

# Conference to address issue of disappearing farmland

Saving Ontario's disappearing farmland will be the focus of the upcoming Farmland Preservation Conference this summer.

Slated for June 28 and 29 at the University of Guelph, the conference — dubbed Preserving Farmland for Farmers — will bring together farmers, planners, academics, politicians and conservationists to explore options available to province-wide farmers.

Ontario Minister of Agriculture and Food Steve Peters is expected to speak about the provincial gov-

ernment's commitment to preserving Ontario's farmland.

Other speakers will include experts from the British Columbia Agricultural Land Reserve and the Quebec Agricultural Land Protection Regime, and Tom Daniels of the University of Pennsylvania, who'll speak about farmland preservation in the US.

"This is an important conference and an excellent opportunity for this government to respond to a positive public commitment to preserve Ontario's farmland, which

developed in the '70s, but was never effectively acted upon," said Melissa Watkins, research associate with the Farmland Preservation Research Project.

"The increasingly rapid loss of farmland and encroachment upon farming communities makes it imperative to develop a long-term plan and vision of how Ontario's farmland will be used in the future. Without an adequate land base of productive land for farming, the future of agriculture in Ontario could be doomed."

# Mayor questions if White Paper recommendations are overkill

• from CH on page 15

"Is this overkill? I question that as a lay person. Walkerton happened because of one or two negligent people not doing their job. I think yes (it is overkill)," Mr. Krantz said.

Conservation authorities will play a significant role in the plans outlined in the White Paper. Ontario's 36 conservation authorities will be divided into 16 regional authorities for the purposes of the source protection plans, said Bob Edmondson, director of watershed management services.

CH passed a recommendation that it partner with Hamilton Conservation Authority, with a third party deciding which authority will take the lead role.

In its recommendations, CH advised that in addition to safeguarding water supplies for drinking purposes, source protection plans should recognize the importance of preserving the ecological integrity of the watershed — the land that drains into a creek, river or stream. Mr. Edmondson said the cost for the new measures will be worth every penny.

"How can you put a value on life?" he asked, adding there's a responsibility to make sure a tragedy like the one in Walkerton doesn't happen again. "It fell between the cracks."

The first step is to have a proper map of ground water areas to pinpoint which areas might be vulnerable to contamination or depletion.

"It's an issue of quantity and quality," Mr. Edmondson said.

In a presentation to the board, Mr. Edmondson stressed the importance of monitoring water-taking, another issue addressed in the White Paper, and making sure what's taken — by farmers, water bottlers and golf courses, among others — is actually needed.

Charging for water-taking was also recommended. The White Paper is open for public comment until April 12, after which it will be put into legislation. Regulations resulting from the White Paper are expected to come in the fall, Mr. Edmondson said.

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