

FARMING IN LARGELY URBAN REGION 'VERY DIFFICULT'

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ment with limited or no further family member to continue farming," said local farmer Robert McClure in a letter he penned to regional council on behalf of VOW. "Our farms are our business, our homes, our pensions, our retirement income, and our financial legacy to our children."

He noted that farming in the urban shadow is "very difficult," with challenges such as: heavy traffic and narrow roads not being compatible with farm equipment, water shortages from wells running dry, municipal and environmental restrictions, and a lack of supportive agricultural infrastructure.

"The farming infrastructure like machinery dealers, feed stores, veterinary services, cattle breeders — they have all left (Halton), and you can't convince any of them to come back," said McClure, noting some farmers who want to continue are also moving out to more agriculturally focused areas of the province.

"The next generation of prospective farmers have limited opportunities to build successful, sustainable farming operations in Halton Region."

The group's message comes as a contrast to the one being put forth by citizens' coalition Stop Sprawl Halton (SSH), which has supporters throughout the region who are fighting to preserve farmland and promote growth within existing urban boundaries.

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— local farmer Robert McClure

Among SSH's key arguments are that: Halton's growth can be accommodated on the thousands of acres that have already been approved for development, planners should focus more on increasing density within the current urban boundary, and designating farmland for growth runs against the climate emergencies declared by Halton and the four local municipalities.

Farmer Don Rowntree said while stopping sprawl and saving farms is a great idea, he contends that "regrettably, we're 30 years too late to preserve farmland for farming purposes."

He and wife Robin have a cattle farm in south Georgetown and also do hay and cash cropping. He echoed the concerns raised by McClure and explained that carrying on with day-to-day farm operations has become increasingly difficult in the face of nearby growth.

"Slow-moving tractors and (farming) implements are not welcomed by the majority of Halton residents," he said, noting a road he commonly used to take crops to a Caledon grain mill is now off limits due to a truck restriction.

"We have had to increase our liability insurance again — another added expense. City traffic and farm equipment do not mix."

With no family members to take over when they retire, Rowntree said that "selling our farms to an interested farmer is highly unlikely as there are so many other true farming areas in Ontario with higher yields and not all of our constraints."

The preferred growth concept put forth by Halton staff says an additional 5,238 acres are needed in Milton and Halton Hills for new community and employment lands to support growth targets prescribed by the province.

While regional council was originally set to vote on the matter Feb. 9, the decision has been rescheduled to a future meeting, with the February session now serving as a council workshop.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: Amidst an impending regional council vote on expanding Halton's urban boundaries and a growing push against that, we wanted to share how local farmers felt about the issue.

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