

April 13, 2022

REGION OF PEEL

OFFICE OF THE REGIONAL CLERK

To the regional council of Peel.

Hi there, my name is Dean Orr, I am a young farmer in York Region.

While I am not one of your constituents, my career is one that allows me to have front-line perspective on land-use planning, as well as city and urban planning. Our family farm is in King City where we grow mostly corn, soybeans wheat, organic black and kidney beans for grain and maple syrup. All of our land is rented. As you can imagine, that leaves us extremely vulnerable and acutely aware as to the decisions of land use planning as well as decisions made by those that own the land, which in our case is mostly developers and speculators. My dad has seen many farms he has rented get turned into low density housing. I have become increasingly dismayed at Ontario's approach to land use practices and have spent what small amount of free time I have, over the past couple of months trying to learn as much as I can about good community planning and it's undeniable link to agriculture in Ontario.

The stability of our food system over the past century in North America has become quite stable, with a caveat of; *when* there are fossil fuels and transportation readily available. We have created an agrifood system that is no longer using the most locally available resources, the result of which is that farms are no longer held in higher importance than fields and farms further away. As a farmer who has some concept of sustainability, this has always fascinated me, as it seems so obvious that is has created the potential for huge food insecurity. You don't need a crystal ball to see that shipping in oranges from South Africa, salad from California, pork from China are unsustainable practices. We have created a carbon debt in order to bring those foods to grocery store shelves. We simply will not be able to do that in the future, if we are going to lower our carbon emissions and save ourselves from climate change. The deficit that these missing foods will make will have to come from local sources. The more local the source, the less carbon emissions from transportation, and also the higher the stability and security becomes. The longer food transportation takes, the more problems can arise in the supply chain. We need to preserve our farmland for the food security of our current and future population .

It should not be understated that even in a good year, it is hard to get a good crop. With climate change we are already seeing less predictable and more extreme weather patterns, and we have not seen the worst of it. A late frost in the spring, too much rain, or too little, too much heat, can all effect yield dramatically. We can predict that yields have the likelihood of decreasing, and becoming more variable. We are going to need all of the prime farmland we can get in the next 50 years to create a buffer against variations in crop yield. The more cropland we have, the greater the chance we are still going to be able to produce enough food, locally, to feed the population.

The silver lining to preserving our farms for more locally derived agriculture is that it allows for huge economic growth within a region. The report "Dollars and Sense: Opportunities to Strengthen Southern Ontario's Food System" published in 2015 suggests that replacing just 10% of the top 10 fruit and vegetable imports with local production would allow for a gain of almost a quarter of a billion dollars in GDP and an increase in 3400 jobs. They also suggest that nearly half of our current imports could be produced within province<sup>2</sup>.

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There is a finite amount of good quality farmland in Ontario, and in Canada. As soon as you start to get not much further North than Barrie, you hit the Canadian shield, which covers over 60% of Ontario. It is mostly rock, and is not good farmland. The depth of the topsoil in the region makes large scale agriculture impossible. If we are going to be able to feed Ontario's projected population of 20 million people plus<sup>1</sup> by 2046, on a locally sourced diet, we will need as much prime farmland as we can, which is predominantly found in Southern Ontario only. Further to that, Southern Ontario is particularly suited to growing more warm season crops than the rest of the country is. There are things we can grow here that simply do not grow well elsewhere.

So how should we start to look at planning to accommodate a greater need for this farmland?

The short answer is to reduce car dependent sprawl immediately . Car dependency takes up a huge amount of space for parking lots and roads. It is an inefficient way to move people and inefficient use of space. There are a ton of examples in Ontario of pre World War 2 city design that does not rely on car transportation; instead walking, good transit and bikes: and these are vibrant wonderful, yet intensified, neighbourhoods. They are more climate resilient and much less impactful on the climate and rural space. If we continue business as usual, and continue building low density housing and sprawl, the deeper we are digging our hole into food insecurity and increasing greenhouse gas emissions. Densification does not need to look like skyscrapers. There are lots of options for shorter apartments and multi-unit dwellings; I am sure you have heard lots about the 'missing middle' housing options. By breaking away from business as usual, all of the planned population growth could almost certainly be fit into the current urban boundaries, or at most, not come anywhere close to requiring 10,000 acres of expansion. We do not live in the 1970's anymore. We know what it takes to create good, walkable, denser communities that are less impactful on the environment. As well, it IS possible to leave tracts of land within the urban boundary as farm land to feed these communities. Why have we not done this within any of our cities? Why has agriculture never been considered as part of city design?

I am sure everyone has heard the most recent report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. We have to act, and we have to act fast and dramatically. With so many options available that would prevent urban boundary expansion, it would be nothing short of negligence to ignore them. Building with no boundary expansion IS possible, and it will decrease our impact on the environment. It will save forests, and fields and habitat, and farms. It will give people more options to source locally. There is so much opportunity to explore better options to build our communities than using our current practices. We have to turn away from sprawl.

I would like to leave you with one of my favourite quotes.

"We do not inherit the land from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children"

You do not need to feel pressured into allowing this expansion now when there are better options on the table that allow for no boundary expansion.

Please vote against urban boundary expansion.

Thank you,

Dean Orr

#### Literature Cited

1. WWW.Ontario.com "Ontario Population Projections"
2. Dollars and Sense: Opportunities to Strengthen Southern Ontario's Food System