

Regenerative agriculture under threat

Highway schemes and factory farming threaten healthy soil and food

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture estimates that 175 acres of farmland is lost every day in Ontario. It's being lost to highways and airports, to fossil fuel extraction, to gravel pits -- even to alternative energy projects.¹

The construction of Highway 413, for example, has huge implications for farmers practicing sustainable agriculture. The 59 km superhighway would destroy over 400 acres of the Greenbelt as well as 2,000 acres of highly productive farmland. It would bisect the sensitive headwaters of four watersheds within Mississauga of the Credit First Nation's territory, disrupting ceremonial sites, burial grounds and cultural landscapes.²

Provincial government policies have consistently supported large agribusiness, propping up unsustainable approaches that compromise soil health. (e.g., the case of the use of the mycotoxin DON in field corn in 2018).³

Industrial agriculture doesn't protect habitat of native pollinators and impacts water drawdowns from aquifers.⁴

Ontario lacks support for smaller regenerative farms, (which focus on topsoil regeneration and carbon sequestration), ignoring the work of



¹ Rod MacRae. "Agricultural Land Protection. <https://foodpolicyforcanada.info.yorku.ca/agricultural-land-protection/>

² Environmental Defense. Stop the 413. <https://environmentaldefence.ca/stop-the-413-3/>

³ Email communication with Devan Penney, regenerative farmer in Grey County and <https://www.topcropmanager.com/government-steps-in-to-help-ontario-producers-affected-by-don-21575/>

⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/global/2018/oct/04/ontario-six-nations-nestle-running-water>).



**SENIORS
for
CLIMATE
ACTION
NOW**

the growing numbers of ecologically minded farmers struggling against climate breakdown. The province also lacks the knowledge and political will to support more progressive approaches to agriculture and rural communities.⁵

Recent changes to land use regulation by the Ontario Land Tribunal and other regulatory boards have favoured developers over farmland and agricultural community preservation. (See section on Land Use and Urban Sprawl re: Planning Act, the Greenbelt, Bradford Pass, and Highway 413 construction). Across southern Ontario, prime farmland and vital greenspace has been zoned for development through Minister's Zoning Orders (MZOs).⁶ Regarding rich food land as an investment opportunity ignores our desperate need to nurture healthy climate friendly production.

Wetlands and natural areas are as critical as farmland to regenerative agriculture. The ecosystem functions and buffering they provide to nearby farmland are vital, mitigating the effects of climate breakdown on agriculture.⁷

Legislation tucked away in a Ford government omnibus bill ostensibly addressing COVID-19 recovery, eroded Conservation Area (CA) ability to protect wetlands. The new law

legislates CA board make-up, restricts their powers, and limits their appeal rights. Ministers have gained more power to overturn local planning decisions. Ministerial exemption [Schedule 6 of Bill 229 - The Protect, Support, and Recover from COVID-19 Act]⁸

Meanwhile, the pandemic has exposed global food supply chain fragility. Peruvian asparagus in January? This global system depends on massive, expensive fossil fuel inputs. And imported people: Many Ontario farms depend on migrant labour. But the Ford government was slow to protect migrant labour from Covid-19.

Climate First Solutions: Regenerative Agriculture

Sustain Ontario: The Alliance for Healthy Food and Farming advocates for these Good Food and Farming Ideas.

- ! 1. Support Sustainable Farming: Enable Future Farmers and Preserve Farmland**
- ! 2. Get Healthy Food into Schools and the Curriculum**
- ! 3. Support Community Growing**
- ! 4. Enable all Ontarians to Access Healthy Food**
- ! 5. Support Sustainable Local Food and Farm Enterprises**
- ! 6. Establish a Provincial Food Policy Council⁹.**

⁵ Devan Penney.

⁶ <https://nfuontario.ca/new/farm-organizations-nature-conservancy-groups-protest-mzos/>

⁷ Devan Penney.

⁸ Email communication with Phil Mount, Just Food and Sustain Ontario.

⁹ <https://sustainontario.com/vote-on-food/>



**SENIORS
for
CLIMATE
ACTION!
NOW**

The National Farmers Union -- Ontario has called on farmers to take climate action, for example using more cover crops, ploughing less, and increasing tree areas through reforestation.¹⁰ The NFU-O named 5 issues that farmers and eaters want the Ford government to support: farmland preservation, water protection, environmental stewardship, support for young, new and retiring farmers, and rural infrastructure.¹¹

Farmers for Climate Solutions names four actions governments at every level need to take:

- ! 1. Adopt an agri-environmental strategy with clear targets**
- ! 2. Support farmers to adopt climate-friendly practices**

! 3. Adapt risk management programs to reward climate-friendly agriculture

! 4. Allocate additional funds to the next Agricultural Policy Framework for climate adaptation and mitigation.¹²

Food justice activists are calling for infrastructure to enable short and local supply chains, fostering food sovereignty and agroecology. Protecting and expanding the Greenbelt is critical. Regenerative farming methods reduce emissions, store carbon in healthy soil, and enhance resiliency.¹³ Indigenous food activists offer a deeper understanding of the interconnections of “all our relations” that sustain humans and more than humans in the web of life, articulated in the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address.¹⁴

¹⁰ <https://nfuontario.ca/new/nfuo-calls-on-farmers-take-climate-action/>

¹¹ <https://nfuontario.ca/new/survey-results-top-5-ways-the-provincial-government-can-support-farmers/>

¹² <https://farmersforclimatesolutions.ca/apf>

¹³ <https://earthtotables.org/essays/the-soil-is-alive/> and <https://earthtotables.org/essays/who-will-feed-us/>

¹⁴ <https://earthtotables.org/essays/the-thanksgiving-address/>