

Provincial budget raises concerns among farmers

Monday's provincial budget recycled some important farm news. \$50 million will be provided in interest rate relief, and \$40 million will be committed to the gross revenue insurance program (GRIP).

"Regrettably, there is absolutely no mention of the companion NISA program (Net Income Stabilization Account) by the Treasurer," said Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) President Roger George, urging that

"the Ontario Minister of Agriculture and Food endorse the NISA initiative soon."

In addition, Mr. George said "this \$90 million of old news wasn't enough to halt the decline in the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food's (OMAF) share of the total provincial budget, given that agricultural spending, excluding property tax rebate, slipped to 8/10ths of one percent of total provincial expenditures."

The 35 per cent increase in provincial tobacco tax, piled on top of the February federal increase, will put an untold number of Ontario's tobacco farmers out of business.

"The OFA has advised successive Treasurers that if you're going to tax tobacco products off the shelves, the government must provide some transitional support for tobacco farmers. This budget doesn't do that," said Mr. George.

Two issues raised in the budget speech that gave the OFA some cause for concern. Firstly, the Treasurer reiterated the government's labor reform agenda. "OFA and Ontario farm organizations intend to keep a very close watch on government initiatives in this area to ensure that the farm community can live with any changes that are proposed," said Mr. George.

Second, the Treasurer has asked the Fair Tax Commission for

an opinion on a land speculation tax. "We hope a land speculation tax won't be considered in isolation from fair property taxes generally."

"Finally, we encourage the government to quickly complete a federal-provincial agreement on training that would allow the province to enter into a partnership with the farmers of Ontario in funding the Ontario Agricultural Training Institute (OATI)," Mr. George concluded.

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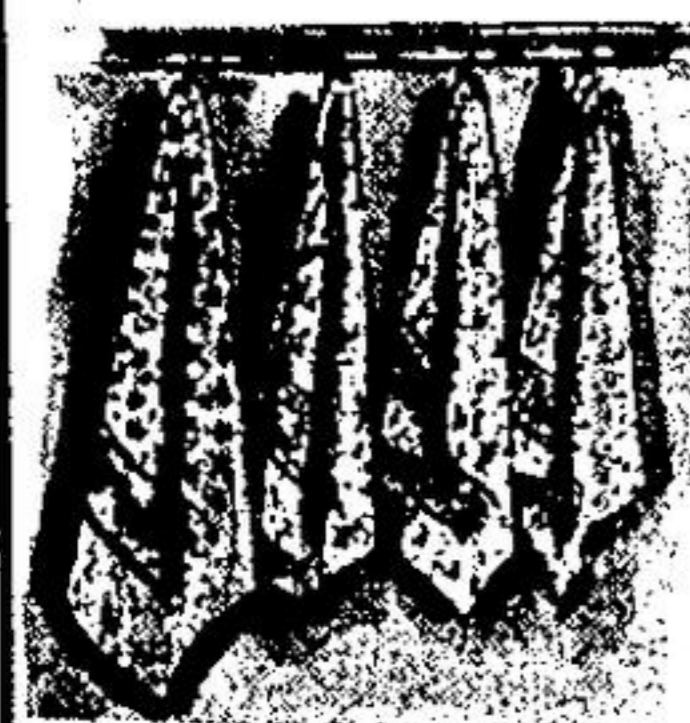
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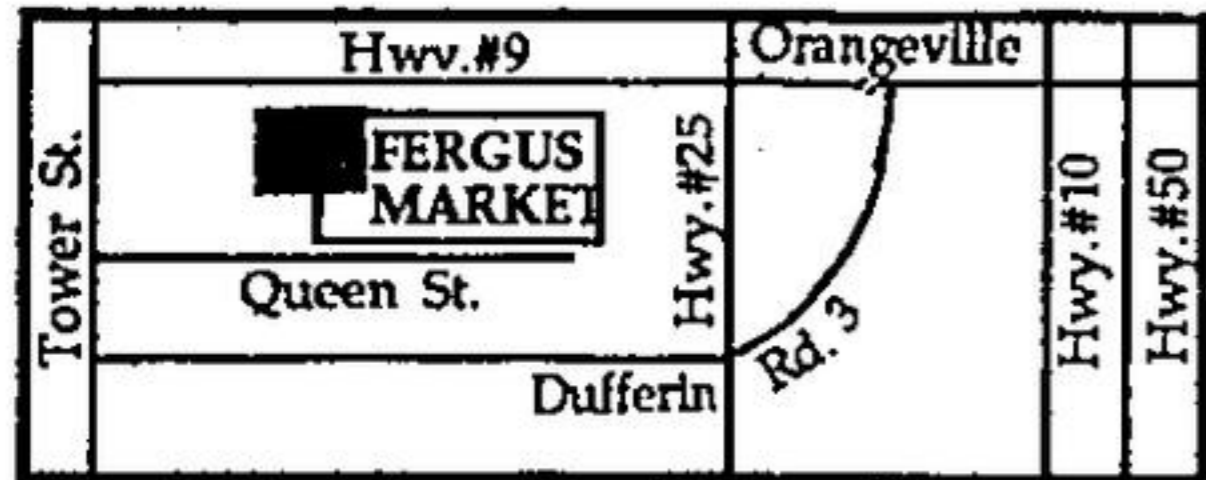
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