

National Farmers Union - Ontario
5420 ON-6
Guelph, ON
N1H 6J2

Dear Ms. Bakker:

Thank you for giving the Green Party of Ontario the opportunity to share our views on the issues that matter to farmers living in Ontario. I am pleased to respond on behalf of the GPO.

Food sovereignty means that every Canadian citizen has the right to define and control their own food systems as well as being able to access and afford Canadian-produced healthy, high quality food, which is grown or raised in an environmentally, economically and socially sustainable manner. This is not compatible with an export driven food program which places corporate sovereignty above Canadian rights to access food first.

1.a) Does your party support this position, and if so, what policies do you propose to support constructive legislation which achieves Canadian good sovereignty?

The Green Party of Ontario agrees that all Canadians have the right to quality locally grown food produced in a sustainable, economical, and socially responsible manner.

Trade agreements have allowed non-farmer multinational corporations to gain too much control over our food systems. Instead, we should be prioritizing food produced by local family farms for the people of this province.

We need to set measurable Ontario food purchasing targets for all public institutions to ensure that *local* producers come first. The Green Party of Ontario supports a mandate that *at least* forty percent of food purchased for all public institutions must be Ontario grown. We would also push to establish an Ontario Food and Farming Policy Council to coordinate planning across ministries and consult diverse stakeholders.

We need to support our farmers and help them be competitive in the global market through investments in rural infrastructure, including research and innovation, distribution hubs, farmer co-operatives, and specialty crops, in addition to providing improved broadband infrastructure for the communities they live in. We would eliminate tax penalties and reduce zoning restrictions to facilitate local on-farm food enterprises and innovative sources of farm income.

We would also push for increased funding support for local food and beverage processors to further support local innovation.

The true measure of economic success is a stable and predictable net income for farm families. Often political messaging alludes to concepts such as prosperity, net impact of agriculture to the country's/province's GDP, and economic outlook for the farming sector. However, these broad economic analyses almost always ignore this most critical of all measurements.

2.a) How will your party enshrine “net economic return” as a principle measurement for analysis of farm needs, as an effective tool to evaluate all government taxation and spending activities, and the distinguishing measure of food producer health

Low farm income creates pressure for farmers to sell farmland for urban development. This in turn leads to a decrease in locally-owned family farms. Supporting a local food distribution network that allows farmers to profit from their land will ease the pressure they may feel to abandon farming in favour of development.

To ensure stability of net income for farm families, we plan to improve income stabilization programs so they are more accessible for smaller farms, cover a wider range of products, and do not penalize farmers when they experience bad years. We will also increase funding support for job creation in the sector and for Ontario farmers who are struggling or have bad crop seasons.

Furthermore, we can improve economic opportunities for farmers by increasing support for innovation and research and implementing changes in zoning and tax structure.

2. b) How will your party implement this upon gaining control of the government's legislative agenda?

The Green Party of Ontario would establish an Ontario Food and Farming Policy Council to coordinate planning across ministries and consult diverse stakeholders.

In order to ensure that farmers are thriving, we will improve provincial assessment tools to incorporate indicators related to the economic, social, and environmental well-being of their communities.

As generational transfers in farming are now entering an unprecedented pace, significant economic barriers are preventing the continuance of many viable farm businesses. These barriers can be exacerbated for people based on gender, religion, race, etc. Government policies, or lack thereof, pose the most significant

barrier for next generation succession and for new entry farmers. The present course is clearly identified through statistics Canada data with significant yearly drops in the number of active farm operations. Without real public policy, the government-fueled trend to larger farm operations, as well as farm land being purchased by non-farm speculative sources, is a threat to Canadian food sovereignty.

3.a) What are the 3 most significant measures that your party is prepared to enact that ensure true scalable access and ownership of economically viable farm businesses and the land required for net generation food producers?

The average age of Canadian farmers is 55 years old. Without action on this issue today, the farming sector will crumble due to lack of succession planning. The Green Party of Ontario is committed to assisting the farming sector to maintain itself as a viable industry in which one can earn a good income with limited financial risk. Protecting the farming sector is vital to our economy and food security. We need to act now to attract more young people to enter the industry or take on management of their family farms.

Therefore, we need to cut red tape for family farms and local food processors. This means reforming regulations and taxes so that the size of farming operations is taken into consideration. We will also eliminate tax penalties and reduce zoning restrictions to facilitate local on-farm food enterprises and innovative sources of farm income.

We need to Invest more funds into rural infrastructure, research and innovation, plant-based manufacturing products, distribution hubs, farmer co-ops, and specialty crops to allow for greater opportunity and diversity of scale within the sector.

In terms of land lost to development, we need to freeze urban boundaries now to stop urban sprawl and protect farming, water, and natural heritage in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. We also need to ensure the permanent protection of prime farmland in Ontario.

Regardless of your party's position regarding climate change, extreme weather events and human activities have created significant hardships for food producers, and these negative effects have necessitated actions to improve the environmental sustainability of our food production system. Food producers have not received fair societal support, nor recognition, for their role and potential to improve our collective environment.

4.a) What are the key initiatives that your party is prepared to take which will empower food producers to engage in an effective environmental stewardship

plan for Ontario that protects food production capacity, provides true net financial support and respects private ownership rights?

The Green Party of Ontario is committed to protecting the soil and water farmers depend on. By doing so, we can strengthen the economy, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and make local produce more accessible to Ontarians.

It is important to reward farmers for good stewardship practices that provide environmental and community benefits like clean water, habitat preservation, soil health, and carbon storage. We will make investments to expand Safe Harbour Protection programs. This will compensate farmers for the public good they provide in protecting endangered species and at-risk ecosystems on their property.

We also support providing incentives for pollinator-friendly farming practices and investing in research on the economic value of wild pollinators for farmers and their crops.

It is also important that we increase funding and logistical support for the implementation of a long-term Organic Growth Strategy that will support transition, small-scale certification, access to organic advisors and capital, and organic research and promotion expansion.

Every food producer has the right to produce food within the laws of society, and every eater has the right to know the origins of the food they purchase. Far too often, one sided, heavily influenced lobbies hijack societal debate regarding food source and production methods, and processors and retailers take significant liberties with food origins and ingredient sources, including at farmers' markets.

5.a) How will your party ensure the right of consumers to know with certainty the origins of their food are consistent with a clearly defined standard kept in public trust via their government vs big budget advertising, and how will you work with other levels of government to ensure that we the people define those terms?

We support implementing an *Organic Products Act* that would standardize the definition of "Organic" so that any producers' use of the term would be supported by third-party certification of sound organic practices that protect our water and soil. Establishing an Ontario Food and Farming Policy Council that is made up of farmers and other local stakeholders will also allow for oversight and clearly defined standards about the food that Ontarians consume.

By implementing an Ontario Food and Farming Policy Council, citizens and stakeholders will be more involved in planning decisions related to farming.

Rural community infrastructure is a necessary and critical component to a thriving local food system for Ontario residents. Government neglect and/or regulations accelerate the viability deficit for much of this infrastructure. For example:

- **imposing near federal standards onto provincial small-scale abattoirs where compliance costs are unrealistic and unfair for the business model to survive,**
- **permitting rural first response medical access points to be swept into large centralized super facilities leaving rural residents exposed to a lesser standard of emergency health care,**
- **failing to assist rural communities in replacing secondary employers that support existing local infrastructure such as hardware stores, schools, churches, grocery stores, etc.,**
- **giving lucrative access for alcohol retailing to super players such as Loblaw's while largely ignoring the local smaller retailers,**
- **imposing ever increasing standards for municipal infrastructure projects and services, such as road construction, fire services, and policing, while failing to ensure that funding supports match the dictates from Queen's Park.**

6.a) What specifically will your party do to concretely correct this trend, and how will local food producers hold your party accountable?

Small-scale farms and abattoirs should not be burdened with compliance costs that make it impossible for them to compete with large corporate farms. We support easing the regulatory pressure on small abattoirs to ensure their viability.

Investment is lacking for infrastructure in rural communities. We support increased funding for municipalities to invest in infrastructure, but we also support providing autonomy to municipalities to employ revenue tools when needed, such as road tolls to fund transit.

Changes also need to be made to ensure that there is adequate infrastructure and services to support rural and remote communities. Broadband internet, quality healthcare, and local businesses are essential for local economies to thrive.

We need to find creative ways to serve these areas, including more nurse-run healthcare centres. We also need to provide a list of mandatory core services that must be available within rural areas so that everyone receives access to the care they need without having to travel.

We, too, are disappointed with the priority access given to large retailers to sell alcohol in this province while small family stores are hindered by regulatory and financial barriers. We need to ease these regulations and remove barriers that

make it difficult for craft brewers and local distillers to bring their product to market.

Food producers in Ontario are forced to compete against other jurisdictions – some on a price-taker public market exchange, some within supply managed sectors, and some on a supply/demand roller coaster. Regardless of food sector, Ontario farmers assume politically determined costs of production such as hydro, wage disparities, compliance costs, taxation, etc.

7.a) Given the political cost of doing business, how will your party ensure Ontario food producers are competing on a level playing field against out of jurisdiction products entering Ontario under trade agreements, so that these same burdens are applied equally to them?

We will implement smart regulations and tax reforms that will help reduce financial burdens on local farms and create a level playing field for all businesses.

The NFU considers social stewardship every bit as vital as economic and environmental stewardship in our approach to food. Ontario's society presently engages in a colonial inspired food production model which has grown and evolved over time into our present food system. Nevertheless, colonial ownership, distribution, trade, support systems, etc. still serve as a major influence for our present food system.

8. a) How does your party intend to fairly reconcile Indigenous rights and legal obligations with our present society for all affected parties, and how will indigenous rights be reflected within the Ontario food system?

We plan to support the prior and informed consent of Indigenous peoples for any development that would infringe on land claims. Decision-making related to planning and development should involve local Indigenous communities.

Urban sprawl, fueled by non-farm speculative acquisition, presents a clear threat for the protection of prime agricultural farmland. The NFU is a strong proponent of an approach that would see all of Ontario temporarily greenbelt-ed, allowing for a farmland-centric plan for Ontario's growth. Developer driven growth should not be the defining driving force over community wishes.

9. a) What has your party done in the past to protect farmland, and what is your plan to effectively end Ontario sprawl, rejuvenate existing communities, and protect forest, water, and farmland from our own greed?

The Leader of the Green Party of Ontario, Mike Schreiner, is the only party leader in Ontario to sign the food and water first pledge. This pledge mandates that prime farmland should be protected against development at all costs. Mike has been outspoken on the need to protect water and to increase water-taking levies to prioritize public drinking water for communities first.

Our plan for Ontario is to build up, not out. We need to freeze urban boundaries to stop urban sprawl and protect our precious farmland and water sources from future development. In order to conserve farmland, green spaces and natural heritage, we will identify and permanently protect Ontario's prime farmland and support farmers who want to be stewards of the land.

10. a) Projecting your party positions, what does Ontario food production look like in 50 years: who owns the land; who are the people farming it, who controls the offerings for food choice; and what changes need to take place immediately to bring about your party's vision?

The Green Party of Ontario's vision for food in Ontario is one where family farms are the primary agricultural decision-makers and food producers. We would like to see the control of the province's farmland and food systems in the hands of local growers. We need to do away with the current model that prioritizes big business over our environment, healthy food, and the sustenance of local family farms.

The Green Party of Ontario supports Ontario farmers in their effort to provide all citizens with access to healthy local food within a framework of sustainable, local agriculture.

Sincerely,

Samantha Bird
Director of Operations
Green Party of Ontario