POWER IN POLICY

MEASURING FARMLAND LOSS IN ONTARIO AND TESTING THE STRENGTH OF THE GREENBELT ACT

*Photo from the Ontario Farmland
Trust*

RURAL SYMPOSIUM ■ MARCH 2019 ■ XIAOYUAN WAN & RACHEL SINGER

AGENDA

- Project Background
- Research Objectives
- Methodology
- Phase 1: Project Summary
- Case Studies: York, Peel, Halton
- Results
- Update on Phase 2
- Q&A

PROJECT BACKGROUND

- A lack of real-time data that documents development, zoning, or special policies that may impact farmland availability (prime agriculture) in Ontario
 - **Census** – Only documents land in production (e.g. commodity prices). It may be decades before land comes out of production following a land use decision. It also does not distinguish prime from non-prime lands.
 - **Aerial imagery** – Varies across the province and may or may not document the impact of land use decisions.
- The delay between approvals and development impacts the public's perception of the efficacy of planning tools when confronted with sprawl

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Build on Phase 1 and compile data regarding farmland conversion to non-farmland uses across Southern Ontario
- Apply ROPA methodology in regions/counties that have a significant portion of prime agriculture
- Complete a jurisdictional scan of agricultural land use policies within Ontario and across Canada will identify potential best practices
- Identify land use policies that have the potential to better protect the long-term availability of agricultural land in Ontario

METHODOLOGY

- This research uses Official Plans and approved Regional Official Plan Amendments to identify the amount of prime agricultural land lost, capturing:
 - Redesignations to a development designation (such as urban, residential, commercial, industrial, recreational designations)
 - Redesignations to a rural designation
 - Site-specific, special policy amendments
- Captured both data before the 2005 PPS and before the Greenbelt Act

PHASE 1

- 15 regions have been completed covering years 2000-2017
- Hamilton and Kawartha Lakes are still underway
- County summaries for completed regions are available online

Prime Agricultural Land Redesignation by County/Region (2000-2017)

YORK REGION

Prime Agricultural Area Redesignation:

6233 ha

1755 ha

0 ha

Prime Agricultural Area Converted Through ROPAs in York Region (2000-2017)

YORK REGION

Before 2005:

- **257** ha within the Greenbelt
- **2887** ha outside the Greenbelt

After 2005:

- **0** ha within the Greenbelt
- **4844** ha outside the Greenbelt

Prime Agricultural Area Converted in York Region
Relative to the Greenbelt Plan

PEEL REGION

Prime Agricultural Area Redesignation:

3274 ha

201 ha

127 ha

**Prime Agricultural Area Converted Through ROPAs
in the Region of Peel (2000-2017)**

PEEL REGION

Before 2005:

- **127** ha within the Greenbelt
- **2865** ha outside the Greenbelt

After 2005:

- **0** ha within the Greenbelt
- **409** ha outside the Greenbelt

Prime Agricultural Area Converted Through ROPAs in Peel Region Relative to the Greenbelt Plan

HALTON REGION

Prime Agricultural Area Redesignation:

2656 ha

0 ha

287 ha

Prime Agricultural Area Converted Through ROPAs in Halton Region (2000-2017)

HALTON REGION

Before 2005:

- **113** ha Within the Greenbelt
- **112** ha Outside the Greenbelt

After 2005:

- **0** ha Within the Greenbelt
- **2718** ha Outside the Greenbelt

Prime Agricultural Area Converted Through ROPAs in Halton Region Relative to the Greenbelt Plan

RESULTS: TRENDS

Prime Agricultural Land Loss Within and Outside the Greenbelt Pre-2005 and After

RESULTS: TRENDS

**Prime Agricultural Land Loss
Within Greenbelt**

■ Before 2005 ■ after 2005

**Prime Agricultural Land Loss
Outside Greenbelt**

■ Before 2005 ■ after 2005

PHASE 2: UNDERWAY

- South-Western Ontario is currently underway
- South-Eastern Ontario will be completed Summer 2019
- Data collection will be complete by Fall 2019
- Final Report will be completed by August 2020

THANK YOU!

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