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Suburban progress gobbling up rural setting

By **KATHY YANCHUS**
 Special to *The Champion*

In south Halton, no doubt many long-time residents are frustrated, perhaps outraged at seemingly endless expansion. As Milton stands poised for growth, the same scenario could unfold here.

Straddling the two communities is a farm and those operating it know their days in the fields could be numbered.

Consider Norm and Sandy Biggar the next time you whiz up the four-lane Trafalgar Road just past its intersection with Dundas.

For six generations, the Biggar family has farmed in this area in relative obscurity, their grain crops and, previously, herds of livestock providing for us.

Now, however, their future is more uncertain than ever and their urban neighbours, eager to buy a piece of the suburbs, are oblivious to their plight.

The Biggars operate a cash crop farm that's starting to suffocate under the encroachment of development. The 1,500 acres they farm in north Oakville and south Milton are slowly being engulfed by houses and asphalt.

Farm Tour

It's a fact they are quite aware of, but not losing sleep over -- a sentiment they expressed during the recent 1999 Halton Farm Tour. The annual tour is sponsored by the Halton Agricultural Advisory Committee (HAAC) and designed as a means of focusing on the issues facing farmers.

"Farming gets in your blood. It's challenging," said Mr. Biggar, who has been in partnership with his father since 1975 on the farm that produces soybeans, grain corn, wheat, oats, barley and red clover seed.

It's a way of life not unaffected by technology, which has made farming more efficient, although not more predictable, explained Mr. Biggar.

"No two days are exactly the same even though the seasons repeat. Between Mother Nature and weather patterns, no two days are the same."

His wife Sandy was not raised on a farm, but married into it, and "when the men are on the land for 18 hours a day," everything else falls in her hands.

"You become very independent," she said.

Road rage

The past five years have seen a period of unprecedented change for the Biggars.

"One of the real challenges is 'road rage,'" said Mr. Biggar, who is constantly being given the one finger salute as he drives his combine at a snail's pace along the formerly placid, now congested, back roads.

"They think my sole purpose in life is to hold them up."

When harvesting and planting, "I can't just park it and wait. Everything is dictated by the weather."

The Biggars find it increasingly difficult to secure a long-term lease on their land. Whereas it used to be no problem successfully landing a five-year term, it's now tough even to snag a one-year lease.



Norm and Sandy Biggar wonder what will become of their rural lifestyle as the 1,500 acres they farm in south Milton is slowly being engulfed by houses and asphalt.

This makes it more difficult to plan crop rotation, he explained to the audience of decision-makers from all levels of government plus members of school boards, conservation authorities and Halton's Land Division Committee and Agricultural Advisory Committee.

"There's a reluctance on the part of landowners to give out long-term leases. When they want to pull the trigger, they don't want to be held up by some farmer and their land. It's not something we lose sleep over, but we're certainly aware."

"We realize we probably don't have much more than 10 years farming left here. We're not going to stay here and let the town surround us. It is farming and there's a way of life to it."

Future unknown

Whether one of his three daughters decide to pursue agriculture will influence their ultimate decision as to if they re-locate or retire early, he said.

Farming is not only a difficult life, but one that "wrecks havoc with your cash flow."

"Definitely within the next 15 to 20 years everything will be developed south of (Highways) 403/407" and more than likely up

to (Highway) 401, predicted Mr. Biggar.

Hopefully, he added, some farmland north of Hwy. 401 will be maintained for the future.

At one point, the Biggars felt the expansion of surrounding highways would help alleviate congestion around their farm, but with the addition of looming light posts came a new obstacle. The light adversely affected some acreage of soybeans that are day-length sensitive and don't realize seasons are shortening and it's time to ripen, said Mr. Biggar.

Orderly fashion

On the plus side, said Mr. Biggar, his hat goes off to Halton because of the orderly fashion in which it has developed.

The reason for the annual tour, which this year included Birdolm Holsteins in Georgetown, Hendervale Equestrian Complex in Burlington and Scotch Block Winery in Milton, is to give policy-makers a better understanding of the farmers' point of view, explained HAAC research assistant Kathy Kielt.

Hope is that in their decision-making they will realize the impact their decisions, particularly in the area of development, will have on the agricultural community and industry.

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COGECO 14 Programming Schedule — October 19th - October 25th, 1999

Tuesday, October 19th		Wednesday, October 20th		Thursday, October 21th		Sunday, October 24th		Monday, October 25th	
10am, 11am, 12pm	Yesterday's Plugged In!	10am, 11am, 12pm	Yesterday's Plugged In!	10am, 11am, 12pm	Yesterday's Plugged In!	4pm, 5pm, 6:30pm	Plugged In! - Week in Review	10am, 11am, 12pm	Yesterday's Plugged In!
5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm	Plugged In!	5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm	Plugged In!	5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm	Plugged In!	4:30pm	The Local Scene	5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm	Plugged In!
6:00pm	Seniors Showcase	6:00pm	Cable in the Classroom	6:00pm	The Local Scene	5:30pm	Seniors Showcase	6:00pm	The Art of Watercolour
7:00pm	Money Week	7:00pm	Swap Talk	7:00pm	The issue is...			7:00pm	Living On the Edge
8:00pm	Cable in the Classroom	8:00pm	Milton Council	8:00pm	Milton Fair Demo Derby			8:00pm	SportsZONE Live

Feature of the week: Join Wally Hunter & Rob Rublon on "Money Week" for a look at our financial world. Tuesday, 7pm.