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Agriculture and the Environment

Ontario's farmers are amongst the most environmentally-conscious in the world. For much of the past decade they have been developing environmental farm plans for their own properties, and now they are preparing nutrient management plans for their farms.



By Lisa Alderman, OFA Executive Committee

When each farmer was expected to produce enough food for 18 or 20 other people, the pressure on the land and the environment was much less. Today, however, each farmer is feeding more than 100 people and the area of land used to produce food has been declining with urban sprawl.

These circumstances have forced modern farmers to be much more aware of their impact on the land, the water, the air, and yes, their non-farm neighbors living all around them.

In recent years the Ontario Federation of Agriculture was

successful in getting the provincial government to tighten up the Farming and Food Production Protection Act as a means of ensuring farmers using normal farming practices would not be shut down as a result of complaints from their non-farm neighbors.

Within the past year, the number of complaints from these non-farm neighbors has increased in a few areas of the province where large production facilities have been established to take advantage of economies of scale. After all, if farmers are to be expected to survive with declining product prices, they have to find some way of increasing their cash returns.

OFA is part of the Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition, and recently participated in a presentation of findings to a provincial government task force on "Intensive Agricul-

tural Operations in Rural Ontario." That task force has representatives from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, and the Ministry of the Environment.

The "input" phase of the task force's job has been completed, and soon we can expect recommendations to the provincial government. Part of these recommendations are expected to address the role municipal governments should play in controlling today's modern farming operations. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture is watching the process closely, prepared to take steps to protect the rights of farmers to carry on their farming operations.

OFA does not condone farming operations that contribute pollution to the environment. We expect farmers to do everything possible to protect and improve the environment so that future generations have something to enjoy. With this in mind, OFA is prepared to work with farmers and all levels of government to develop plans to achieve this objective.

Meeting all the existing

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and future requirements to protect the environment is becoming very complex, and OFA sees a growing need for OMA-FRA to be there as a "third party" to provide input into systems being developed, and eventually verification that the farmers are doing their part.

OFA is also supporting the Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition call for the establishment of Local Nutrient Management Committees to work with municipal councils on agricultural issues, and the appointment of a Provincial Arbitrator for settlement of environmental complaints against farmers.

Another problem OFA sees in urgent need of a solution is the shortage of inspection staff for the Ministry of the Envi-

ronment. OFA and the Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition want complaints against farming operations dealt with in a timely fashion to minimize any possible negative impacts on the environment from negligent farm operators.

OFA is proud of the work the farming community in Ontario has done to protect and improve the environment, and it wants the rest of society to know farmers are good stewards of the land and its surroundings.

EDITOR'S NOTE: In Peterborough County, the first by-law to control large-scale livestock concentration has just been enacted by Otonabee South Monaghan council, and other councils are working towards similar bylaws.