

Regions banding together to create viable Ag industry

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Halton Regional Chair Joyce Savoline noted that the funding from the province proves their support for farmers and the industry and she was clearly pleased to have been a part of the committee.

"For me, this plan says that now there are identified actions to how we are going to work together," said Savoline. "We'll work on them one by one, we're just going to go for it."

The 37-point road map, created over the last four years, acknowledges the industry's valuable economic contribution of \$1.3 billion in gross sales and approximately 35,000 jobs. In support of the plan, the provincial government has offered one-time funding of \$200,000 to each of the four regions.

Not only were economic contribu-

tions recognized, but Savoline pointed out that those in the industry make a heavy personal contribution as well.

"Farmers work probably double what any of us work in an ordinary week...we enjoy the hard work that they put into their day," said Savoline.

Although few specifics of the plan were discussed during the celebration, the plan was available in print and it reads as a blueprint for addressing issues in the areas of economic development, education and marketing, land use and accountability and responsibility.

The plan also outlines which organizations will be responsible for each of the action items and just how those actions will be implemented.

"The action plan that we are launching today outlines how we intend to preserve what we already have along with a strategy to grow the GTA agricultural and food sector for the future," said Dombrowsky.

For those representing the agriculture industry, there was a quiet optimism that the plan will help create some stability in the sector and as Dombrowsky suggested, even help it grow.

"It's a recognition that agriculture will still be here fifty years from now," said Peter Lambrick a director of the Halton Federation of Agriculture and spokesperson for the GTA Federations of Agriculture.

Harry Brander from the Ontario

Federation of Agriculture also indicated the plan appears to be good overall. He sees it as another tool and step in securing survival for farmers, but he knows the problems they're facing are complex.

"The plan gets at viability. If we can get that straightened out it will certainly help, but there are other issues," said Brander.

Trade, taxation, development and the cultural expectation of space that North Americans have come to expect were issues Brander suggested have an effect on farming.

He also expressed concerns about concepts such as agri-tourism and it's impact on the industry. Too many wineries, for instance and the market could become flooded, suggested Brander.

"I really wonder what is going to happen to the core farmer," he said.



PHOTO BY PETER C. MCCUSKER
Halton Region Chair Joyce Savoline with (left to right) David Lyons Peel Region Councillor Ward 2, Leona Dombrowsky Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and John Gerretsen, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing at the Dave Mason Farm.

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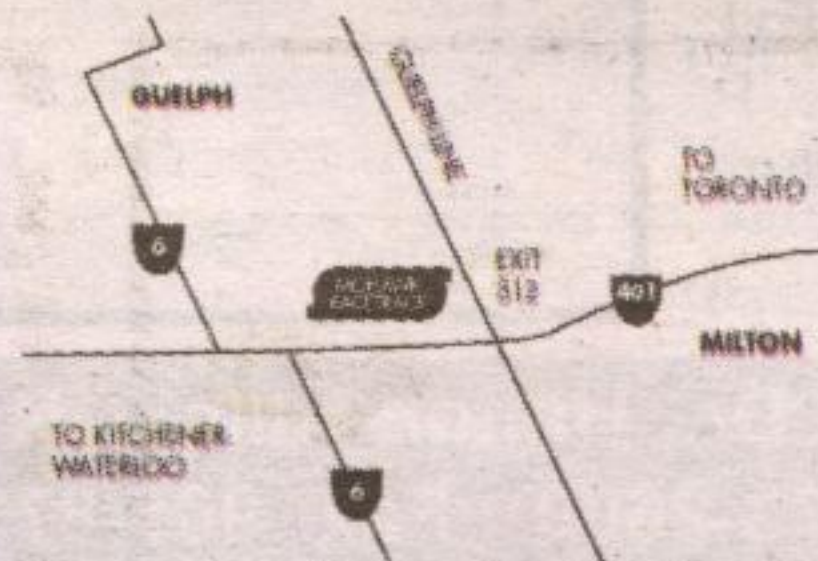
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