

FARMING IS BIG BUSINESS IN PETERBOROUGH COUNTY !!!

F Farm Commodity Sales \$61 Million
 Number of Farms - 1,369
 Value of Farms—\$556 Million
 (Machinery, Livestock, Land, Buildings)

532 acres of vegetable crops....216 acres in fruit crops....
 15,402 beef cows....6,483 dairy cows....10,635 pigs...
 507,663 hens and chickens..10,828 acres corn for grain...
 5,645 acres corn for silage...386 acres for sweet corn....

Source: 1996 Census of Agriculture

Highest Farm Cash Receipts was for Dairy Commodities \$18.2 Million



Changes to Hydro

By Allan Gardiner, OFA Executive Committee

Almost five years ago the

stage was set for the changes we see coming to Ontario's supply of electricity and its

distribution. That's when a five-year freeze was placed on rates Ontario Hydro could charge its customers by the minister of the environment and energy.

At the time, it seemed like good news, but then we had monthly services charges added to what Hydro's farming customers had to pay. While the actual rates may have been maintained, the costs to farmers have increased.

Now, farmers are bracing for further increases in their energy costs, especially the small volume users, as the province proceeds with its plans to deregulate the energy business in Ontario. With Ontario Hydro being broken into at least three separate companies, it won't be easy determining which segment is responsi-

ble for future price increases, and where the complaints should be focused.

Now we are seeing a multitude of power brokers springing up across the province as a result of the deregulation and the opening up of electric energy merchandising. It could even reach the state of being confusing for people to decide where to turn to buy their power requirements.

Many years ago the Ontario Federation of Agriculture negotiated a "rural rate assistance" program with Ontario Hydro to lower the cost of electric energy for farming customers of Hydro. With all the changes taking place, it hasn't been determined if that program will be maintained or which segment of the industry will take the hit for the rate reduction.

We are all aware that Ontario Hydro accumulated billions of dollars in debt over the past quarter century of operation. The provincial government, as part of its plan for the

deregulation and changes, wants to see that debt paid off with taxes on profits the newly-created power companies are expected to make.

The OFA believes that government's promises of no increase in energy rates because of the deregulation may be hollow rhetoric. How can these new companies turn a profit where Ontario Hydro couldn't unless the rates are increased?

OFA has calculated that farms without houses will see their electric bills increase about \$350 per year on service costs. Others in rural Ontario will see similar increases in their electric costs, and this is a major concern for the OFA. It is believed these higher energy costs will undermine the investment climate in rural Ontario with a subsequent reduction in the number of off-farm jobs.

Off-farm jobs are what has kept many small or beginning farmers on their farms, and OFA is concerned these



Ontario Federation of Agriculture

OFA Commentary

changes to the electric supply business in Ontario may bring another round of off-farm migration.

There is also considerable worry about maintenance of transmission lines in remote rural areas. In the past Ontario Hydro managed to provide an acceptable level of services to these areas, but now if something goes wrong in a remote rural area, the company responsible will probably have to assess the impact of their provision of service on their bottom line. After all, they are expected to show a profit that can be applied to Ontario Hydro's debt repayment.

OFA continues to review all aspects of the changes and is attempting to establish how best to protect the interests of Ontario farmers and the rural Ontario community.

Once again the cards seem to be stacked against the interests of rural Ontario. This approach by the provincial government is of increasing concern to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture.

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.