



The Greenbelt lands are back but why stop there?

The NFU-O Calls on Rural Voice readers to help advance Environmental Protection, Food Security, and Housing Affordability

The Ford Government's decision to return 7,400 acres back into the Greenbelt is vindication for the National Farmers Union - Ontario (NFU-O) and for all those who stood opposed to the idea that paving over farmland was necessary to create affordable housing and liveable communities.

In addition to the Greenbelt win, the announcement by Paul Calandra, the new Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, to reverse the forced expansion of urban boundaries in twelve Ontario municipalities is another welcomed result of an unprecedented mobilization of concerned citizens.

Ontarians said no to urban sprawl and the Province listened.

The NFU-O wishes to thank its members, allies, Indigenous peoples, environmental groups, affordable housing advocates, alternative media outlets, and every Ontarian who refused to let the Ford Government bulldoze over Greenbelt and urban boundary protections and gift a handful of developers some of the province's most fertile farmland.

"This is a victory for all of us," says NFU-O President, Max Hansgen. "Together, we stood united against corruption and the undermining of democratic processes."

"Now," asks Hansgen, "how might we build upon this unity to advocate for policy that will advance real affordable housing options AND broaden the province's protection of our finite farmland and sensitive natural heritage?"

According to the agricultural census, we continue to lose upwards of 319 acres of farmland daily in the



West Duffins Creek is adjacent to the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve and is where the largest section of Greenbelt land was to be removed.

province. Threats still loom large, with proposed projects like the 60-kilometre Highway 413 slated to cover 2,400 acres of prime agricultural land in asphalt, a fifth of which is within the Greenbelt. The 16-kilometre Bradford bypass in the Regional Municipality of York connecting Highway 400 and Highway 404 will also result in thousands of acres of prime and specialty farmland being taken out of production. Developers are still snapping up farmland on the periphery of the Greenbelt for speculative purposes, even though there is plenty of land within existing urban boundaries to build affordable housing where Ontarians work.

It is time to confront these threats with a positive vision where we put environmental protection, food security, and housing affordability above short-term, speculative gain.

To achieve these ends, the NFU-O Farmland Committee seeks to work with allies to advance the following visionary policy directions:

- Why stop at the Greenbelt? Advocate the protection of all farmland in the province to ensure a future with food security.
- Keep farmland for farmers. To address the farmland affordability crisis, let's collectively call on the Province to release public data on

farmland ownership with a view to developing policy to restrict non-farmer speculation on all of the province's farmland.

- Make public farmland the incubator for the next generation of food producers. Request the Province conduct an inventory of all publicly owned agricultural land and consult with Indigenous communities on the use of public land to ascertain whether suitable infrastructure and management of this public resource could be implemented to support small-scale food production. Doing so would help increase land access for new and young farmers, and ensure that public lands are being used towards important public initiatives like food security and community development.

- Affordable housing for all. Call on all levels of government to commit to the construction of non-profit, public, and affordable housing projects and enhance public transportation services within pre-existing rural municipal boundaries.

Want to join the discussion on how to further farmland protection in the province? Reach out to Briana at briana@nfontario.ca to find out more about how you can participate and/or support the NFU-O's Farmland Committee. We want to hear from you. ◇