

Dear Elgin County Council,

I'm a life long farmer from Norfolk County.

There have been recent reports in the media that Ontario is losing 319 acres of farmland per day mainly to urban sprawl and development.

The statistics used to claim of the loss of **319 acres of farm land each day** are taken from the *2021 Statistics Canada (StatsCan) Census of Agriculture* and compared to the 2016 StatsCan Census

One only need go to the StatsCan Census for 2021 and read the notice on "*changes in reporting methods*" to see that a comparison directly to the 2016 StatsCan report cannot be made in some sections of the census. A change in reporting for 2021 was that only farms registering an income from the sale of agricultural farming to CRA are reported in the survey.

Also, there is a significant difference in reported farm land area between StatsCan and Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) data which shows "**an increase**" in total "**taxable**" farm land.

Note: The StatsCan defines **Total Farm Area** as all farm land owned, used and/or controlled by **active** farmers.

MPAC defines **Total Farm land as all land assessed for tax purposes** even if that land is not actively farmed.

The suggestion by some that all loss of farm land can be attributed primarily to *Urban development is a false narrative*.

In Norfolk County, during the downsizing of the Tobacco industry many farms were, and continue to be, purchased by the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) with land that has been conserved and restored that total more than 8000 acres.

Farmers engaging in estate planning have also donated farmland area parcels for ecological tax credits to the Long Point Basin Land Trust (LPBLT) in recent years. The LPBLT now owns 1200 acres of land in Norfolk County. There are 36 Land Trust affiliated groups active across Ontario.

Over 9000 acres of land in Norfolk has been dedicated to these *conservation* groups over the last 30 years. This is significantly higher than the approximate 1,500 to 2000 acres that may have been used for housing development by the county over the same period. Nature based organizations along with numerous Land Trusts actively seek to acquire farmland areas with woodlots wetlands and other natural areas across Ontario with grant funding from the Federal and Provincial government.

All these lands are now no longer included in the StatsCan data collection.

Where investors (domestic and offshore) buy farm land and lease fields to farmers, only the acreage rented for crop production is reported to StatsCan.

It is extremely important to note that ***acres for the production of crops have increased*** in Ontario and across Canada. This is attributed to farm improvements such as tile drainage, clearing of additional crop land to enlarge fields to better accommodate larger and more automated farm equipment, and greenhouse operations. Farmers are a very resourceful group and will always find ways to improve farm productivity. Increases in cropland acres, annual yield increases resulting from improved variety development and new production methods will ensure our agricultural output continues to increase every year. This article from the *Fraser Institute* supports this point. <https://troymedia.com/business/loss-of-ontario-cropland-exaggerated/>

Other farm land losses are attributed to farm consolidation resulting in surplus dwellings and related land being severed, also the introduction of new recreation areas, wind and solar farms, etc.

The sheer size of today's modern farm equipment and economies of scale in agriculture make ownership of marginal farm land areas that have small irregular shaped fields, a high percentage of Woodlots, wetlands, rocky and rolling terrain less attractive for farm operators to purchase. Non farm residents are more likely to purchase the marginal farm properties and rent back a small portion of land to farm operators or plant the remaining open farm land back into trees. These parcels **remain classified as total farm area** in the MPAC data and are not lost to development.

An in-depth look at StatsCan numbers show minimal losses of total farm land in the Counties of Wellington, Perth, Oxford, Chatham- Kent and Middlesex, due to lower acreages of woodlots, wetlands and other non-tillable areas.

On the other side of the equation, there is huge potential for vast acreages of new land to be cleared and made available for crop production in the great northern clay belt area surrounding Temiskaming. Land clearing and tile drainage grants are available for agricultural development in Northern Ontario. New Agricultural enterprises include Livestock and crop production including small grains, hay, soybeans and even vegetable production are being established in the region.

The following links are very helpful in understanding the actual amount of farm land loss due to "development" (Official Plan Amendments and Urban Boundary expansions) versus the conversion to "conservation".

I encourage everyone review the study “*Measuring Farmland Loss*” by Dr. Wayne Caldwell and Dr. Sara Epp and others, dated January 2021, University of Guelph

(<https://www.waynecaldwell.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/volume-1-FINAL.pdf>)

where it concludes that due to Official Plan Amendments (OPA), for the period 2000 – 2017 (17 years compared to the StatsCan 5 years) there was approximately 30,000 ha of farmland lost.

This equates to a 12 acres per day loss of farmland in the most populated regions of Ontario.

From the same study showing farm land loss in Norfolk County -

<https://www.waynecaldwell.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Norfolk-County.pdf>

The following information/studies are also useful:

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3210015301>

Municipal Property Assessment Corporation data - https://data.ontario.ca/dataset/4864e831-c859-4c00-b1b0-7da3fc1ab805/resource/459b3eb3-d109-4df4-aeb1-812b62fd028e/download/ceag_and_mpac.xlsx

Land Trusts active in Ontario- <https://olta.ca/find-a-land-trust/>

Ontario Increases Investments including in the Greenlands Conservation Partnership -

<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/environmental-funding/ecological-gifts-program.html>

<https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1003202/ontario-increasing-investment-in-the-greenlands-conservation-partnership>

<https://natureconservancy.ca/norfolk-county-corridor/>

I encourage Elgin County Council to thoroughly and critically review the numbers and question the data being presented by anyone proclaiming that we are losing 319 acres per day of farmland in Ontario to development.

Best Regards,

Frank Schonberger