



# National Farmers Union – Ontario NEWSLETTER

*Strong Communities.  
Sound Policies.  
Sustainable Farms.*

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## NFU-O members weigh in on Ontario's Greenbelt: to grow or not to grow?

Ontario's Greenbelt is the world's largest with two million acres of protected farmland, forests, wetlands, rivers, and lakes. Our Greenbelt provides us with fresh air, clean water, local food and drink, and world-class outdoor recreation and tourism experiences. The Greenbelt is home to much of Ontario's vital environmental, groundwater and agricultural resources.

In March, the NFU-O was awarded a grant, through the Greenbelt Expansion Consultation Fund, to consult with farmers across the province and mobilize them to participate in the provincial consultation process as farmers. Our goal is to produce a high-quality and well-researched public response to the proposed Greenbelt Expansion. In April, we did just that.

Our approach to policy has been, and will always be, based on input from our locals and our grassroots membership and the Greenbelt project was no exception. As part of our engagement strategy we launched a public survey to capture the needs and perspectives of the agricultural community. In only a few short weeks, we heard from more than 100 of our members. As of April 9, over 90 per cent of survey respondents advocated protection and maintenance of all water resources and agricultural land in the Greenbelt, and 84 per cent believed all greenbelt land should be protected for agricultural use or nature preservation until sustainability studies have been completed and selective use can be determined.

"I actually don't agree with the 'Greenbelt' designation per se," said one member, "but prefer 'natural preservation'. We need to find a way to stop developers from owning farmland [...] and receiving tax rebates... Agricultural tax designation

should be for true farms. Speculation taxes should be levied for holding land captive. I have 10 acres and would like more to graze my sheep on, but I can't get land, because developers are holding it and renting it to big farmers in order to get agricultural land tax rates. They don't care how it is being used... Let's be smarter. We need ways to keep politicians [...] from re-zoning wetlands and protected lands for so-called 'economic' benefit when it suits them."

In 2018 the NFU-O requested that all farmland be "greenbelted" until further studies are done. We stand by this as farmland continues to disappear. Greenbelt protections also help to address other issues like skyrocketing farmland prices. Without this protection, industries will simply move outward instead of planning for long-term viability. Short-term, nonrenewable land use, such as gravel pits, will destroy farmland and rural communities. The potential economic benefits of extractive industry and highways do not matter when farmland and ecosystems do not exist. One member felt that "[there] must be a moratorium on any further expansion of the aggregate industry, as well as safeguards against speculative

purchases of lands deemed as agricultural and/or natural preservation," concluding that, "Ontario must stop selling its future to the highest bidder."

The NFU-O also held two virtual member consultation sessions on April 7 and April 8, that featured a short presentation followed by an opportunity for the membership to ask questions, learn about what they could do in their own communities, and, most importantly, share their thoughts on the proposed Greenbelt Expansion plan. In addition to completing the survey, the membership was encouraged to contact their local government, expressing their concerns and opinions, and a template letter was provided urging the extensions of strong protections to farmland in and around the Greenbelt.

Feedback on ways to grow the size and further enhance the quality of the Greenbelt were due to the The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing on April 19, 2021. We eagerly await the announcement of the Greenbelt Expansion plan, and maintain the belief, as one member succinctly put it, "Nature, water, and food security through preservation of farmland should come before everything else."

### Coming Events

**Local 312 Middlesex** – Local 312 will hold a monthly "InfoHour" (Zoom meeting) on the second Tuesday of each month from 7:00 - 8:00 p.m. Upcoming "InfoHours" will cover topics on access to local abattoirs, farm tax planning, grants for farmers, agritourism, and more! Future topics will be announced in the weekly NFU-O e-newsletter. InfoHours are open to all NFU-O members. To participate, and for more information, reach out to Bill De Young at [deyoung\\_bill@outlook.com](mailto:deyoung_bill@outlook.com).

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