

# Must reclaim 2 million acres to feed Ontario by year 2,000



DONALD MacDonald makes a point for Halton-Burlington NDP candidate Bill Johnson and the audience at Georgetown high school cafeteria.

## Gray disagrees with MacDonald

Halton-Burlington Progressive Conservative candidate George Gray found remarks by NDP agriculture and food critic Donald MacDonald at Georgetown last Wednesday hard to stomach, and the alarming aspects of MacDonald's speech hard to grasp, in view of developments in the field of agriculture.

Gray said he attended the meeting because he respected MacDonald's opinions on agriculture but he disliked "scare tactics" such as the speaker used Wednesday at Georgetown high school. "I feel the Ontario Government has done a good job with agriculture in Ontario," Gray said. He disagrees with tactics that suggest that if agricultural land is not frozen land will be used up for other purposes.

Asked by this newspaper for his views, Gray said he graduated from the Ontario Agricultural College 20 years ago and he recalls graduates were told then there would be a world shortage of food and farming would be the ideal occupation to get into.

"I'm still waiting for it to happen," he says.

Shortages of food? "I'll believe it when I see it," he says.

MacDonald's speech seems to forget the 700 percent increase in production on Ontario farms in the last 15 years. He said we would need a 70 percent increase in farm production by 1985. "Farmers would easily do it, given the chance," Gray maintains.

As chairman of the Ontario Turkey Board and an active farmer, Gray said turkey farmers are operating at only 65 percent of capacity. People eat only nine and a half pounds of turkey per capita, so there's no sense in producing any more. The same is true in the chicken and egg industries where farmers are restricted to 85 and 60 percent capacity because of the limited demand.

Politicians like MacDonald are not taking into account the falling birth rate, birth control programs in India, China and Pakistan, Gray states, suggesting the world may be approaching zero population growth which would mean much less demand for food.

He also said the latest figures for Ontario's population projection in the year 2000 were 11,300,000, not the 12 million MacDonald predicted. The population increase will come from immigration, not the birthrate and that

trend could be slowed down by the economic downturn which Gray does not expect to improve substantially for several years.

He said immigrants now find other parts of the world more attractive than Canada or Ontario and this could also have a bearing on this province's population.

The PC candidate said he did not want to get involved in the argument over how many acres were going out of production because he felt Agriculture Minister Bill Newman was arguing that value of growing crops had improved the situation. Viable farmers are renting land speculators hold and putting the land back into production, because it is now profitable to do so.

Gray pointed to the U.S. farm economy as an example where they can produce and sell at less cost than Ontario or Canadian farmers because they have a subsidy system which is two and a half times that in effect in Canada.

One of the most serious inequities he sees is that between Canada and the U.S. on tariffs. He says the federal government is trading off agricultural tariffs to get an advantage with manufactured goods and this has a disastrous effect on farmers when products from the U.S. such as hot house cucumbers, and tomatoes, to name two, are dumped on the Canadian market.

Tariffs on beef into the States are higher than ours, Gray says, enabling the U.S. farmers to sell their beef cheaper here than Canadians can sell in the U.S.

"We can't build a viable agriculture industry here if we are continually threatened by cheap imports," Gray said. "We have to protect ourselves." He advocated equalized rather than high tariffs to protect Canadians.

Gray said the auto pact was a good example of what he was aiming at. If he felt the advantage in both manufacturing and food should be equalized so no one country benefitted at the expense of another.

Gray also said he agreed with Agricultural Minister Newman that official plans and zoning by-laws were adequate to control agricultural land rather than the freeze advocated by MacDonald. The freeze, he maintained, would only hatch another body to control it, adding further to government bureaucracy.

MacDonald's remarks about big chain stores and their monopolization of food production did not disturb Mr. Gray. He said the big chains had grown because they packaged and presented their products better than anyone else and this was the key to their success. On the other hand, he noted small merchants can also prosper if they have good business ac-



George Gray

men. Many small merchants also left the business world to find jobs in industry with fewer hours and better pay, he says, accounting for the decline.

Gray also felt the NDP's agriculture critic had not taken into account the imminence of synthetic foods on the market made from soybeans, rape and various other protein supplies.

He noted whereas it took five pounds of grain to make one pound of beef and two to three pounds for one pound of chicken or turkey, it was a pound for a pound ratio with synthetics and they would soon be on the market.

There'd be a ready market for grain but it could mean a difference in the expansion or decline of the livestock market.

Synthetic foods have been tried such as adding soybean to hamburger and found to be good. There may be a reluctance to buy at first but the price factor will influence the market because it will be cheaper, Gray concluded.

### Truck, car

A total of \$1,500 in damages occurred May 22 when a truck driven by Arnold Tevsnik, Orton, was in collision with a parked car owned by Robert Gibson, 40 Kingham Rd., Halton Regional Police say.

Ontario must reclaim tens of thousands of acres of agricultural land being used by a few people living on huge tracts. Untold numbers of acres are also being gobbled up by highways, hydro corridors and developments. If something isn't done soon, Ontario—basically an agricultural province—will be producing only two or three major products to meet its own needs by 1985.

A study has shown, MacDonald said, that by the year 2,000 AD 60 per cent of Ontario's food will have to be imported to meet the needs of a population projected at 12 million people.

MacDonald appealed to listeners to realize farming incomes had dropped drastically in the last three years and if something was not done soon to stabilize it, farmers would leave agriculture in increasing numbers.

Twenty years ago, MacDonald said, of every dollar spent on food, 60 cents went to the farmer. During the last twenty years the farmer's share of the food dollar has dropped to 35 cents although he acknowledged it might be up to 40 cents at this time. But that's the farmer's gross income at the farm gate.

A farmer's net income, after costs of production are subtracted, would amount to only 8-10 cents of the dollar on food he produced, MacDonald claimed. Because agriculture has become so unattractive, farmers are leaving in droves.

"Since 1966, over 40 per cent of the farmers working the land, have left it," the NDP agriculture critic said. And of those who are still around, about half are still part-time farmers who work at other industries to supple-

ment their income. "They can't make enough money from farming alone," the speaker claimed.

In his opinion, the Ontario Government was shirking its responsibility to the farm community behind a smoke screen of rhetoric. To back his points MacDonald took the figures: Minister of Agriculture Bill Newman was using to rebut the contentions of the NDP that 26 acres of land is going out of production every hour of the day.

Mr. Newman now claims that rather than 26 acres per hour going out of production 6.6 acres of land are being brought back into production, encouraged by the better economic climate for farmers. However, the speaker said, the Newman figures are suspect and open to question. NDP figures of 26 acres an hour came, incidentally, he said, from the annual brief of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. MacDonald said the OFA brief urged the Government to take action because all the best land in Ontario would be under concrete in 50 years if they didn't.

MacDonald said the Minister of Agriculture was trying to lull people into believing the situation was not so urgent as both the Federation of Agriculture and the NDP believe. He is preaching concern but not alarm, the speaker said. "and it disturbs me." We must recognize the serious problem and do something about it.

MacDonald said Newman's figures were based on the Canada Land Inventory and assessment figures and no real definition of what is growing or the class of land being used is available. So they were suspect.

The speaker said that we need one acre per person to feed the people in Ontario and with a projected population of 12 million by the year 2000 AD, Ontario will need 12 million acres of prime farm land to feed the 12 million people. Now, MacDonald said, all that is available is a

little over 10 million acres of prime land—which leaves the province two million acres short.

To solve the "alarming" problem, MacDonald suggested there should be a two barrelled approach—ensure land now in production is kept that way and (2) reclaim another two million acres which have been lost.

Unless that is done by the year 2,000, Ontario will be importing 60 per cent of its food needs, MacDonald warned.

The speaker said the Government has refused to recognize the problem. "All that government policy offers by way of something more to protect foodlands is the contention that the amount of land used for urban growth should be constrained by zoning.

"But that's what we've always done, and it is patently inadequate," MacDonald said, suggesting it was weary old political rhetoric about respecting rural and local autonomy.

Instead, the speaker said the Government should pay heed to organizations such as the Ontario Association of Rural Municipalities and the Ontario Institute of Agrologists which urges the Province to subject any application to use prime farm land for any other purpose to review by all the normal planning bodies, up to the provincial planning authorities, with a final appeal to a provincial Land Tribunal, to make a binding decision.

However, MacDonald says the PC Government and the Liberals have both dismissed these "urgent pleas" as being a "freeze" even though it would be accompanied by machinery to consider legitimate exceptions.

Ontario Federation of Agriculture President Gordon Hill predicted, "I see a continued flow of farmland out of agriculture... the government refuses to give agriculture a high priority," the speaker noted.

Calling preservation of farm land a "freeze" leaves a false impression," MacDonald claimed. "It's no strait-jacket," he said, stating his party wants to alter an attitude which has become a fundamentalist approach—that agricultural land can just sit there until someone wants to use it for any other purpose.

"We'll have no farm land left in 10 years unless we change our approach," MacDonald thundered.

The speaker suggested Queen's Park should take a leaf from the British Columbia farm income stabilization plan in which 90 per cent of

BC farmers voluntarily enrolled. He said it insured the farmer for poor years and cost for the plan were equally shared in one-third premiums by the farmer, province and federal government. He said the plan negotiated on each commodity each year to cover production and get a fair return for the farmer, and also covered up deficiencies in poor years.

MacDonald said the NDP was in the forefront of many far-sighted agricultural programs and he predicted the entire country would soon follow suit with the BC stabilization program.

"We are told it is an infringement of free enterprise," he said, "and would bankrupt the province" but noted that the Social Credit government of BC, which is about as free enterprise oriented as a government can get, has retained it.

The speaker also spoke glowingly of NDP programs in Manitoba where farm land is sold by a father to a land bank with the understanding it would be leased back to his son. In this manner the farmer has a pension and the son can stay on the farm without a huge capital debt.

He pointed out that in Ontario a farmer pays property tax on the tools of his trade, a fact one didn't find in town or city. The burden became so great Queen's Park first decided to rebate 25 per cent and increased it to 50 per cent.

In 1962 the NDP drafted an agricultural policy calling for a complete exemption of farm land from property tax," MacDonald said, but the Government has just now set up a commission to study the proposal.

The food industry is the largest industry in Canada but farmers represents less than 20 per cent of those involved. There is a "growing horde" of middlemen from the farm gate to the check-out counters nibbling away at profits until there is little left for the farmer, the speaker claimed.

He said the Miller report showed people were paying at least 4 per cent more for food than necessary, which doesn't seem much until one realizes the \$4.7 billion spent on food each year in Ontario and that 4 per cent represents \$188 million.

Giant supermarkets such as Loblaw's, Steinbergs, A & P and Dominion Stores had almost a monopoly on food distribution and associated industries, he said. The Argus Corporation which owns control of Massey-Harris, Dom-

tar, CFRB and CJAD Montreal has its finger in almost every piece of agricultural pie from farm machines to retailing, MacDonald claimed.

The giant chains own the farm produce, sell it to their own processing plants, their own wholesaler handles it before the same retailer sells it.

"They are playing games in the family," MacDonald charged and shuffling chains to cheat the taxpayers as well as the consumers.

"Yet Beryl Plumtree sat in Ottawa and couldn't find a villain," the speaker noted sarcastically.

It is not just a farm problem, the preservation of agricultural land is society's problem, the speaker concluded.

A question and answer period followed in which Morley Mills asked why farmers shouldn't be given the same facilities as doctors to ply their profession. He said doctors were given hospitals. He asked why farmers were not given land to work?

MacDonald replied that Mr. Mills was ahead of his time but agreed leasing land to avoid large capital outlay for young people anxious to farm was one answer but it "kind of upsets the theory of land for people."

Harold Middlebrook of the Federation of Agriculture told the speaker some farmers feel if land is kept for agriculture the bottom goes out of its value. The speaker said that happened in BC but it soon returned to market prices.

MacDonald also said his party disagreed with so-

called developers' rights in which farmers close to urban centres have the right to make a million by selling their farm to developers. He said the entire community pays for the folly.

In reply to another question, the speaker said he has introduced a Private Member's Bill in the Legislature to prevent computer pricing in supermarkets which would see the price taken off the product on the shelf and have it read by a computer at the check-out counter.

He said it took \$150,000 to install one of the computer units but a store could save \$120,000 each year it was in operation, meaning the equipment would be paid for in little more than a year.

Supermarkets would make much more profit and he suggested some of it should be passed on to the consumer in lower prices.

MacDonald did not oppose the computerized shopping provided it preserved prices on products for the purposes of comparison shopping. With that provision the supermarket would still make \$37,000 saving on a \$150,000 investment.

The speaker was introduced by newly named Halton-Burlington NDP candidate Bill Johnson and thanked by Archie Brown, the party's organizer.

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## Predicts farm costs are bound to rise

"Farm costs are going to rise because of the oil price increases," Gordon Hill, President of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, said today. "The almost six cents a gallon increase in oil prices will affect costs at every stage in the food chain and will result in higher food costs."

Mr. Hill explained, "The costs of all farm inputs will increase. For example, the chemical fertilizer industry is a large user of fuel. Machinery companies' costs and prices will increase due to high transportation costs. The wages of those making farm inputs will rise due to their own added living costs."

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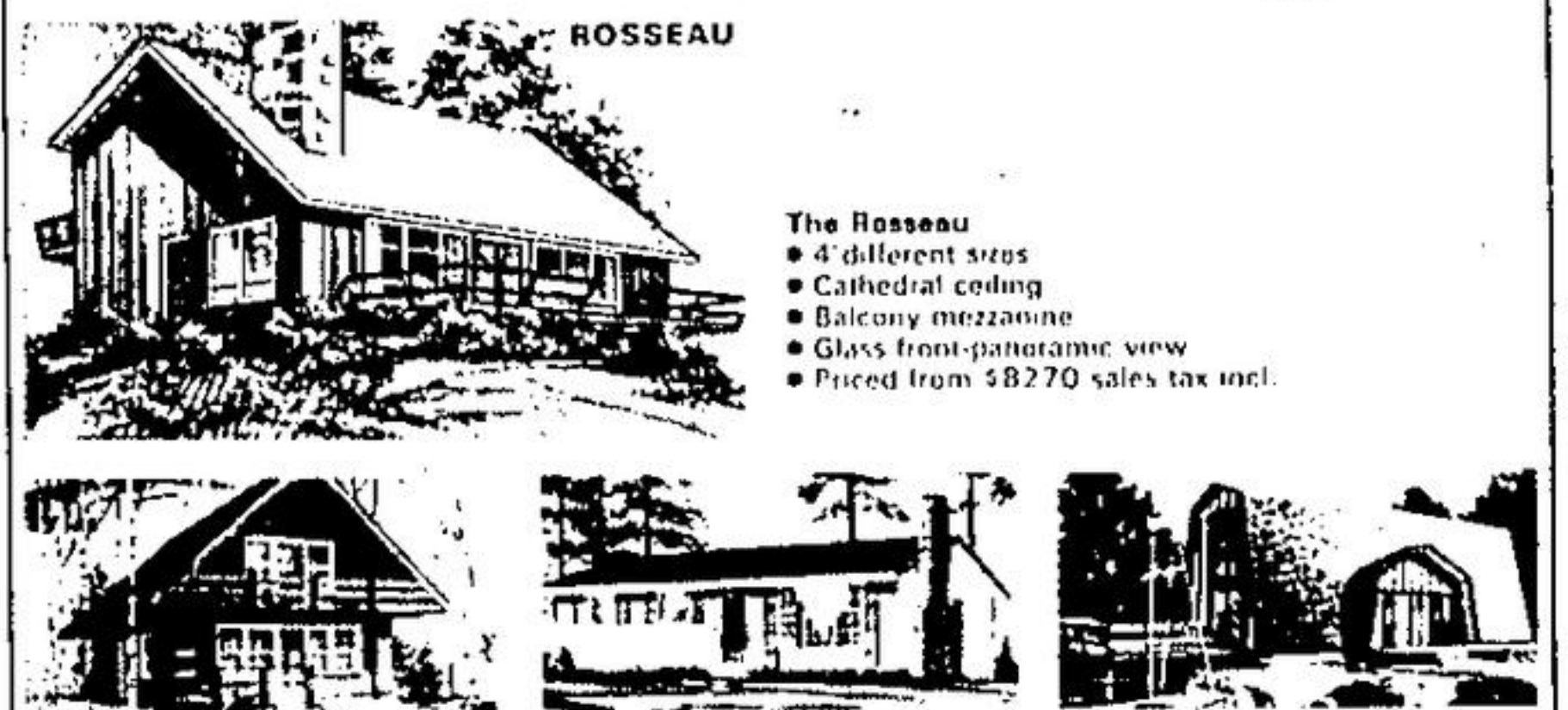
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