

# Farmers unite to protest higher land assessments

Halton's farmers don't plan to accept their 1968 assessment increases sitting down. About 275 of them demonstrated their opposition during a packed meeting near Milton last week, and most of them signed up to support Halton Federation of Agriculture in a mass protest they threatened to carry as far as the Ontario Municipal Board.

The Federation called Wednesday's meeting at the Masonic Hall to allow County Assessor Robert Beach and the assessors of Equeusing, Nassagaweya, Oakville and Burlington to explain why farm land assessments are doubling, tripling, and even quadrupling this year. The five men revealed farm land assessments have been too low for too long, and a re-adjustment has been made over the past two years to put assessments back where they belonged. Bona fide farmer-to-farmer land sales in the past two years were studied and average figures gleaned from these sales were used to establish the new values.

In 1966, Mr. Beach revealed, studies showed farm land was assessed for 20 to 24 per cent of resale value, while the correct percentage should be 33, or one-third of market value. The study was launched at the insistence of the minister of municipal affairs, the Hon. J. W. Spooner, who told the 1965 assessors' convention that 62 per cent of 950 municipalities the Department studied had serious deviations and discrepancies in assessing.

But the farmers who jammed into the hall and spilled out into a hallway protested the planned increases and indicated the assessors had used some speculative land prices. A market gardener from Burlington pointed out his assessment was going from \$400 to \$1,200 an acre, a 300 per cent increase, and if his taxes went up accordingly he wouldn't be able to continue gardening.

Another, when someone asked for a definition of a bona fide farmer, suggested it was "the man in the squeeze." Burlington Assessor Ernest Williams spoke first to the gathering, reporting there had been little changes in farm land assessments over the past 10 years. Orchard land was increased from \$180 an acre to a maximum of \$350 while market garden land was going up from \$400 to a maximum \$1,200 per acre.

Perfect land would be classed as 100 per cent and points would be deducted to give a lower assessment for rocky or flood lands, Oakville's assessor Ed Dunham told the audience. He said assessments in Oakville would range from \$60 to \$115 per acre. This year added farm assessment would represent only a small fraction of an estimated \$30 to \$40 million the town would be adding, he said.

Art Benton of Equeusing said 46 farm sales were analyzed to find an average price per acre, and in 1967 the average sale value was \$267 per acre. Now Equeusing land suitable for crops on rotation would be assessed from \$55 to \$85 an acre, while non-arable land would range from \$10 to \$40.

Nassagaweya's assessments are \$30 to \$70 per acre for arable land, and \$10 to \$25 for non-arable, assessor Cal McIntyre explained. All four assessors invited every farmer to visit their office, in company with their neighbors if possible, to compare their new assessments and have the system explained.

In answer to questions from the floor, the assessors pointed out vacant farm lands and residential lands held for development will be four times higher than normal farm assessments. Residential land assessments will be upped to 33 per cent of market value throughout Halton this year, but the increase will not be so noticeable because most residential areas are presently assessed at closer to 33 per cent than farm lands are. Mr. Williams used Burlington as an example—residential is currently assessed about 32 per cent while farms are running 19 to 21 per cent of value, so when both are upped to 33 per cent the farmer will see the largest difference.

"I think you're squeezing us out," charged one Equeusing farmer. Speculators are forcing land prices to skyrocket in the south part of the county, so farmers there are selling out at high prices and heading north and inflicting the same high prices there, he added. Meanwhile, farmers are making no profits on their operations, just making a living off their farms.

Another from Equeusing said he moved to Halton when Etobicoke doubled farm assessments. "We thought that was the first shot, but they're still shooting," he said, and forcing the farmers right out of the township.

A Burlington man wondered if the government was at fault for forcing the legislation on the assessors. "People are drawing the manual who don't know a thing about farming," he charged. Mr. Williams suggested he should address those remarks to Halton East M.P.P. Jim Snow who was also in the audience.

The same man said the government forced farmers into a milk marketing plan, which gives them the same milk prices as farmers in Northern and Eastern Ontario who can buy land for \$100 an acre, or less.

An Equeusing man charged the assessors didn't know a thing about farming and were making their assessments on the basis of "how green the grass is."

In answer to a Nassagaweya man who felt industry should be hit with higher assessments, Mr. Beach said the assessment act calls for equalization of assessing, not "who can best afford to pay". Mr. Dunham added that industry was already paying its way, with assessment on land and buildings plus a 60 per cent business assessment, plus a mill rate nine or 10 mills higher than farmers pay.

Several farmers expressed concern that the rising taxes which they expect to accompany increased assessments, will squeeze out every small farmer and leave the

door open to large farming syndicates.

"Our land isn't worth anything, until we want to sell it," said an Oakville woman. She said the assessors and municipal officials expected the farmers to keep up with those who sold land in Etobicoke or Malton for \$5,000 an acre and bought new land in Halton at \$2,000 an acre.

Another Oakville man wondered if land sales were the true method of establishing the value of farm land. "If I held stocks and my neighbor sold his stocks, would you penalize me if I didn't sell them?" he wanted to know. His smile drew cheers and guffaws from the audience.

"We would be glad to pay the extra taxes if you could assure everyone in this room they could make as much extra money to pay it," suggested a Burlington man. Several told how the costs of operating a farm are increasing daily, yet the return on their products is not rising correspondingly.

When the assessors left the meeting, M.P.P.'s Jim Snow and George Kerr spoke briefly. Mr. Snow said he was sorry the meeting was not being held a week later, as the government committee studying the Smith Report on Taxation was presenting its brief to the government Monday morning.

As chairman of the committee's agricultural sub-committee, he said there were changes coming but he was not free to reveal them at the time. "I feel we will do a considerable amount to relieve the load on the working farmer," he promised. "It's in

the taxation, not the assessment" where the changes will be made.

Mr. Snow agreed with one farmer who suggested this area of Ontario, the Golden Horseshoe had seen the greatest increase in taxation yet no increase in incomes. He also agreed taxation of farm land and buildings should be equal across the country, not unrealistic in comparison with other parts of the country.

Mr. Kerr charged it was not the act, but the assessors' interpretation of the assessing act and the manual that were at fault. He noted farms in Northern Ontario are not having this problem. "I feel the local assessors are being influenced by speculators who pay an inflated value for farm land. Are they really using only bona fide farm sales?"

Delayed taxes are one answer, but most farmers would find it distasteful he said.

Solicitor Ray Plante of a Brampton law firm was present to hear the discussion and represent the Federation of Agriculture if there is a need for a mass protest of assessments. He felt the first step should be for each farmer to appeal his assessment to the municipality, and perhaps even agitate at the municipal level for special concessions on farms. If this did not work a provincial law might be changed to aid the farmers.

He felt it might be profitable to take one farm as a test case, have the farmers in the county support an extensive appeal to the high courts, and force the courts to make a ruling that would benefit everyone.

As the meeting ended, those favoring a united effort to appeal assessments signed up to pledge their support. The Federation, meanwhile, is scheduling an executive meeting for tonight (Wednesday) to review the white paper on the Smith Report with the Halton East M.P.P. and both president Denzil Lawrence and property committee chairman Harold Middlebrook, who conducted the meeting, promised to keep the farmers informed on future developments.

## Working farms:

### Protect the farmer

A "working farm" has been defined and a recommendation for the establishment of a County Farm Classification Board made in the report on taxation by the Select Committee of the Legislature. The report was released Monday.

The report, released Monday, Agriculture president Denzil Lawrence commented, on a brief review of the report, the plan looked "fair." "It seems to offer protection for the farmer who operates a farm or who wishes to retire on his farm and rent his land for agricultural production."

The proposals, he noted, were quite close to those suggested by the Halton Federation.

Halton M.P.P. Jim Snow, a member of the Select Committee was chairman of the subcommittee on defining a "working farm". The Select Committee endorsed the Smith Commission recommendation that the assessment of the land and structures of a farm property be separated into working farm assessment and residential assessment. The farm dwelling and the other parts of the farm holding not qualifying as working farm would be classified as residential property. The Committee rejected the principle of full utilization as the basis for defining working farm.

Forseeing difficulties in the interpretation of the definition of a working farm, the Select Committee proposed the establishment of a County Farm Classification Board. The Board would consist of three members appointed by the Ontario Department of Agriculture, to resolve disputes on interpretation. A working farm was defined as a unit of 100 acres or less which had sales of agricultural products of at least \$3,000. Where the acreage is over 100 the sales

## Grace Bird wins Halton safety contest again

By J. Jenkins

When 14 year old Grace Bird of R. R. 2, Georgetown was named the winner of the Halton Safety Council Scrapbook Competition last Tuesday evening, it was little more than a pleasant surprise. This is the third consecutive year that Grace has won the competition. In the previous two years participants were required to design a safety poster. Grace has been very active in extra 4-H

competitions this year. She was the top junior public speaker in the June competition, and was recently awarded a prize for her top miscellaneous 4-H project.

Second prize in the Safety Scrapbook Competition went to Verria Thompson of R. R. 1, Burlington, with 3rd and 4th prize going to Lorne Wilson, Georgetown, and Carol Somerville, Acton, respectively.

Gerald Carton, President of the Halton Farm Safety Council, and Mix W. Webb, Secretary, had high praise for the calibre of the scrapbooks entered in the competition. The top four scrapbooks will be on exhibit at Milton Fair.

Continuing on taxation the Select Committee endorsed the Smith Report that all property be assessed each year at 100 percent of actual current value. A single mill rate would be applied, calculated at varying percentages for different classes of assessment. Committee proposes a property tax at 60 percent on residential and business property, recreational properties and non-working farms. A 40 percent rate on a working farm was proposed.

Industry and commerce will be subject to a graduated business tax on a taxable business assessment of 10 percent on the first \$10,000 of assessment, 20 percent on the second \$10,000, 30 percent on the third and 40 percent on any amount in excess of \$30,000.



## Farms near Guelph International site

The 1968 International Plowing Match and Farm Machinery Demonstration, the largest annual outdoor agricultural event of its kind in Canada, will be held near Guelph from October 16 to 19. The match includes a 60-acre Tented City and many more acres of crop and machinery demonstration areas. The location will be the farm of Jack Gilchrist and his neighbors, six miles north of Guelph on Highway 6.

The site for the 1968 Match will be officially proclaimed by the Hon. W. A. Stewart, Minister of Agriculture and Food at a special ceremony in Guelph.

The Match will include plowing competitions and machinery demonstrations and also events such as sheep shearing, horseshoe pitching, an antique power machinery display, an exhibit on farm safety and various films.

A Tented City, complete with its own mayor, will occupy 60 acres and will include exhibits by farm machinery manufacturers and suppliers of goods and services to farming.

The match includes an active and complete program for all members of the family. Besides the many acres of exhibits and demonstrations and the numerous competitions, a miniature airshow is scheduled

for October 18 and 19. It will attract model airplane flyers representing clubs throughout Ontario to try their hand in the flying of the radio controlled model aircraft.

The ladies will also find many items of interest at the Plowing Match. Arrangements have been completed for daily fashion shows, flower demonstrations, cooking schools, beauty demonstrations, and gardening exhibits.

The 1968 International Plowing Match, October 16-19, will bring an exciting, unique atmosphere to Guelph. Everyone is invited to visit the match to watch the competitions, to see the many demonstrations and displays and be entertained.

## Watch for warning

This fall, as every year, there will be hundreds of farm tractors, combines, and other machines on our highways. As of September 1, 1968, the triangular red and orange Slow Moving Vehicle sign becomes mandatory on the rear of farm vehicles travelling public roads. Watch for this warning sign. It's used for your protection.

## BELL LINES



by L. G. Denby  
your telephone manager

If talk is becoming more of a convenience and a bargain all the time blame it on the telephone companies. Once again long distance rates have been reduced. This time Bell Canada, along with the other members of the Trans-Canada Telephone System, has lowered rates on a nationwide calling. Now, after midnight until 6 a.m., a coast-to-coast three-minute call that you dial yourself costs \$1 or less. Where Direct Distance Dialing is not yet available, the Operator will place your call for you at the same low rates. Midnight at the calling point governs the new rate. Over the years as improvements in equipment, increased Direct Distance facilities and the growing use of long distance services have made it possible, we have continued to voluntarily reduce long distance rates. In fact, long distance telephone service is one of the very few costs that have been decreasing rather than increasing over the years. Staple foods, services, luxuries and even housing have all shown fairly large increases in the past 20 years. In 1931, it cost \$6.25 for a three-minute coast-to-coast call. By 1936 we were able to bring that cost down to \$5.25 and in 1946 to \$3.90. By 1961 the price for the nationwide call was \$2.80. Our last reduction, in 1966, brought the cost of a coast-to-coast three-minute call to \$1.95. The new reduction makes long distance calling a bigger bargain than ever, especially for any of you who have family or friends living in Western Canada.

A story we heard recently concerned a couple from Ohio on vacation in Canada. They were trying to locate some relatives who had recently moved to a small town in Quebec. He noticed a telephone truck just around the corner and stopped, but before he could say a word, one of the men came over to the car and asked if he was looking for the Robinsons. "How did you know?" the traveller asked. "I didn't realize the telephone company knew I was coming!" But two telephone men did. Seems the young Robinson boy had spent some time on the corner waiting for them and watching the men at work. When he left, he asked the men to look out for a car with Ohio license plates. The travellers were quickly directed to a happy family reunion.

This is the year, girls, 1968. One of the year's which comes under an Act of Scottish Parliament passed in 1288. For 700 years law and tradition are on your side in Leap Year. Just remember there are only a few months left. Here's the ancient law: "It is statut and ordnait that during the rein of hir maiest bilisat Mageste, for like year known as lepe yeare, ilk maiden ladye of bothe highe and lowe estait shall hae liberte to bespeke ye man she like, albeit he refuses to talk hir to be his lawful wyfe, he shall be mulctid in ye sum of ane pundis or less, as his estait may be."

*Lloyd Denby*



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