Paving Paradise? Measuring Farmland Loss in Southern Ontario

By: Emma Drake and Sara Epp

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An aerial photograph of a suburban neighborhood. The image shows a mix of residential areas with houses and trees, and large open fields. A road runs horizontally across the middle of the image. The overall tone is green and brown, suggesting a rural or semi-rural setting.

Presentation Outline

- Starting premise
 - Challenges with existing measurement tools
- Research method
- Findings
- Next Steps
- Questions

Funding Support

- We would like to thank OMAFRA for their financial support of this project through the OMAFRA – University of Guelph partnership.

**Agri-Food
and Rural**

Mobilizing Agri-Food and
Rural Research Knowledge

A program of the
OMAFRA – U of G
Partnership

Link

Measuring Farmland Conversion: Starting Premise

We are challenged by the absence of data to accurately document changes to farmland availability over time

Source:
GeoOttawa

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. The image shows a mix of green agricultural fields, some with distinct rows of crops, and areas of bare, brownish soil. A network of roads and paths crisscrosses the terrain. In the lower-left and lower-right, there are clusters of buildings, including houses and larger structures, some with swimming pools. The overall scene depicts a typical rural environment where land use is a key factor.

Existing Methods Come With Challenges

- **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.
- **Aerial imagery** – Varies across the province and may or may not document the impact of land use decisions.

Land Approvals and Development

- Delay between approvals and land development
 - Land often comes out of production years after approvals have been granted
 - When new houses are built a former agricultural use is visibly lost
- *Assumed policy failure of Greenbelt or County or Regional Planning*
 - People see houses built on prime land or “sprawl” and assume that the planning instrument isn’t working

Public Engagement

Conveying
planning
jargon is
difficult

When is farmland considered lost to development?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYwIqJlQNfA>

Under construction - 2017

Construction completed - 2014

Official Plan Amendments 1973 to 1981

Under construction - 2017

Research Methods

This research specifically looked at approved official plan amendments by region/county to identify the amount of land lost to urban expansion and other non-agricultural land uses.

Timeframe – Research Parameters

- Start with the year 2000 to 2014
- Captured both data before the 2005 PPS and before the Greenbelt

Study Sites

Prime Agricultural Land Redesignated (2000-2014) by County/Region

Number of Official Plan Amendments by Year in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2000-2014

Greenbelt Area Totals

	Outside the Greenbelt Plan Area		Within the Greenbelt Plan Area		Total
	pre-2005	2005- 2014	pre-2005	2005-2014	
Prime Agriculture Land Lost (Hectares)	9,859	9,284	652	0	19,795 ha
Site Specific Non-Agricultural Uses (Hectares)	435.5	1,007.4	254	32	1,728.9 ha
Total	10,294.5 ha	10,291.4 ha	906 ha	32 ha	21,523.9 ha

York Region Amendments

Legend

- Special Policy
- Land Loss
- Land Gain
- Niagara Escarpment
- Oak Ridges Moraine
- Outer Greenbelt
- Greater Golden Horseshoe
- Municipal Boundary

Produced by the Resources Information and Business Services Unit of the Environmental Management Branch.

An aerial photograph of a suburban landscape. On the left, there are large green agricultural fields with some brown patches. A road runs horizontally across the middle. To the right of the road, there is a dense residential area with many houses, trees, and winding streets. The overall scene depicts the interface between rural farmland and suburban development.

Next Steps

- Complete case studies within the Greater Golden Horseshoe
 - Kawartha Lakes and Hamilton
- Farmland Loss Roadshow
 - Planners, farmers and other stakeholders

Thank You

- Questions?