

# Six Nations farmers refuse to sign lease agreement, farming for free

By Donna Duric  
Writer

Six Nations farmers are continuing to farm 280 acres of Burtch lands without rental payments being made to either the Six Nations Band Council or Confederacy.

Some members of the Six Nations Farmers Association (S.N.F.A.) have refused to sign a lease agreement with the Confederacy to farm the contested Burtch lands again this summer this summer.

Aaron Detlor, lawyer for the Haudenosaunee Development Institute, (H.D.I.) told the Confederacy last Saturday that farmers are refusing to sign

a lease with them even though the Confederacy directed farmers to work with the H.D.I. on a lease agreement last November. "As it stands now, the S.N.F.A. do not want to sign the lease," said Detlor. He said the H.D.I. has heard from some Six Nations farmers who were willing to rent land from the Confederacy but S.N.F.A. vice-president Ralph Sowden is not one of them.

"Why should we sign a lease when they don't own the land?" he said. "We just wanted a letter of support."

Detlor said farmers had an issue with the price of rent.

The Confederacy is offering the land for rent at \$50 an acre, ( \$14,000) which some farmers said was too much, said Detlor. Across the street from the Burtch lands, rent is going for \$150 an acre, he said.

The farmers had been paying \$25 an acre (\$7,000) in lease fees .

The S.N.F.A refused to sign leases with either political body instead taking over the Burtch lands and farming the lands at no charge.

No financial report on the acreage has been provided. The S.N.F.A. donated \$15,000 of the profits it earned on the lands to community groups last year.

Mohawk Chief Allen MacNaughton had negotiated the return of the Burtch lands to the Confederacy in exchange for barricades coming down during the 2006 land reclamation.

Last year, band council began claiming it, and not the Confederacy, had jurisdiction over the Burtch lands.

"The band council does not need to be involved in the Burtch lands and neither should the band council be included in the Burtch land talks," said Detlor. "It's coming back the way it was held in 1784 and this is the only body that has the jurisdiction and authority to make agreements

about who gets to use that land."

Sowden said the S.N.F.A. believes neither the Confederacy nor band council has jurisdiction over the Burtch property, which has been undergoing a cleanup and soil remediation since 2006. The S.N.F.A did have a five-year lease with the Confederacy from 2007 to 2011 and has not since renewed it. Last year, the S.N.F.A had no agreement with either the Confederacy or band council to farm the Burtch lands. The S.N.F.A. instead decided it would donate its profits to various community organizations, including all the longhouses on the ter-

ritory. Sowden said they'll be doing the same this year.

Sowden said farmers should be starting to plant this year's crops within the next month whether it has permission or not.

Confederacy Chiefs instructed the H.D.I. to continue trying to get a lease agreement signed with the S.N.F.A..

"A leasing arrangement is of significant importance so we recognize the Burtch lands come back to Six Nations people in the manner it was intended, which is the way it was held in 1784," said Detlor. "The band council didn't exist in 1784."