

# Champion Country

Covering Rural Halton & Wellington County



## Halton farmers join rally at Queen's Park

By **ROBIN DOWNTON-POIRIER**  
*Special to The Champion*

About 30 Halton farmers joined a group of nearly 8,000 at a rally at Queen's Park in Toronto Wednesday to express their united concerns about the beating they say Ontario farm operations are taking at the hands of the provincial and federal governments.

"The rally was very well organized and, although emotions were high and a little heated, it was relatively peaceful," said Halton Federation of Agriculture president John Opsteen, a chicken farmer on Second Line in Nassagaweya. "We had about 30 farmers from Halton that travelled on a bus arranged by the federation but there may have been others (from our area) that arranged their own transportation."

Farmers across Ontario are frustrated and angry about federal and provincial government policies they say are hurting their livelihood and pushing many into bankruptcy. Low commodity prices, nutrient management policies (manure handling), mad cow disease and greenbelt protection strategies are really damaging the farming industry, said Mr. Opsteen.

Referred to as the 'One Voice March', Wednesday's event was attended by farmers from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, the Christian Farmers and the National Farmers Union, but not only farmers attended the rally. Many they do business with did as well.

"Farming affects so many other businesses such as equipment dealers and feed businesses as well as many local rural businesses," said Mr. Opsteen. "We've got so much support from our communities."

The rally accomplished a great deal, according to Mr. Opsteen. He said they had "the chance to bring their issues to the table" and had their voices heard.

"It was also commendable that the agriculture minister wandered the crowds and listened to our concerns. He was very interested in what we had to say and it was a very positive rally. There are other groups that have similar concerns (such as the Rural Revolution, a more aggressive group that has been organizing blockades along the 401 corridor) but, in the end, we all have the same goals — to have farmers treated fairly and with respect."

### Passing time

Four-year-old Julia Wagner playfully covers her dad Dieter's eyes while the two wait in line for pancakes Saturday afternoon at Mountsberg Conservation Area. It was part of the Mapletowne event held in conjunction with the maple syrup season.

Photo by **GRAHAM PAINE**

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