



NFU-O President engages with policymakers and community leaders to enact change

Ontario farmers face a range of challenges, from the threat of farmland loss to mental health concerns. Max Hansgen, NFU-O President, is addressing these issues head-on.

On March 29, Hansgen, along with NFU President Jenn Pfenning, met with MPPs at Queen’s Park to discuss the ongoing risks to farmland protection in Ontario. Bill 23, which weakens the province’s protections for agricultural lands and opens them up for development, remains a primary concern. Farmland is a finite resource, and once it is lost to development, it cannot be regained. We already lose 319 acres of farmland a day, and Bill 23 will only accelerate this loss. The NFU-O calls for policies that prioritize farmland protection and urges MPPs to take action to ensure that farmland is preserved for future generations, which includes repealing Bill 23.

As well, the NFU-O advocates for land grabbing prevention legislation, which would help prevent foreign and domestic investors from acquiring large amounts of agricultural land for non-farming purposes.

“Agricultural land should be owned by the farmers who grow our food and not by companies that are speculating on land prices rising even higher, or seeking to increase dividends through high rents – or both – at the expense of eaters and growers alike”, urges Hansgen.

Hansgen then visited FoodShare Toronto, where he met with Orlando Martín López Gómez, NFU-O’s BIPOC Advisor and FoodShare’s Community Food Growing Senior Manager. FoodShare is a nonprofit that addresses hunger and advocates for policy to strengthen food security and justice. They also deliver food



NFU-O President Max Hansgen (left) and NFU-O BIPOC Advisor Orlando Martín López Gómez (right) at a FoodShare urban farm property in Toronto.

boxes and operate an urban farm. The need for urban agriculture is growing, as it offers an alternative model for food production as land becomes ever more difficult to access. As well, urban agriculture serves as a valuable teaching and community building tool.

FoodShare’s urban farm provides fresh local produce to the local community and serves as a model for sustainable agriculture. The three-acre farm is also an educational site, providing community youth with an opportunity to become connected to the food system and gain the skills necessary to become involved in farming.

On March 30, Hansgen provided opening remarks at the “Healthy, Vibrant Communities – A Mental Health Summit for Agriculture and Rural Communities” event in Guelph, speaking about building resilience in farmers’ mental health. Isolation, financial stress, and the pressure of unpredictable weather and crop yields all pose a threat to

farmers’ mental wellbeing.

“The NFU believes improving farmer mental health requires collaboration between farmers, farm organizations and government agencies to find ways to improve the economic viability and stability of the sector,” says Hansgen. “Farmers ask trained specialists for help with the health of their soil and crops and ask their vet or nutritionist for help with the health of their animals. It is not a weakness to ask for help when we are not sure how to deal with a problem.”

While the challenges we face may seem overwhelming in isolation, there is strength in community. By engaging with policymakers, community leaders, and local farmers, the NFU-O is working to promote policies that support farmers, protect farmland, and build healthy, vibrant communities. Solidarity within the NFU makes us strong, and we’re lucky to have such engaged and passionate leadership in Hansgen!