

Farm debate

From “satanic” genetically modified food, to fighting urban sprawl, to the gun registry and to farm management risk – three of the five Wellington-Halton Hills candidates in Monday’s federal election debated agriculture issues at an all-candidates meeting last Tuesday.

Sponsored by the 400-member Halton Federation of Agriculture, a disappointing crowd of approximately 20 people attended the meeting at the Acton Town Hall Centre that featured Conservative incumbent MP Michel Chong, Liberal candidate Barry Peters and Green Party hopeful Brent Bouteiller.

Bert Andrews, owner of Andrews Scenic Acres, asked what the candidates would do to help farmers deal with risk management.

Liberal candidate Peters said that farmers face so many things they can’t control, that the Liberal Party would protect them with a national food policy, and a Clean Slate program which would review all programs from the farm up, not from Ottawa down. “We would

also restore AgriFlex to its original mission of offering reasonably flexible packages that provide you with predictable, stable income during those tough times.”

The Green’s Bouteiller agreed that risk management is very important to protect farmers from fluctuations in the market during a bad season. “We need to make sure our farmers are staying on their farms ... and we need to support strong local economies to make sure that people have access to local food...” Bouteiller said.

Chong said he supports the government’s risk management proposals. “The Federal government should volunteer to transfer a greater amount of Federal subsidy dollars down to the province of Ontario in order to reflect a degree of share of national agricultural production...”

Asked by Don Parker how they would prevent Monsanto from doing any more of its “satanic” business with genetically-modified food, Chong touted the environmental benefits that genetically-modified crops have had, and that the government should proceed



TREE TOPPLED: This 150-foot tree – no one is sure what kind it is – came down on the front lawn of a Churchill Road north home with a “thump” during last Tuesday’s storm. A few broken branches landed on the roof, but there was no other damage as the homeowner had moved his wife’s car as the winds picked up.

– Frances Niblock photo

cautiously with genetically-modified farm animals.

Peters said they must be sure that any products in the market place are safe and meet quality standards and are beneficial to the environment and not do any harm.

Bouteiller said the genetically modified crops available today are not of benefit to anyone and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is not doing a good job.

On the issue of genetically-modified crops, the candidates said:

Chong: “If we were,

as North Americans, to ban genetically-modified crops, this planet would undergo a severe and mass starvation. The fact is, that thanks to the advances in genetics, crop production across North America has increased substantially...”

Peters: “We’re going to ban experimentation with planting and promotion of new GE crops, and were going to implement the Cartahenya protocol which requires adoption of new products to be guided by the precautionary principle.”

Bouteiller: “I don’t

believe that genetically-altered crops that are being offered today are of any real benefit to any of us...these companies don’t know what they’re doing when it comes to gene modification and should not be allowed to do so.”

Asked how they would control urban sprawl, which drives farmers off their land, the candidates said:

Chong: Government needs to continue to improve farm incomes, farm operating incomes, so farmers have money to put aside for their retirement.

There’s no farming if there is no farmland.”

Bouteiller: “...I have been in favour of the Greenbelt legislation and the Places to Grow...because those documents clearly state that we need to stop growing beyond our borders.”

Peters: “(Farmers) look at their land as a retirement package, which is unfortunate because a lot of them would like to leave it to their children...we need to look at farm incomes to make sure they are stable ...so these farms are not being sold off to developers...”

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