

Work Plan to Implement the GTA Agricultural Action Plan

July – December 2006

1. Create the GTA AAC¹

- Completed September 2005
- Executive Director appointed, May 2006
- Finalize operational details as soon as possible

2. Provide dedicated agricultural economic development capability at the municipalities, with GTA-wide and provincial co-ordination²

- Regular meetings of Central Ontario Agriculture Economic Developers. Two meetings have been held. Third planned for July 17. Regular participants to date, Durham Region, Halton Region, Peel Region (Town of Caledon), York Region, Kawartha Lakes, Hamilton, GTA AAC, OMAFRA (Rural Programs Branch) and OMAFRA (Regional Rural Programs). Also invited are Toronto, Niagara and AAFC.
- Document the present level of staff and resources committed to economic development capability for agriculture, food and countryside³ in each region/municipality.
- Propose the next steps for increasing the staff and resources committed to agricultural, food and countryside development for each municipality.
- Draft a sample work plan for economic development staff with a focus on agriculture, food and countryside demonstrating the opportunity and demand for expanding this service.

3. Recognize and adapt to cultural diversity and demographic realities⁴

- Develop a GTA population profile to identify emerging consumer groups (Action #19)
- Convene a working group of regional staff (including Toronto) with demographic expertise, OMAFRA staff with expertise in food trends, Ministry of Tourism staff with expertise in culinary trends and University of Guelph with expertise in consumer trends.
- Begin the analysis of changes in food consumption in the GTA related to population demographics, ethnic diversity, culture-based food and experience preferences and food as a determinant of health. Complete a draft report in time for Local Food Conference.
- Survey GTA farmers re their present enterprises, interest in new opportunities (ethnically diverse, culture-based food and experience, and food as a determinant of health) and their willingness to change.

¹ Priority #1. GTA Action #7. Referenced priorities are listed in Appendix I. Referenced actions are listed in Appendix II

² Priority #2, GTA Action #9

³ In the landscape outside settlement areas

⁴ Priority #4, GTA Action #21

- Begin comparing changing food consumption patterns to current production patterns in the GTA to identify shifting opportunities for production and value added. Complete report by mid 2007.

4. Strengthen the Local Food System in the GTA⁵

- Become an organiser of the annual local food events that are now led by the Toronto Food Policy Council and the Caledon Countryside Alliance
 - A major speaker at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair on November 9.
 - Local Food Conference on November 25. Tentative theme: consumer trends and new opportunities for local markets
 - February 2007: networking workshop to bring local food interests together to develop collaborations and value chains.
- Create a presence for GTA Agriculture at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair with two purposes:
 - Now that they have had a taste of agriculture, invite Royal visitors to celebrate agriculture in the countryside during 2007 by distributing a list of events and websites.
 - Explore the use of a calendar if affordable or through partnership with others already creating a calendar.
 - Explore the possibility of creating an effective atmosphere for extending the invitation: food sampling, chefs preparing local food.
 - Create an email list of those who want to be informed of day trip and half-day trip opportunities to celebrate agriculture in the GTA. (Create a newsletter for this email list in 2007.)
- Encourage each region to develop a farm fresh map, web presence and email list for local celebrations. In 2007 develop an Internet portal that links all the electronic initiatives in the regions.
- Start organizing for the celebration of GTA agriculture in 2007.

5. Toolkit for Near-urban Agriculture

- Collaborate with the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development, University of Guelph, to enable this two-year project
- Explore a number of tools to enhance and energize near-urban agriculture
- Funded by Greenbelt Foundation. Foundation has accepted the letter of inquiry and asked for a full proposal by mid July.
- Project includes:
 - Collaborative process that examines the Provincial Policy Statement (under the Planning Act), Official Plan and Zoning Bylaw changes⁶ and the patterns that farm enterprises follow when they change in response to new opportunities.
 - Process will involve farmers, their organizations, planners and other stakeholders.

⁵ GTA Actions 3, 17, 18, 20 and 21.

⁶ GTA Actions 27, 28, 29 and 30.

- Provincial Policy Statement (under the Planning Act), Official Plan and Zoning Bylaw policies that enable farmers to supplement farm income through compatible secondary uses on the farm.⁷
- Provincial Policy Statement (under the Planning Act), Official Plan and Zoning Bylaw policies that support energy self-sufficiency on farms and other countryside properties.
- Provincial Policy Statement (under the Planning Act), Official Plan and Zoning Bylaw policies that allow farms significantly smaller than 100 acres and the programs needed to maintain these smaller properties in agricultural production.
- A set of initiatives, such as farmer certification, value chain management and procurement commitments that give products from near-urban agriculture a permanent presence in Greater Toronto Area value chains (grocery stores, institution food suppliers).
- By the end of 2006, complete the design of the project and start the collaborative process.

6. Communicate the Importance of GTA Agriculture to Key Influencers and the Public

- Facilitated sessions with the GTA AAC and stakeholders to develop a consensus on the approach to take towards the existence of the Golden Horseshoe Greenbelt
- Write commentaries on GTA agriculture and the local food chain on a regular basis. Distribute to media and key influencers.
- Find a partner with whom to develop a survey to gage the attitude of the GTA public to local food and the importance of agriculture.
- Develop a website presence that documents agriculture in the GTA and the work of the GTA AAC.

7. Provide programs to assist in farm succession and support new farmers⁸

- Work with OMAFRA to customize their “Growing Your Opportunities” workshops to be very relevant to near-urban agriculture.
- Encourage each region to plan a “Growing Your Opportunities” workshop during the next 12 months (Peel = December 6).
- For GTA enterprise development staff, develop a workshop that focuses on the realities of farm economics, emerging opportunities and the type of one-on-one help that farmers need to change their businesses. Deliver the workshop on 2007.

8. Adopt transportation policies and programs that keep roads safe for farmers⁹

- Document, what, if anything, regional municipalities are doing about farmer frustration with commuter traffic.
- Document the concerns of farm groups through a survey of farm groups.

⁷ Priority #8, GTA Actions 35 and 36.

⁸ Priority #5, GTA Actions 23 and 24.

⁹ Priority #9, GTA Action 37.

- Enable a working group of the partners willing to meet regularly with the Ministry of Transportation and municipal road officials to discuss needs and best practices.
- Meet at least once in 2006.
- Document best practices as they emerge from the discussions.
- Start the organization of a conference on traffic management in the working countryside on the edge of major cities and invite experts from other cities to speak.

9. Identify a variety of mechanisms for protecting natural areas while benefiting the landowner¹⁰

- Create an outline for a pilot project, “Thank You Countryside,” that seeks to:
 - Develop mechanisms for paying farmers for environmental goods and services
 - Ask consumers to contribute to paying for these services as part of grocery purchases.
- Survey farmers and consumers in potential pilot project areas re their interest in participating in a “Thank You Countryside” pilot project.
- Take the concept to a variety of stakeholders and ask them to join in a Working Group mandated to design a pilot project somewhere in the GTA.
- Lead the Working Group in the design and development of the pilot project. Complete the design by mid 2007.

10. Seek reforms in farmland and value-added taxation¹¹

- Participate in the review of property assessment that is expected as a result of the Ombudsman’s report on MPAC. Encourage all partners in the GTA AAC to participate in the review and seek substantial changes as proposed below.
- Develop and adopt a recommendation that emphasizes the need for municipalities to have alternative sources of income to their heavy dependence on property taxes.
- Develop and adopt a recommendation that asks the Ministry of Finance to assess farmland based on its production potential and not on market value.
- Develop and adopt a recommendation that asks the Ministry of Finance to include, in the farm class, all value-added activities that are of a small or moderate scale and that are located on a working farm.

Adopted
GTA Agricultural Action Committee
June 28, 2006

¹⁰ Priority #7, GTA Action 33.

¹¹ Priority #3, GTA Actions 10 and 11.

Appendix I: Responsibility and Priority Matrix, Section 5.4 of the GTA Agricultural Action Plan

The table in Appendix 2 summarizes all actions and responsibilities resulting from this exercise. This matrix has been refined based on discussions held at the November symposium, focus teams and comments received from the public, government and stakeholders of the agricultural community. The matrix highlights nine 'high' priority actions identified through the consultation process as well as some other actions that have been identified as 'on-going' priorities. The highest priorities are summarized as:

1. Create the GTA AAC
2. Provide dedicated agricultural economic development capability at the municipalities, with GTA-wide and provincial co-ordination
3. Seek reforms in farmland and value-added taxation
4. Recognize and adapt to cultural diversity and demographic realities
5. Provide programs to assist in farm succession and support new farmers
6. Work to achieve PPS and Official Plan changes that better protect agriculture
7. Identify a variety of mechanisms for protecting natural areas while benefiting the landowner
8. Enable farmers to supplement farm income through compatible secondary uses on the farm
9. Adopt transportation policies and programs that keep roads safe for farmers

Appendix II: GTA Actions Noted in the Footnotes

Action #3 Meaningfully differentiate GTA farm products via Foodland Ontario advertising/campaigns, and initiate an “Ontario First” priority to increase sales for locally grown products.

Action #7: Create a GTA Agricultural Action Committee (GTA AAC), comprised of dynamic champions, to provide a coordinating function for agriculture in the GTA, share information, raise awareness of issues, act as liaison with all levels of government, and encourage innovation and diversification within the industry.

Action #9: Provide for dedicated agricultural economic development capability at the GTA municipalities and overall GTA coordination to promote local agriculture, connect producers with local markets including retailers and restaurants, and provide business support

Action #10 Collaboration between the agricultural industry and municipalities in lobbying the Ontario Ministry of Finance for fair farmland and value-added tax assessment. Tax incentives should also be considered to reduce speculation in urban fringe areas, promote the industry to young farmers and encourage innovation.

Action #11 Municipal governments should explore options for reducing farmland tax assessment.

Action #17 Create a forum to facilitate alliances among the different agricultural sectors and outside agencies such as school boards, conservation authorities and the development industry.

Action #18 Design a comprehensive communications strategy to promote local farm products and recreation, entertainment and education opportunities on the farm. For example, consider developing a TV channel specifically for agriculture to promote food safety, environmental stewardship, new marketing and other ideas.

Action #20 Develop a suite of new marketing techniques, using the population profile, which will capture the different consumer groups e.g. use of different languages and media outlets.

Action #21: Investigate new opportunities to cater to changing cultural diversity and demographics, e.g. production of healthy products for consumers who value locally grown food.

Action #23: Provide GTA relevant farm succession educational opportunities.

Action #24: Programs to promote and support entry-level farmers should be implemented, such as apprenticeship programs and coop placements for high school, community college and university students.

Actions #27: Continue protecting a critical mass of high priority agricultural land through a strengthened PPS, together with municipal agricultural designations. Prevent fragmentation of land by restricting or prohibiting rural severance policies in Official Plans.

Action #28: Recognizing the evolving needs of farmers and reality of non-farm uses in the agricultural area, ensure Minimum Distance Separation requirements are included

in zoning by-laws and implemented by Building Officials, and ensure there is public, staff and Council awareness of Normal Farm Practices, as represented in the Farming and Food Production Protection Act and MOE regulations governing pesticide use, Nutrient Management, etc.

Action #29: The new Provincial Policy Statement should strengthen the criteria that need to be assessed in justification studies for taking land out of agriculture. Current approaches are too discretionary.

Action #30: Investigate and evaluate different approaches to protecting GTA agricultural land via agricultural preserves for example, building on Markham, Pickering, Niagara, Oak Ridges Moraine and U.S. experiences.

Action #33: Investigate and make available, GTA-wide mechanisms for promoting natural area protection such as conservation easements, provision of professional forestry advice and tree stock to private landowners, and environmental payments for example. Promote the use of tax benefits to reduce the cost to farmers of retaining natural areas.

Action #35: Councils should consider adopting policies to permit secondary uses on the farm to enable the farm entity to improve economic viability. To ensure compatibility with existing farm and non-farm uses, secondary uses must be subject to tests that must be met based on local circumstances.

Action #36: Adopt policies to permit value-added and agri-tainment operations that are compatible with surrounding agriculture, as these uses can increase farm income and provide an excellent opportunity to improve public appreciation of and support for GTA agriculture.

Action #37: Adopt consistent transportation policies and programs for regional and local roads to ensure safe movement of farm vehicles e.g. efficient public transit to keep commuters off rural roads, slow-moving vehicle signage, consultation with farmers during transportation master planning, Class Environmental Assessments and during capital and operating budget deliberations. Farmers need to be consulted on rural road designs and upgrades (e.g. road type, alignments, shoulders, cross-sections, and sign placement).