and parking requirements.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- The municipality's policies on growth and development and its zoning by-laws affect farmers by determining what they can build, where, and when. For example, as of right uses appropriate for agriculture mean a farmer can go ahead and apply for a building permit to build a new barn, bunkhouse, or farm market, without having to endure lengthy and costly zoning by-law Amendment applications which are open to appeal.
- Agriculture products and production practices are constantly changing and evolving. Zoning by-laws should be up to date to reflect the current realities of farming to avoid the need for Minor Variances or Zoning By-Law Amendments.
- On-farm diversification (e.g., food processing, retail farm markets, farm weddings, etc.) is growing in Ontario as farmers look for new revenue streams and consumers are increasingly interested in where their food comes from. Provisions in the zoning by-law that balance farmland preservation with opportunities to undertake diversified income-generating activities will help farmers remain viable in the long term.



How can you help?

- When establishing and updating comprehensive zoning by-laws and official plans, consult with your agricultural community to reduce red tape (think 'green tape') and avoid unnecessary hurdles.
- Ensure Municipal Official Plans and zoning by-laws have clearly defined permitted uses in each zone which reflect the needs of agriculture in your community and consider compatibility with neighbouring uses to support these farm ventures in their success.

Resources

- [OMAFA's Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas](#)
- [OMAFA's Minimum Distance Separation \(MDS\) Document](#)



Land use planning and economic development

Municipal tree by-laws



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Tree cover across Ontario is declining, particularly in southern Ontario, and municipalities endeavour to maintain a degree of tree cover throughout their landscapes.
- A local municipality may choose to enact a tree by-law (as per the [Municipal Act's section 135 – Tree by-laws](#)), to prohibit or regulate the destruction or injuring of trees in woodlands (one hectare of more in area) designated in the by-law.
- As many agricultural activities involve working with and potentially altering trees or forested areas, municipalities should consider outlining provisions or exemptions for farmers in their by-laws, which do not hinder normal farm practices.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Municipal tree by-laws may unduly impact the ability of a farmer to run or alter their operation or maintain their property in a way that is conducive to agriculture



How can you help?

- Municipalities that choose to enact a tree by-law should incorporate an agricultural exemption for:
 - destruction of trees during the pursuit of normal farm practices, e.g., for farm forestry/woodlot purposes, where trees are impeding the passage of agricultural equipment along an existing laneway that is either within or along the edge of a woodland, and preventing the encroachment of woodlands on productive agricultural resources.
 - land previously cleared and used for agricultural purposes, which has become overgrown with young (less than 10 years old) early successional tree species (e.g., Sumac, Hawthorne, Apple, Scots Pine, Poplar, White Birch, Ash) and the land is intended to be used again as part of an agricultural operation (defined as land eligible for a Farm Business Registration Number); and,
 - a linear windbreak or hedgerow or a bona fide tree nursery that is being actively managed and harvested for the purposes of which it was planted.

Resources

- [Municipal Act Section 135 – Tree by-laws](#)
- [County of Oxford, Woodlands Conservation By-Law 6035-2018](#)



Land use planning and economic development

Minister's Zoning Orders



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Ontario municipalities have access to a resource called the Minister's Zoning Order (MZO), a power under the Planning Act that allows the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to grant planning approvals exempt from regular planning process. In April 2021, [a change to the Planning Act](#) provides that MZOs outside of the Greenbelt do not have to be consistent with the Provincial Planning Statement (PPS), which places them outside of the scope of the mitigation hierarchy.
- The province of Ontario has recently seen an increase in the number of MZOs granted for development, including multiple MZOs used to rezone farmland for urban development.
- By convention, the Minister considers request for MZOs made and endorsed at the municipal level or by Ministers at the provincial level. While the Minister is not required to consult with the public on the contents of an MZO, most MZOs are opened for public comment on the Environmental Registry of Ontario.
- In some cases, municipalities might see the ability to request an MZO for a zoning change as a favourable alternative to undergoing other planning processes. However, the short-sighted use of these tools can often come with a loss of public confidence and unpredictable consequences for communities.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Ontario's arable land supply is becoming ever more finite. This correlates with a rise in land prices that can make the business of farming less viable, since commodity prices fluctuate and do not always cover the cost of stewarding lands.
- The problem is exacerbated when MZOs are used to re-designate farmland for non-agricultural development. It can reduce the land supply that is available and viable for food production. High land cost is particularly an issue for new or beginning farmers.
- These issues can make selling the farm the most economically viable option for farm families, which compounds the problem even further. The lack of public input or engagement and the inability to appeal the MZO decision removes the element of public interest from the process



How can you help?

- Ensure you have read the resource provided below to understand OFA's perspective. Recognize the challenges associated with the use of MZOs to re-zone farmland and avoid their use in your municipality. Try to understand what is driving the request.
- Strike a balance between competing interests for land uses. Economic development is often seen as directly tied to urban growth and more jobs. However, agriculture and its related industries also create and retain jobs, in addition to many other public benefits. Consider how we will feed our growing population on a municipal, provincial, national, and global scale.

Resources

- [OFA's Submission on Minister's Zoning Orders](#)



Land use planning and economic development

Rural economic development



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Policies that support the economic well-being of rural businesses and residents support the broader regional economy. Availability and access to health care services, rural schools, affordable energy, broadband internet and transportation infrastructure are all essential for rural economic development.
- Municipalities tend to offer economic development programs and incentives in urban areas to develop their downtowns and support businesses (e.g., downtown revitalization or business improvement areas), however, rural support is often lacking.
- Rural municipalities are increasingly engaging in economic development initiatives. An economic development strategy may be commissioned to assist with identifying key sectors to target for growth and guide initiatives undertaken by the municipality.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Economic development initiatives tend to favour industries such as manufacturing, energy or retail while overlooking the economic opportunities in the agri-food sector. Farmers need continued support to provide food, fibre and fuel to Ontario's economy.
- Rural areas may not be given the resources and support needed to retain and expand their operations. There is a growing importance to support economic prosperity of rural and agricultural businesses through financial incentives and reduced costs.



How can you help?

- Reduce the financial burden by exempting farm structures from development charges.
- Support rural infrastructure projects and apply for municipal infrastructure funding.
- Municipalities can implement Community Improvement Plans (CIP) that encourage private investment, renew infrastructure, and waive development fees. Provide incentives for on-farm diversification by developing an agricultural/rural-specific CIP.
- Business retention and expansion studies (BR+E) can focus specifically on agriculture and food to determine specific needs and opportunities within the sector. An agri-food BR+E can be particularly useful for determining whether specific infrastructure is needed (e.g., grain elevator, freezer storage facilities, distribution centres, etc.) or specific cluster development (e.g., craft beer and hops industry growth).

Resources

- [AFIO Directory: Examples of municipal/regional economic development strategies](#)
- [AFIO Directory: Examples of rural/agricultural community improvement plans](#)
- [AFIO Directory: Examples of BR+E studies for agriculture and food](#)



Land use planning and economic development

Community and regional food planning



What's the issue for municipalities?

- " **Land use planning and economic development** are key components of a municipality's strategy to support local food systems. This involves coordinating with other departments like planning and economic development to ensure that land use policies support the growth of local food production and distribution.
- " **Community and regional food planning** is essential for identifying opportunities for local food production and distribution. This includes working with local farmers and food businesses to identify areas for production and distribution, and developing policies that support their growth.



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Land use planning and economic development

On-Farm Diversified Uses



What's the issue for municipalities?

- On-farm Diversified Uses (OFDUs) are identified in the Provincial Planning Statement as one of three uses permitted in Ontario's prime agricultural areas, which are intended to support agriculture as the primary use in agricultural areas while providing agricultural operations with opportunities to diversify revenue streams and remain viable.
- The [OMAFA Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas](#) (guidelines) set out five criteria that a proposal must meet to qualify as an OFDU to balance farmland preservation and economic development objectives.
- Municipalities must implement OFDU policies through Official Plans, Zoning By-laws, and other municipal planning procedures.
- While the guidelines clarify the interpretation of PPS policies and provide examples of OFDU policies and procedures for municipalities, inconsistencies exist in how municipalities interpret and implement the guidelines, creating barriers to establishing legal OFDUs in prime agricultural and rural areas.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- While some farmers find the process to establish OFDUs easy, others face costly and time-consuming obstacles, such as Official Plan or zoning by-law amendments, or cost-prohibitive policies which are not appropriate for agriculture, such as development charges and urbanized site plan control.
- Complex municipal processes make it difficult for farm businesses to be aware of the proper steps needed for OFDUs, creating potential conflict with municipal authorities and neighbours.
- On-farm diversification opportunities are critical to farm businesses looking to grow and explore new income streams. This diversification can take many forms, ranging from tourism to value-added uses to many more opportunities.



How can you help?

- Use the standard definitions and policies found in the PPS, and the criteria and guidance for OFDUs laid out in the Guidelines to design municipal policies and procedures that work for farmers diversifying their businesses. Include as of right provisions in your Official Plan and Zoning By-law that permit OFDUs at an appropriate size and scale. Ensure that built development, such as requirements for Site Plan Control, is compatible with the agricultural nature of the area.
- Have a pre-submission consultation meeting with all applicants to lay out fees, timelines, and requirements for the OFDU planning application. Scale back fees and requirements for OFDUs (e.g., development charges, engineered drawings, studies, application fees, site plan control) where appropriate and feasible.

Resources

- [OFA Policy regarding On-Farm Diversified Uses](#)
- [OMAFA's Publication 851: Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas](#)
- [OMAFA's Land Use Planning page](#)



Land use planning and economic development

On-farm housing for agriculture workers



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Labour housing provides on-farm accommodation for seasonal agriculture workers when additional employment is required for agricultural production. Housing needs can be context-specific and are often dictated by the commodity type. While farm labour needs vary across the province, horticulture and greenhouse production tend to see the highest demand for workers. This housing can range from simple repurposing of surplus houses to larger bunkhouse accommodations.
- Farmers employing workers through the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) and the Agricultural Stream under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) are contractually required to provide approved worker housing during their time in Canada.
- Municipalities need to develop policies and zoning regulations to ensure that on-farm housing is compatible with the rural landscape and that it minimizes impacts on agricultural lands. If overly restrictive, these policies and zoning regulations may stifle agricultural production and economic growth.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Housing for farm workers is an agricultural land use. It is an essential component of farm production – without labour to plant, tend and harvest crops, agricultural production does not occur. Modern farm operations can be of various sizes and employ significant numbers of workers depending on the scale of operations and crops grown.
- The number of workers, the number of residences, or the size of workers' residences on a farm should reflect the labour needs of the farm to produce and grow. Policies should provide flexibility to give workers more space and ensure that comfort and safety (both physical and psychological) are maintained. Arbitrarily restricting workers' housing may result in employers seeking housing off-farm, which increases the demand and subsequently the cost of housing in the domestic housing market.



How can you help?

- Ensure municipal zoning by-laws are consistent with the Provincial Planning Statement (PPS) which defines agricultural uses to include associated on-farm buildings and structures, including accommodation for full-time farm labour when the size and nature of the operation requires additional employment.
- Recognize that Ontario's seasonal agricultural workforce is an essential component of the agri-food value chain, it is vital that farm employers are able to access and house the number workers their operations require.
- Consult with local farm employers to understand their housing needs and to develop land use policies that have the flexibility for Ontario's farmers to construct safe and quality accommodations for farmworkers, while maintaining the long-term protection of agricultural land.

Resources

- [Foreign Agricultural Resource Management Services \(F.A.R.M.S.\) Seasonal Farm Worker Housing Guidelines](#)
- [OMAF's Publication 851: Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas](#)
- [OMAF's Minimum Distance Separation \(MDS\) Guidance](#)



Land use planning and economic development

Natural Heritage Systems



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Per the Provincial Planning Statement, Natural Heritage Systems (NHS) are a provincial interest that municipalities are responsible for identifying, preserving, and protecting.
- NHS protection policies focus on the protection of significant wetlands, significant coastal wetlands, significant woodlands, significant valley lands, significant wildlife habitat, significant areas of natural and scientific interest and the habitats of endangered and threatened species.
- Municipal land use planning documents must account for both Agricultural and NHS policies and ensure that agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses, and on-farm diversified uses are preserved and protected in agricultural areas when planning for Natural Heritage Systems.
- Even though the Provincial Planning Statement (PPS) dictates that natural heritage features and areas must be protected for the long term, it also states that nothing in the Natural Heritage PPS Policies (Section 4.1) are intended to limit the ability of agricultural uses to continue.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- NHS mapped on properties may designate artificial features as 'natural heritage' (e.g., a planted windbreak mapped as a woodlot, or a drainage pond mapped as a wetland). These inaccurately mapped features add restrictions that limit plans to expand or change operations.
- NHS provisions can be a barrier to economic opportunities where property enhancements such as storage or processing facilities are limited due to setback requirements or cost-prohibitive environmental impact studies.



How can you help?

- Recognize that agricultural lands and activities are equally as worthy of protection as NHS features, and that NHS is not intended to limit the ability of agricultural uses to continue. Provide farmers with the opportunity to review NHS mapping before it is included in the Official Plan to ensure accuracy of the NHS features worthy of protection.
- Develop a clear online portal or mail out fact sheets to provide step-by-step guidance for farmers looking to understand what land use designations are on their lot and the provisions that apply to them. Provide clarity on what the setbacks from NES features are for each kind of feature and what the definitions are for those features that would be considered significant. Scale back fees and streamline requirements (e.g., environmental impact studies) for farmers looking to expand or alter farm operations in the NHS.

Resources

- [OMAFA Summary of the Agricultural System and Natural Heritage System Policies in Ontario's Provincial Plans](#)



Municipal finance

Municipal farm property tax ratio



What's the issue for municipalities?

- The Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) is responsible for the assessment and classification of property. However, municipalities set property tax rates and upper/single-tier municipalities determine local tax burden through their tax ratio policy.
- Farm residences, plus a minimum one acre of land, are taxed at the municipality's residential tax rate. However, farmland and outbuildings that are eligible for the Farm Property Class Tax Rate Program are taxed at no more than 25% of the residential property tax rate. Upper and single-tier municipalities have the authority to set the farm property tax ratio below 25%.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Property assessments for the 2026 property tax year will continue to be based on January 1, 2016 current values. In MPAC's province-wide 2016 property reassessment, farmland assessment increases have greatly outpaced the residential assessment increases in most municipalities. Consequentially, the farm class is carrying a larger share of the total municipal tax burden. Therefore, a reduction in the municipal farm property tax ratio (below 25 percent of the residential property tax rate) should be considered.
- Collecting an increasing portion of the municipal budget from the farm property class is inappropriate where the revenue is allocated to finance municipal services for developed areas (e.g., sidewalks, street lighting). Taxes collected from farmland should reflect the minimal municipal services required by farmland and buildings.
- The farm property tax rate only applies to farmland and farm buildings that have been classified by MPAC into the farm property class. The farm residence and one acre remain in the residential property class and are taxed at the residential property tax rate. Therefore, farmers pay residential property taxes like other homeowners.



How can you help?

- Support reducing the farm property tax ratio to ensure that the percentage of municipal tax revenue from the farm property class remains consistent with previous years.

Resources

- [OFA's webpage on Taxation](#)
- [MPAC's webpage on Understanding Your Assessment](#)



Municipal finance

Taxation of on-farm value-added activities



What's the issue for municipalities?

- The Fair Assessment System in Ontario classifies properties, and each class is taxed at a different rate. This has resulted in some buildings located on farms being classified and taxed at full commercial or industrial rates. These rates are inappropriate in cases where the building is used for activities necessary to store or distribute the primary agricultural product or commodity.
- In addition, buildings used to conduct on-farm value-added activities, such as small-scale processing, retail or agritourism should be encouraged and not discouraged by excessive property taxes. The OFA defines value-added activities as an extension of the farming operation by taking a marketable farm commodity produced on land owned or controlled through rental, lease and/or sharecropping arrangements by the same farmer or farmers and increasing its value by further preparing it, and/or storing it, and/or selling it directly to the consumer.
- Since 2018, single-tier and upper-tier municipal councils may pass a by-law opting to have two subclasses for small-scale on-farm business apply in their municipality. Effective January 2022, the Government of Ontario introduced O.Reg. 828/21, a second optional subclass for both the industrial and commercial subclasses to provide further support to small-scale on-farm businesses. The new legislation allows municipalities to increase the threshold of eligible assessment to which the reduced tax rate applies from \$50,000 to \$100,000. In municipalities that adopt these optional property subclasses, the maximum assessed value of land that is eligible for inclusion in the first and second subclasses for small-scale on-farm business for the industrial property class and the first and second subclasses for small-scale on-farm business for the commercial property class is \$100,000. The qualifying commercial and industrial portions are eligible to receive a tax rate that is 75% lower than the local commercial/industrial tax rates. Properties with an assessed value of greater than \$1,000,000 will not be eligible for these new optional property tax subclasses.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Farm buildings that are used for activities necessary to get their primary agricultural products to market should not be considered commercial or industrial uses. Farm buildings that are used for small-scale value-added agriculture should be encouraged in order to support business diversification and product enhancement on the farm.
- Commercial and industrial property tax classes are considerably higher than farmland property tax classes and can unduly restrict farm business ventures.



How can you help?

- Support the adoption of small-scale on-farm business subclasses for industrial and commercial property classes in single-tier and upper-tier municipalities.
- Encourage on-farm, value-added activities that enhance agricultural offerings in a community to create jobs and stimulate the rural economy.

Resources

- [OFA's webpage on Taxation](#)
- [MPAC website: Qualifying for Farm Tax Incentive Programs](#)



Municipal finance

Development charges on new farm buildings



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Municipal governments can levy municipal development charges on new residential and non-residential buildings and structures to cover the capital costs associated with increased demand for municipal services that result from growth-related development. These capital costs can include acquiring and improving land and buildings, infrastructure for water and sewer services, and new equipment and buildings required to maintain emergency services.
- Although the *Development Charges Act* provides municipalities with the ability to apply such charges to agricultural buildings and structures, most municipalities have chosen to exempt agricultural buildings and structures from municipal development charges.
- However, subsequent by-laws may omit the existing exemptions for agricultural buildings and structures unless farmers and municipal councillors are vigilant.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Development charges are in place to fund services related to growth, which brings more people to a municipality (e.g., higher local population, more employment). Since the construction of most new farm buildings does not increase the need for growth-related services that other types of development do, development charges should not apply to farm buildings and structures. If they do, farmers are bearing more than their share of the municipality's additional capital expenditures.
- If one municipality applies development charges to agricultural buildings and structures while a neighbouring municipality does not, an inter-regional inequity is created. About 75 percent of municipalities with development charges by-laws do not apply the charges to farm buildings and structures.
- Standardizing the application of development charges to agriculture through a province-wide exemption would prevent farmers from facing inequitable treatment in a minority of municipalities. The OFA believes that the Development Charges Act should be amended to provide a statutory exemption to farm animal housing and other farm buildings/structures from all development charges to ensure equitable treatment of farms in all Ontario municipalities.



How can you help?

- Determine whether development charges apply to agricultural structures in your municipality and consider amending these charges.
- Support OFA's position that all new farm buildings in Ontario should be exempt from development charges.

Resources

- [OFA's submission on the Development Charges Act](#)



Environment and animal welfare

Nutrient management and pesticides



What's the issue for municipalities?

- The *Nutrient Management Act (NMA)* and the *Pesticides Act* both contain language placing regulatory control firmly in the domain of the provincial government.
- Specifically, in the case of the NMA section 61(1) states: A regulation super-sedes a by-law of a municipality as a provision in that by-law if the by-law or provision addresses the same subject matter as the regulation.
- Similarly, section 7.1(5) of the Pesticides Act states: A municipal by-law is inoperative if it addresses the use, sale, offer for sale or transfer of a pesticide that may be used for a cosmetic purpose.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- The OFA lobbied for, and supports, the above provisions on the basis that it is preferable to have provincial legislation and regulations governing pesticides and land-applied nutrients rather than a patchwork of inconsistent municipal by-laws.



How can you help?

- Where necessary, repeal existing by-laws that deal with either pesticides or land-applied nutrients.

Resources

- OFA's webpage on Nutrient Management
- OMAFA's webpage on Nutrient Management
- OMAFA's webpage on Pesticide Use



Environment and animal welfare

Noxious weed control



What's the issue for municipalities?

- The *Weed Control Act* and related regulations are meant to provide relief from the spread of noxious weeds. The Act requires every person in possession of land to “destroy all noxious weeds on it”. The province has designated a number of plants as noxious weeds, including giant hog weed. Municipalities may add additional weeds to the noxious weeds list for local enforcement.
- There are three levels of weed inspectors: lower tier (if applicable) appointed locally, upper tier (county, region or district) appointed regionally, and a provincial/chief inspector appointed by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFRA). Municipal councils of upper-tier and single-tier municipalities are required to appoint area weed inspectors through by-law.
- A landowner concerned about weeds on neighbouring lands should contact their municipal clerk, asking for the weed inspector. The local municipal clerk should always be the first point of contact, regardless of whether the weed problem occurs at the municipal, county or provincial levels. The clerk should contact the appropriate inspector.
- Any person/entity (landowners, municipalities, provincially owned land, MTO properties, conservation authorities, former railway rights-of-way, etc.) in possession of land where noxious weeds are present and negatively impacting agricultural lands, are responsible for controlling them, including any associated costs.
- A weed inspector who finds noxious weeds or weed seeds can order the person in possession of the land to destroy them within seven days (excluding weekends). An order to destroy weeds can be appealed to the chief inspector. In turn, the decision of the chief inspector can be appealed to Divisional Court.
- If a landowner fails to obey an order to destroy, the municipality can destroy the weeds and bill the owner for the cost. Ultimately, if the bill is not paid, it is added to the property tax bill as taxes owing.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Noxious weed control on and adjacent to agricultural land improves crop yields and reduces a farmer's need to undertake costly on-farm weed control.



How can you help?

- Ensure that municipal properties, including parks, recreational trails and road allowances, particularly adjacent to agricultural lands, are kept weed-free.
- Commit to ensuring that municipal weed inspectors keep all properties free of noxious weeds.

Resources

- [OMAFRA's webpage on Noxious Weeds in Ontario](#)
- [OFA's issue page on Noxious Weed Control](#)



Environment and animal welfare

Excess soil and site alteration



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Excess soil (soil, topsoil or fill) is typically generated from construction activities and must be moved off-site when it cannot be reused at the development site. Most excess soil can be reused safely, however some excess soil may have contaminant concentrations that limit reuse options. The Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks oversees the Excess Soil Regulation, which sets out rules and standards for reuse of excess soil.
- Municipalities are often on the receiving end of excess soil, when local residents and businesses use excess soil to alter their properties, commonly known as site alteration. Many municipalities use Site Alteration Bylaws to limit their risk when soil generated in another location is imported to the municipality.
- Farmers use excess soil in many regular farming activities, such as grading a laneway or farm yard.
- Site alteration activities on-farm could include leveling fields to improve the amount of usable farmland, grade alterations for safer equipment operation, adding soil depth over bedrock, fixing drainage or erosion issues, or improving soil characteristics for crop production.
- Excess soil used for site alteration must be managed responsibly, to protect the quality of agricultural land and water resources while ensuring no adverse effects on human or livestock health or the environment.
- The Municipal Act provides municipal authority to regulate certain fill activities through permit conditions, but also provides exception for agricultural activities like incidental removal of topsoil as part of Normal Farming Practices.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- The Farming and Food Production and Protection Act provides protection for farmers against municipal bylaws that restrict Normal Farm Practices as part of an agricultural operation, as well as nuisance complaints from neighbours.
- Many on-farm uses of excess soil are part of regular farming activities and could be considered Normal Farm Practices.
- Site alteration bylaws that do not consider on-farm use of excess soil in regular farming practices can be burdensome for farmers.



How can you help?

- Consider exempting site alteration activities on farms from municipal bylaws, or provide considerations for agricultural applications based on project size.
- Ensure site alteration bylaws don't hinder regular agricultural activities on a farm, while still being protective of human health and the environment.

Resources

- OMAFA Factsheet: Importation of Soil onto Agricultural Land
- Ontario's Handling Excess Soil webpage



Environment and animal welfare

Backyard livestock and poultry



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Increasingly, many people in Ontario are raising livestock and poultry in rural and urban settings.
- People, animals, and wildlife can unknowingly bring with them diseases that can easily be transmitted to other animals and to people, and to other locations.
- Disease prevention and mitigation through good biosecurity practices is important for individuals keeping livestock or poultry in their backyards to protect not only their own animals, but those surrounding them.
- Safeguarding animals and people from the introduction and spread of infectious agents is critical. Good biosecurity practices keep backyard livestock, poultry, companion animals, and people safe.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Diseases such as Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza are an ongoing concern for Ontario's livestock and poultry industry, and the risk of disease transmission and outbreak is constantly present.
- Diseases, viruses, and other harmful agents can easily travel between locations on animals, people and their clothing, vehicles, and other machinery. Pathogens can easily transmit from backyard livestock and poultry onto commercial farms.
- Contracting diseases on farms can be devastating, leading to losses of an individual's animals and poultry, whole herds and flocks, and threatens the livelihood of farm businesses across the province.
- Good biosecurity practices for those who own livestock and poultry are essential to prevent the spread of pathogens between backyard and commercial livestock and poultry.



How can you help?

- New owners may not be aware of the risks of owning backyard livestock and poultry and how to prevent and mitigate those risks; educate residents about farming practices, good biosecurity practices, and why they matter.
- Promote and encourage biosecurity best practices for those raising backyard livestock and poultry within the municipality.

Resources

- [OMAF's webpage on Biosecurity for livestock](#)
- [OMAF's webpage on Raising healthy small flock poultry](#)
- [Small Flock Ontario](#)



Environment and animal welfare

Predation and wildlife management



What's the issue for municipalities?

- We all enjoy seeing wildlife, but when their numbers increase to the point where they cannot survive without turning to agricultural crops, livestock or poultry for food, then farmers look for help. Wildlife damage costs Ontario farmers approximately \$41 million per year.
- Some municipalities have passed municipal “no discharge of firearms” by-laws. These by-laws can negatively impact farmers by closing the municipality to hunting and predator control, leading to increased wildlife damage to crops, livestock or poultry. Other municipalities have passed by-laws to permit Sunday gun hunting, during the normal open season, for deer, wild turkey, etc., to provide more hunting opportunities.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- The *Ontario Wildlife Damage Compensation Program* provides limited compensation to farmers for wildlife damage to livestock, killed or injured by predators. Farmers who have had livestock or poultry killed or injured by a predator should contact their municipal clerk and ask for the Municipal Investigator. Municipalities are required under the *Ontario Wildlife Damage Compensation Program* to appoint one or more Municipal Investigators. Predation by dogs is addressed under the *Protection of Livestock and Poultry from Dogs Act*.
- There is no government program that compensates for wildlife damages to crops, orchards, vineyards, etc.
- Section 31 of the [Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act](#) authorizes anyone to harass, capture or kill wildlife on their own land that is damaging, or is about to damage, their property. These provisions apply to all wildlife, including wild turkeys and beaver, except for endangered or threatened species and moose, caribou, elk or white-tailed deer. MNRF does issue authorizations to farmers facing crop damage by deer or elk. Farmers and other property owners can take reasonable action to protect their property – including crops, livestock or poultry – from predation.



How can you help?

- An apparent first response to agricultural damage by wildlife is to allow hunting during open seasons. Pass a by-law to permit Sunday gun hunting during the normal open season for deer, wild turkey, etc. In some instances, trapping may be a viable solution.
- Develop a municipal program to compensate licensed hunters or trappers who remove nuisance coyotes preying on livestock or poultry.
- Only apply “no discharge of firearms” by-laws in urban areas within your municipality.

Resources

- [OMAFA's webpage on the Ontario Wildlife Damage Compensation Program](#)



Environment and animal welfare

Livestock Guardian Dogs



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Livestock Guardian Dogs (LGDs) provide protection to livestock by patrolling pastures, marking the perimeter of their territory, and bark, run at, or try to intimidate any threats to the livestock they are protecting.
- Municipal by-laws can prevent or negatively impact Ontario's livestock farmers from using LGDs to provide protection to livestock against predation. By-laws should carefully consider the role of LGDs and the service they provide as a normal farm practice.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Problem predators are an increasing challenge and cost for Ontario livestock farmers requiring considerable effort and resources on the farm. The financial cost of predation not only costs farmers, but it also costs Ontario taxpayers.
- Livestock guardian animals are one of the most common forms of predation prevention control used by Ontario livestock farmers. These include LGDs, donkeys, and llamas, with LGDs being the most popular choice.
- There are instances when municipal by-laws hinder the efficient use of LGDs on farming operations as the by-laws are intended primarily for dogs kept for companionship, breeding, or non-working purposes.



How can you help?

- Add the definition of Livestock Guardian Dogs and herding dogs to by-laws.
 - "Livestock Guardian Dog" be defined as a dog that works and/or lives with domestic farm animals to protect them while repelling predators and is used exclusively for that purpose.
 - "Herding Dog" means a dog that has been trained and is actively being used in a bona fide farming operation for the purposes of controlling livestock on the farm.
- Exempt LGDs and herding dogs from annual license fees to decrease potential significant cost for livestock producers.
- Exempt LGDs and herding dogs being actively used in farming practices from the requirement for dogs to wear a collar and tag, provided that the owner uses an alternative means of identification.
- Allow persons to keep more than three dogs at a premise without obtaining a kennel license, providing they meet certain agricultural criteria such as keeping livestock, agricultural or rural land zoning, and that the dogs are LDGs and/or herding dogs.
- Exempt LGDs and herding dogs from barking restrictions if actively engaged in guarding livestock against predators.
- Only apply "no discharge of firearms" by-laws in urban areas within your municipality.

Resources

- [OMAFA's Fact Sheet on Livestock Guardian Dogs](#)



Environment and animal welfare

Provincial Animal Welfare Services (PAWS) Act



What's the issue for municipalities?

- On January 1st, 2020, the *Provincial Animal Welfare Services (PAWS) Act* came into effect for the province of Ontario.
- The new legislation introduced a provincially funded animal welfare enforcement model, headed by a Chief Animal Welfare Inspector and one or more deputies. The new model has the strongest penalties in Canada for people who commit cruelty offences.
- One hundred provincial inspectors provide province-wide coverage for animal distress and cruelty investigations. These inspectors are subject to a code of conduct and specialized training.
- The legislation empowers others, beyond inspectors, to act when an animal is in imminent risk of serious injury or death when it is left in a hot car.
- For more information, please visit [Ontario's animal welfare webpage](#).



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Ontario farm families care about their animals. Farm animal and equine owners uphold high standards of care in alignment with accepted codes of practice and normal farming activities.
- Ontario farm animal owners and caregivers ensure the health and welfare of farm animals through compliance with the provisions outlined in the PAWS Act.



How can you help?

- Keep informed about the *Provincial Animal Welfare Services Act*.
- Promote the toll-free number for the Ontario Animal Protection Call Centre to report concerns about animal distress or abuse: 1-833-9-ANIMAL (264625); Call centre is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Resources

- OFA's webpage on Farm Animal Care
- Ontario's animal welfare webpage



Environment and animal welfare

Farm trespass



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Trespassing on farm properties continues to be an ongoing concern for many farmers across the province. Farmers often deal with off-road vehicles (e.g., ATVs, dirt bikes, and snowmobiles) and rural trail hikers roaming on farm property.
- Ontario's snowmobile trail network spans more than 30,000 kilometres across the province and includes agreements with 18,000 landowners. Trail systems benefit the economy. It is important to remember that there would be no continuous trail network without farmers and rural landowners.
- Trespass by people and vehicles can damage farm property and crops. Farmland is private property; anyone entering without legal authority or permission from the occupier is trespassing.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Increased incidents of on-farm trespassing by persons and vehicles can have detrimental effects on crops, land and farmer livelihood. These incidents jeopardize the health and nutrients of the soil and crops.
- Fences, irrigation systems and other obstacles utilized in farming operations can cause serious harm to trespassers. Farmers are concerned about being found liable for injuries as a result of these obstacles.



How can you help?

- Develop relationships and facilitate communication between farmers, rural landowners, and recreational vehicle clubs.
- Educate the public on the potential effects of trespassing on farm and rural land.
- Know and understand the rights and obligations under the *Trespass to Property Act*, *Occupiers' Liability Act*, *Off-Road Vehicles Act*, and *Motorized Snow Vehicles Act*.

Resources

- [OFA's webpage on Trespass and Occupiers' Liability](#)



**BioSecurity strictly enforced.
No unauthorized personnel.**

Environment and animal welfare

Biosecurity



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Municipal staff, contractors, or inspectors legally entering farms can unintentionally spread livestock and poultry diseases, crop diseases and pests, and weed seeds or other invasive species.
- Contaminants can be carried on every day objects, such as footwear, vehicles and tires, clothing, and tools and equipment.
- Even routine visits by individuals such as bylaw enforcement, building inspectors, and environmental checks can create serious biosecurity risks to farms.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Farmers rely on biosecurity practices to keep infectious diseases and pests out of barns and herds.
- Rapid disease spread or outbreaks can wipe out entire flocks or herds, leading to devastating financial and emotional losses.
- For many farm families, livestock is their livelihood. Strong biosecurity helps ensure farms can keep producing food, and contributing to the local economy.
- Diseases that spread between animals and humans pose risks beyond the farm gate. Good biosecurity protects livelihood, public health, and rural economies.



How can you help?

- Provide biosecurity training to all staff who may visit farms; follow all posted and verbal biosecurity instructions.
- Develop municipal biosecurity policies for inspections and site visits; use remote inspection tools where possible.
- Share biosecurity awareness and education resources with staff, contractors, and the public.
- Respect farmers' rights to limit property access to protect biosecurity.

Resources

- [OFA Biosecurity Fact Sheet](#)
- [OMAFRA Biosecurity Resource](#)
- [CFIA National Biosecurity Standards](#)
- [CFIA Biosecurity Checklist](#)



Environment and animal welfare

Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Trespassers and animal activists illegally enter property, barns and buildings, seizing private property and threatening the health and safety of the farm, agri-food employees, livestock and crops. This causes significant disruptions to the entire agri-food sector, especially for livestock farmers and livestock transporters.
- Enacted in December 2020, the *Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act, 2020* protects farms, farmers, agri-food employees, and the safety of the entire food value chain by addressing the ongoing threat of unwanted trespassing and activists.
- The legislation provides a balanced approach to protect farms, families, livestock and food safety, while recognizing a citizen's right to protest. The Act recognizes the importance of minimizing animal stress and reducing the potential of spreading disease.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Increased incidents of on-farm trespass and barn invasions puts the health and welfare of animals and ultimately the entire food supply at risk by breaching biosecurity protocols.
- These incidents distress farmers, their families and employees, and threaten the health of livestock and crops when activists breach biosecurity protocols.
- Ontario farmers follow strict codes of conduct to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all farm animals.
- The *Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act* ensures farm businesses have a legal standing to protect Ontario farms, agri-employees, livestock, crops and ultimately the entire food supply from intruders.



How can you help?

- Become familiar with the *Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act* and *O. Reg. 701/20*.
- Communicate with municipal and provincial police about the importance of protecting farms and farmers from trespass and activists, and the provisions under the Act and corresponding regulations.
- Educate the public about the risks associated with on-farm and in-barn trespass, and the importance of the *Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act*.

Resources

- [OFA's web page on the Security from Trespass and Protecting Food Safety Act](#)
- [Animal Protection Zone FAQ](#)
- [Animal Protection Zone Decision Tree](#)



Environment and animal welfare

Drainage



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Under the *Drainage Act*, landowners requiring drainage to remove excess water, thereby making their land more productive, can petition their council for a drain. If the petition is valid, Council appoints an engineer to prepare a report. The engineer's report describes the work to be done, including an estimate of the overall cost of the project, and a schedule showing each landowner's estimated share of the project's costs. The municipality implements the engineer's report by enacting a by-law. A portion of the costs of construction, maintenance or repairs allocated to properties classed as "agriculture" for property tax purposes are reduced through a grant from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAF). The municipality is responsible to ensure the continued maintenance of these drains.
- The municipality is also responsible for employing a Drainage Superintendent. The Drainage Superintendent initiates, supervises and assists in the construction, maintenance and repairs of municipal drains under the Act. The costs to employ the Drainage Superintendent are partially paid through an annual grant from OMAFA.
- The *Tile Drainage Act* provides loans to farmers to construct tile drainage systems on their farms. Loans are limited to 75% of the cost of the work to be done, to a maximum of \$50,000 per farmer, per year. Repayment is through ten (10) annual installments, often collected concurrently with the property taxes. The funds for tile loans are provided by OMAFA but are distributed to farmers by their local municipality. To be eligible for a tile drainage loan, the farmer must employ an OMAFA-licensed contractor to do the requisite work.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- The ability to safely and efficiently remove excess water from one's fields enables the farmer to achieve higher crop yields while also reducing rutting and soil compaction.



How can you help?

- Understand your role and responsibilities under both the *Drainage Act* and *Tile Drainage Act* related to agricultural land drainage.
- Non-farm developments adjacent to farmland (e.g., residential, industrial, commercial, recreational or institutional) often entail sizable site grading, which can change natural drainage patterns. Drainage problems can be created at the newly created site, adjacent farms, or both. Ensure that changes in land use require an engineered drainage plan to ensure that adjacent properties are not negatively impacted by drainage.

Resources

- [OMAF's webpage on Agricultural Drainage Infrastructure Program: Administrative Policies](#)
- [OFA's webpage on Water and Drainage](#)



Environment and animal welfare

Water



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Municipal Council must ensure that municipal drinking water is safe, that proper testing is performed at regular intervals, and that regularly scheduled maintenance is performed on structural components. Additional roles of municipalities under the [Clean Water Act \(CWA\)](#) include the implementation of a Source Protection Plan (SPP) for every source of municipal drinking water, be it surface water or groundwater.
- The CWA aims to protect the sources of water that are drawn into a municipal water system for distribution to those who are serviced by the municipal water system.
- Once an SPP is approved, it is the role of the municipality to implement the plan in its Wellhead Protection Areas (groundwater systems) and Intake Protection Zones (surface water systems). To assist in this endeavour, municipalities will be expected to employ and direct Risk Management Officials and Risk Management Inspectors to work with farmers and other landowners on the development and implementation of Risk Management Plans that are tailored to the properties that they own and manage.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Increased scrutiny is being placed on any activities which may impact water quality, including agricultural practices. Given that farms are often located in well-head recharge areas and along rivers and lakes which provide the source of a municipality's drinking water, agriculture will be faced with restrictions on farming practices. Farmers are rural residents who require potable water for their families and their operations, however they will also need to provide safeguards for the public's benefit.
- One major concern for the OFA is the cost of compliance for those farmers who are required to change their management practices as a result of the SPPs.
- Another concern is that Risk Management Officials and Inspectors will not be knowledgeable about agricultural practices. OFA encourages all areas of the province to use the [Farm Source Water Protection Framework](#) developing Risk Management Plans on farms that have been identified with practices deemed to be significant threats.



How can you help?

- Provide funding for farmers required to incur capital costs, and/or management costs, and/or ongoing maintenance costs to protect a municipal drinking water supply.
- Encourage Risk Management Officials/Inspectors to use the Farm Source Water Protection Framework when developing Risk Management Plans on farm operations.

Resources

- [OFA's webpage on Water and Drainage](#)
- [OMAF's Water Management in Agriculture page](#)
- [Farm Source Water Protection Framework](#)



Environment and animal welfare

Stormwater management fees



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Stormwater management fees are specifically imposed on property owners to cover the costs of stormwater management. Municipalities are increasingly introducing Stormwater Management Fee bylaws to help cover municipal water management system costs. Municipalities have the authority to charge user fees, such as a stormwater management fee, under the *Municipal Act*.
- The province does not provide guidance on how to calculate or apply these fees; therefore, in areas where the fees are being applied, the method for calculating these fees is left to each individual municipality.
- Not all municipalities are implementing these fees. Others are exempting agricultural properties from these fees. Some municipalities have incorporated a credit system which will allow property owners to reduce the amount of these fees by having systems in place that reduce runoff from their properties.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Significant fees are being placed on farmers due to a fee structure that does not reflect how water flows on agricultural properties.
- Stormwater Management Fees to agricultural land are being assigned as an afterthought and often included within the Industrial and Commercial classes, despite the significant differences in the movement of stormwater from agricultural properties.
- Agricultural properties provide many significant water services, including absorbing stormwater through infiltration – replenishing aquifers, creeks, streams, lakes and wetlands; slowing peak flows thereby decreasing stream erosion; and filtering contaminants. These environmental services provided to the municipality are not considered in the development of their fees.



How can you help?

- When considering stormwater management, special consideration should be given for agricultural properties to ensure there are no unintended consequences that disproportionately impact farmers.
- Engage with farmers to understand the different practices farmers are already implementing on their farm that support stormwater management.

Resources

- [OFA's webpage on Water and Drainage](#)



Environment and animal welfare

Municipal climate change action/adaptation plans



What's the issue for municipalities?

- The climate is changing in Canada and around the world. This is evidenced by rising global temperatures, more frequent extreme weather events, and unpredictable changes to precipitation cycles.
- Recognizing the vulnerability to livelihoods and assets, municipalities are engaging their administration and community stakeholders to address local climate change issues by developing Climate Change Action and/or Adaptation Plans. Some plans are general to the whole community, and other are specific to agricultural adaptation and resiliency.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Agricultural production has always required farmers to continuously adapt to seasonal variability and changing growing conditions. In some areas of Ontario, climate change is resulting in seasonal variability that falls outside of established norms, causing disruptions to farm production.
- Most farmers operate at the forefront of climate change and may be the first members of the community to suffer from potential impacts.
- As managers of the carbon and nitrogen cycles, farmers can play a key role in local climate resiliency through the implementation of best/beneficial management practices (BMPs).



How can you help?

- Most farmers in Ontario operate in a highly competitive, global marketplace where margins are low, risks are high, and there is little to no opportunity for producers to affect the price that they receive for their products. Adapting farm operations to the potential impacts of climate change may take significant financial and time commitments.
- Ensure that all administration and stakeholders are aware of the capacity of farmers to make significant changes to their operations by making informed and realistic recommendations.
- Involve farmers meaningfully in discussions by consulting with the local agricultural advisory board. If an advisory board does not exist, consider forming a farmer-led agriculture sector taskforce to propose adaptation strategies.
- Understand that the impacts of climate change will be felt differently across agricultural sectors and ensure that program options are flexible and reflective of that diversity.
- Schedule engagement efforts to recognize the seasonal nature of agricultural production and the availability of farmers to participate during the year.

Resources

- [OFA's webpage on Climate Change](#)



Energy and waste

Electricity



What's the issue for municipalities?

- All utilities in Ontario are regulated by the Ontario Energy Board. The role of the municipal councils differs for those areas served by a Local Distribution Company, such as Hydro One, and a Municipal Utility Company.

1) *In places served through a municipal utility*

The municipality owns the electricity distribution system. They are responsible for ensuring electricity service, including quality of service, such as issues with uncontrolled ground current. The municipality is responsible to ensure that landowners are fairly treated in easement and right-of-way contracts.

2) *In municipalities served by either a private company or a Local Distribution Company (LDC)*

The role of the municipal council is limited where the municipality does not have ownership of the utility. Council may be called upon to work politically to ensure their constituents receive quality service and the municipality may intervene in utility rate hearings to encourage better rates and/or service.

- The Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO) will increase transmission system energy generation capacity significantly over the next twenty-five years. As directed by the Minister of Energy and Electrification, the IESO will require projects to obtain municipal support and to conduct Agricultural Impact Assessments on any facilities proposed on land zoned as Prime Agricultural Area.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Electricity is a crucial service for farm and business development. As Ontario transitions to higher use of electricity, it is important that local electricity grids are reliable, resilient, and have the capacity to meet our needs. It is also important that farmland is protected for the continued production of agricultural products.



How can you help?

- Identify how you will address concerns about unacceptable level of service, maintenance, or repair, and how you will ensure rural delivery charges remain aligned with lower urban delivery charges.
- Consider how you will ensure that your residents have adequate energy capacity, efficiency measures and demand management assistance.
- Consider how to protect farmland and determine how best to accommodate energy infrastructure that suits the needs of your local land use planning.

Resources

- [OFA's webpage on Understanding Service Types for Hydro One Customers](#)
- [OFA's webpage on Uncontrolled Electricity](#)
- [OFA's webpage on Land Easements and Acquisitions Under Infrastructure Projects](#)



Energy and waste

Natural gas and renewable natural gas



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Natural gas distribution, where it is available, is provided almost entirely by private firms (e.g., EPCOR or Enbridge). However, these private firms hold a municipal franchise provided to them by the local government to provide service in the area.
- In many rural areas, no natural gas distribution service is provided. As a result, rural residents pay more for energy than their urban counterparts. Historically, the cost to heat a three-bedroom home with natural gas is a fraction of propane or electricity heat costs.
- Municipalities without natural gas service are less attractive for business development and are a missed opportunity for rural prosperity.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Energy is one of the largest inputs on farms, and a significant cost to rural residents and local business owners. If natural gas was available across the province, it could save Ontario farmers, business owners and rural residents over \$1 billion in annual energy costs.
- According to the Ministry of Energy, the transition to higher use of electricity in Ontario includes the continued use of natural gas, especially in rural and northern municipalities.
- New rural gas pipeline infrastructure will also enable rural agricultural communities to produce clean biogas and renewable natural gas for pipeline delivery.



How can you help?

- Undertake a project to bring gas service to, or expand natural gas service in rural communities.
- Consider a municipal agricultural project to produce renewable natural gas.
- Support local improvement by-laws for natural gas service.

Resources

- [OFA's webpage on Natural Gas Infrastructure](#)
- [OFA's webpage on Energy Costs and Availability](#)



Energy and waste

Community energy and emissions planning



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Municipal energy plans are important to develop a plan that will help your community:
 - improve energy efficiency;
 - reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions;
 - study the impact of future growth on energy needs; and
 - foster renewable energy production and economic development.
- Previous attempts to build rural power generation incentivized large, industrial-scaled facilities attached to high-voltage transmission grids. These large renewable procurements were sited based on available high-voltage capacity, with no input from local municipalities.
- Municipalities now have a voice in provincial energy planning proposals in your community.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- OFA believes Rural Community Energy Projects will put power generation where it is needed and will consider energy policy in alignment with climate change, rural economic development, waste management and agricultural objectives. There are many opportunities in Ontario where incentivized local and small-scale energy solutions will help rural Ontario grow.
- Rural Ontario needs access to local energy systems where communities have a say in facility location, design, construction, ownership and management. Developing community energy systems fosters rural economic development and helps communities reduce carbon emissions while creating jobs and delivering reliable local power.



How can you help?

- Take part in regional energy planning and engage your local farm community.
- Eliminate the barriers between electricity, natural gas and other sources of energy and move towards more integrated and longer-term planning.

Resources

- [OFA's webpage on Rural Community Energy Plans](#)
- [Ontario's Municipal Energy Plan Program](#)
- [Independent Electricity System Operator \(IESO\) webpage on Regional Planning](#)



Energy and waste

Alternative energy opportunities on farms



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Alternative energy use promotes conservation and local generation while decreasing transmission costs and greenhouse gas emissions and can provide new revenue sources for municipalities. Alternative energy opportunities on farms include biogas (fuel from farm waste residues), wind power, solar heat, solar electric, and co-generation or combined heat and power.
- Affordable and sustainable energy is critical to the prosperity of our communities. Energy from farms can help power farms and Ontario while improving our environment. It is mutually beneficial for farmers, the private sector and government.
- Rural renewable power should be viewed as a critical contributor to rural economic development and a new foundation for Ontario's farms.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Energy opportunities can add several million dollars in annual farm income in the short term, and between \$1 and \$2 billion annually in the long term, with over \$200 million added each year to the farm 'take home' income. This would do a great deal for the stability of Ontario farms.
- OFA believes solar power on roof tops and close to areas of use is an excellent innovation. However, industrial-scale solar and wind facilities on farmland is a detrimental use of farmland and should be discouraged.



How can you help?

- Support local generation projects to meet local needs. Reduce transmission of power over long distances to create local jobs and contribute to a stable energy system.
- Discuss local energy opportunities with the IESO, OMAFA and MMAH to gain insights surrounding Agricultural Impact Assessments, On-Farm Diversified Uses and Farm-Related Uses of farmland.

Resources

- [OFA's webpage on Alternative Energy Opportunities on Farms](#)
- [IESO Learn Webpage](#)



Energy and waste

Waste resource management



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Ontario generates 11.6 million tonnes of waste per year. The Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) Discussion Paper on Reducing Litter and Waste in Our Communities builds on the actions outlined in the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan to reduce and divert food and organic waste by developing guidance to help municipalities, businesses and institutions meet targets.
- Municipalities with greater than 5,000 people must operate recycling programs that meet provincial standards and are also required to implement composting programs. Smaller communities struggle to participate in recycling and collection of leaf and yard waste, as mandated for larger municipalities.
- Municipal governments play a pivotal role in ensuring residential waste is properly managed for the health of our communities and our environment. As Ontario transitions away from municipal tax dollar funded waste management to Producer Pay platforms, municipal governments are actively involved to ensure the transition serves local constituents in a consistent and transparent manner.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Over the next 10 years, Ontario's existing landfill capacity will be largely exhausted. Rural Ontario needs an integrated waste management system that incorporates strong diversion, reuse, and recycling components. Agricultural product packaging and organic waste needs an integrated approach using best management practices and guidelines throughout the supply chain instead of imposed prescriptive regulations.
- When available, Ontario farmers participate in recycling programs that involve the recycling of pesticide and fertilizer containers, feed, seed and pesticide bags, plastic bale wrap and many other items used on the farm.
- It is important that regulations expand recycling programs for pesticide and fertilizer containers, feed, seed and pesticide bags, plastic bale wrap and many other items used on the farm. OFA believes legislation should also ensure farmers do not bear any unfair responsibility in eliminating waste.



How can you help?

- Expand recycling programs to include items used on the farm. Expanding resource recovery opportunities should be a municipal priority, as waste streams cannot occur if infrastructure or opportunities for diversion do not exist.
- Enable local composting opportunities.
- Enable by-laws to allow local landfills to transition to waste management processing facilities and in smaller communities, to transition to waste transfer stations.
- Carefully consider environmental impacts of allowing existing, non-operational landfill permits to begin operation.

Resources

- [OFA's webpage for Waste Resource Management](#)
- [MECP's Waste Management page](#)



Energy and waste

Food and organic waste



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Every year Ontarians divert 1.4 million tonnes of food and organic waste from landfill streams, and yet 2.2 million tonnes are sent for disposal. Residential and Industrial, Commercial, and Institutional (IC&I) sectors represent 86% of food and organic waste generated; 10% from agriculture; and 4% during distribution.
- Municipalities that process food and organic waste need to support technology and innovation to recover compostable products and packaging. Special considerations are needed for rural, northern, and remote communities. Community size and geographic distribution present unique issues under existing organic waste resource recovery legislation. Municipalities need to pursue regional recovery capacity approaches including economy of scale waste processing.
- Municipalities need to plan for the management and beneficial use of biosolids, enhanced biosolids processing technologies and co-management practices that support volume minimization and nutrient recovery.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Agriculture is a key part of the food and organic waste circuit. Aside from manure that is reinvested into soils as fertilizer, farms do not produce a significant amount of waste, but agriculture must be part of food and organic waste discussions to address unique considerations and solutions for urban and rural Ontario.
- Agriculture is integral to the final stages of the food and organic waste resource circuit and an important partner in the distribution of composts and other food waste.
- The Ontario [Community Food Program Donation Tax Credit for Farmers](#), in addition to the charitable donation tax credit, assists eligible farmers in donating agricultural products to eligible community food programs in Ontario (e.g., food banks).



How can you help?

- Develop regional solutions through partnerships among municipalities, industry and communities. Community-based solutions such as organic waste processing infrastructure, small-scale composting, small-scale biogas and biomass energy generation facilities for rural, northern and remote areas will reduce food waste.
- Food waste that cannot be diverted for food consumption and animal feed should be diverted to composting, aerobic or anaerobic digestion. Partner with the agricultural community to strategically site regional anaerobic digesters with the dual purpose of final stage organic waste consumption, and production of low or net-zero energy.

Resources

- [OFA's webpage on Food Waste](#)
- [OFA's submission regarding MECP's discussion paper: Reducing Litter and Waste](#)



Infrastructure and social services

Roads, bridges and traffic circles



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Over time, farm equipment has grown larger. As farms have grown in size, the need to move equipment on the roads, from farm-to-farm, has also grown.
- In some areas, road maintenance and repairs have resulted in the travelled portion of the road being raised and the shoulders reduced in width. There also may be a significant drop off at the edge of the pavement. Safety barriers on approaches to bridges also effectively reduce road width.
- Traffic circles need to be designed to safely accommodate large farm equipment, particularly in rural areas where farm equipment regularly use the roads.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Improperly designed infrastructure can be a significant problem for farmers. Farm vehicles and equipment are often wider, taller, and longer than any other vehicle travelling on the road. Farmers depend on well-planned, safe, and accessible roadways to conduct business.
- Roads, bridges, and traffic circles that are too narrow to permit farm equipment to pass through force the farmer to make lengthy and costly detours.
- In the worst-case scenario, the municipality must redesign and rebuild the road, bridge or traffic circle to enable farm equipment to pass through.



How can you help?

- Consult with farmers and the local Federation of Agriculture. Farm vehicles should be considered at every point of infrastructure planning.
- Incorporate modifications to curbs and the radius of the traffic circle to allow the movement of farm equipment through traffic circles.

Resources

- [OFA's resource Agricultural Considerations When Designing Municipal Roadways](#)
- [OFA's Farm Implements on the Road Fact Sheet](#)



Infrastructure and social services

Abandoned or former railway rights-of-way



What's the issue for municipalities?

- When a railway company discontinues use of one of its lines, it is first offered for sale or lease to another railway company for continued operation. If no interested parties come forward, the right-of-way is simultaneously offered to the three levels of government (federal, provincial, municipal) at its salvage value. If there is no government interest, the railway company is free to dispose of the property by offering it first to the abutting landowners, and finally to any interested buyer.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Some abandoned or former railway rights-of-way were acquired by the provincial government or individual municipalities, either for some future use as a utility or transportation corridor, or for recreational trail purposes.
- In the event that one of the three levels of government does acquire the right-of-way for some future use, it is OFA's position that the adjacent landowners should be given the first right to lease the land on an interim basis. Unfortunately, this rarely occurs. More often, it is trail groups, sometimes with the cooperation of the local municipality, who obtain the property. This can pose a major challenge for adjacent farmers as matters previously taken care of by the railway (farm crossings, weed control, drainage and policing) must now be addressed.
- The key issue for farmers whose property is either adjacent to, or bisected by, a former railway right-of-way is fencing. Under Ontario's *Line Fences Act*, whoever acquires former railway rights-of-way takes on responsibility for 100% of the costs associated with fence construction or maintenance where the abutting land is "agricultural." Unfortunately, a number of municipalities who have acquired former railway rights-of-way fail to fulfil their statutory fencing obligations. In addition to fencing, farmers with a former railway right-of-way through or adjacent to their farm also face problems with trespass, vandalism, farm crossing conflicts, drain maintenance, farm practices, predator control, weed control, or dogs running at large.



How can you help?

- Maintain farm crossings that enable the farmer to access land on the opposite side of the right-of-way land that would otherwise be landlocked.
- Ensure that the full responsibility for the construction, maintenance and repairs of the fences along former railway rights-of-way are fulfilled by the municipality upon acquiring former railway rights-of-way.

Resources

- [OFA's webpage on Abandoned Railway Rights-of-Way](#)
- [OFA's webpage on Line Fences and the Law in Ontario](#)
- [OFA's Rails-to-Trails Concerns of Adjacent Property Owners](#)
- [Ontario's Line Fences Act](#)



Infrastructure and social services

Land ambulance and farm 911 signs



What's the issue for municipalities?

- All upper-tier municipalities and designated delivery agents are responsible for the delivery and costs of land ambulance services in their area. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care will ensure that minimum standards are maintained and will continue to license and certify the services and staff for land ambulance services.
- Centralized ambulance dispatch means that ambulances will likely travel outside of the municipality that they are from. Agreements will have to be made between municipalities to determine how to pay for this cross-over of boundaries.
- Not all rural property entrances have signage. Each municipality has their own process and fee associated with obtaining a civic address. It is the discretion of each individual municipality which entrances meet code requirements and will therefore be permitted to have a civic address attached to it. We promote that all farm field entrances be maintained so that should there be an incident, emergency vehicles are able to use the entrance. Furthermore, signs should be visible from all directions, so that first responders are able to clearly identify the number.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- All Ontario residents require, and should be provided with, access to adequate emergency services, regardless of where they live and who provides their service. This includes the agricultural community and rural residents.
- Farm accidents can occur in the most remote locations, making it difficult for first responders to easily locate the situation. Unfortunately, not all rural property entrances have signage. In the event of an emergency, no one should have to wait helplessly for first responders to find them. Time is everything, and a civic address at the entrance to a vacant farm field could make all the difference.



How can you help?

- Ensure that rural areas have adequate emergency services.
- Offer Farm 911 signs as a service to your community and encourage rural landowners to use the service. Contact Farm 911 (The Emily Project) for more information.
- Develop resources to inform property owners how to contact emergency services efficiently.

Resources

- [Farm 911 \(The Emily Project\)](#)
- [AFIO Directory: Examples of Municipal Farm 911 Sign Request Forms](#)



Infrastructure and social services

Broadband internet



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Reliable internet access is the norm in urban Ontario but continues to be a problem in many rural areas of the province, often only a few kilometres from major cities. While access to high-speed internet in rural and remote areas is improving, demand for bandwidth will be an ongoing challenge for municipalities as the number of business and household devices connected to the internet continues to increase faster than the expansion of services.
- High-speed broadband internet, affordable energy and well-maintained bridges and road infrastructure are essential to economic growth in rural areas. Greater connectivity will enhance labour productivity and support job creation in rural communities across Ontario.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- Reliable, high-speed broadband internet service is as vital to modern farm businesses as electricity and telephone service. Farmers rely on the internet for information to make timely business decisions, operate sophisticated digital agricultural technologies, facilitate marketing of farm products, access continuing education and farm management information, and participate in the global digital economy.
- In our connectivity surveys, farmers overwhelmingly report that a reliable internet connection is more important than ever to the functioning of their businesses and while this has been improving over the last several years, connectivity demand continues to outpace supply. OFA members believe better internet access will boost their bottom line by opening opportunities for domestic and international markets, and keeping pace with new innovations, technology and overall competitiveness. Connectivity also increases opportunities to invest in new farm technologies that can improve efficiencies on the farm, enhance profitability, and enhance environmental performance.
- OFA believes that rather than setting speed targets that can become obsolete, Internet Service Providers (ISPs) must adopt a Minimum Customer Service Standard that will ensure that farmers and rural residents can receive the level of reliable internet service they need, at a price competitive with their urban counterparts.



How can you help?

- Initiate projects to expand broadband internet into rural areas to meet the current and future needs of rural residents. Find ways to accelerate the municipal approvals processes for broadband internet infrastructure projects in rural areas.
- Municipalities should seek out opportunities to increase the number of internet service providers (ISP) in rural areas with the goal of encouraging competition and lowering costs.
- Conduct research into where there are underserved areas in your community.

Resources

- [OFA's webpage on Broadband Internet](#)
- [CRTC's webpage on Closing the Digital Divide](#)



Infrastructure and social services

Rural childcare



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Municipal governments in Ontario are mandated by law to serve as “service system managers” with primary responsibility for childcare and early child education services. They are responsible for drafting service plans and setting local operational policies, as well as, most importantly, administering financial subsidies to service providers on behalf of the province. In small or rural municipalities, responsibilities are often shared across multiple municipalities via district social services administration boards.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- There is a need for flexible, accessible, affordable, and high-quality childcare in rural areas, particularly for families working in agriculture. The demand for childcare is increasing among farm families, as both parents are required to devote more of their energy to full-time work on the farm or working off the farm to supplement family income.
- Typical childcare services fail to address the unique character of rural areas, including:
 - seasonal fluctuations in the demand for childcare;
 - a scattered population with relatively few users for any one type of service; limited public transportation and travelling long distances; and
 - the need for childcare at the home of the child in cases where both parents work full- or part-time on farm operations.



How can you help?

- Ensure your municipality provides an adequate number of childcare spaces, in a variety of forms to meet the needs of the community. This includes community-based programs that offer a range of services to meet the fluctuating needs of rural families, and which are coordinated with other children and family programs (e.g., recreation, school-based).
- Services could include drop-in centres, kid camps, on-farm day-care, licensed private home day care, extended hour day-care centres, toy libraries, child care registries, mobile resource centres, and support for informal care-givers.
- Ensure municipal, provincial, and federal programs are coordinated at the local level to address farm and rural family needs.

Resources

- [OFA's webpage on Childcare](#)



Infrastructure and social services

Rural schools and school trustees



What's the issue for municipalities?

- Schools provide so much more than a place for learning – they are home to community social events, local sports, and service and community groups.
- Every four years, voters across Ontario decide who will represent their interests and lead their communities by electing school trustees to Ontario's school boards. Municipalities are responsible for conducting the election.
- The role of school trustees is to make local policy consistent with both provincial policy and local realities and administer the funding received from the province for their schools. School trustees are responsible for determining the number, size and location of schools; building, equipping and furnishing schools; and providing education programs that meet the needs of the school community.
- Many of Ontario's school board districts cover a number of municipalities, resulting in boards with low-population areas, such as rural areas, within their jurisdiction.
- While school boards may save money, the cost of closing rural schools is irreversible; not to mention the potential negative impacts on the education and development of our children.



Why does it matter to farmers?

- To keep farm families on the farm and maintain their substantial contributions to the economy, farmers require access to a variety of affordable services and infrastructure; including schools.
- Schools play a multi-purpose role in many rural communities. Not only are they the place where children spend a large portion of their days being educated, but they provide children's playgrounds, adult learning centres, childcare centres, community centres, recreational facilities, and meeting halls. Without such facilities available, it becomes difficult to maintain a viable population and economic base in rural areas.



How can you help?

- Engage with community organizations that are advocating to keep rural schools open.
- Become a champion for rural schools and support limiting the bus commute for rural students.

Resources

- [OFA's webpage on Education](#)
- [Ontario's webpage for Trustee Elections](#)



OFA resources

Issues database

OFA produces fact sheets, submissions to government consultations, commentaries and other publications on issues affecting Ontario farmers. Visit ofa.on.ca/issues for additional materials to support the agricultural sector in your community.

Resources database

OFA has an extensive resource library for municipalities to access issues-based fact sheets, submissions and correspondence, policy positions, webinars, resolutions, archives, and additional information. Visit ofa.on.ca/resources to begin searching for information to learn more about OFA's stance and perspective on a particular issue.

Growing agriculture in your community – municipal resources

OFA has developed several resources for municipalities to support their agri-food community. Visit ofa.on.ca/GrowAg to view and download these resources.

Agri-Food Initiatives Ontario directory

The Agri-Food Initiatives Ontario (AFIO) directory is an online, public resource of initiatives, tools and projects to highlight best practices and improve information sharing across the province. The AFIO Directory helps inspire communities in the early stages and showcases hundreds of successful projects already underway. Visit ofa.on.ca/GrowAg to view and download resources from the Directory.

Guide and checklist to support agricultural growth in your municipality

OFA has developed an easy-to-use checklist for municipal staff, politicians and community leaders aspiring to foster a more agriculture-friendly community. Visit ofa.on.ca/GrowAg to view and download resources.

Agriculture Economic Development and Planning Community of Practice

Interested in engaging with your peers across the province to discuss agri-food issues? The Agriculture Economic Development and Planning Community of Practice is a collaboration between the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFRA) and OFA to encourage information sharing of timely issues facing the Ontario agri-food sector. The free, online webinars provide a forum for engagement, discussion and learning. To sign up for the email list, visit ofa.on.ca/CommunityofPractice.

Conclusion

We all have a role to play in the continued prosperity of Ontario's agriculture and food sector. For nearly 50,000 farmers across our province, agriculture is a part of their livelihood, their home, and their community. Ensuring we can continue to feed the province with healthy, high-quality food means ensuring our farmers are supported.

For additional resources, or an electronic version of this Guide, please visit OFA's webpage

Growing agriculture in your community: ofa.on.ca/GrowAg.

OFA TM Ontario Federation of Agriculture



Thank you for your leadership and commitment to our community.

