

HARVEST

...from Norm. This... collaborative... Mike Adler and Kathleen Griffin... the issue of development... the development boundary... Griffin and Adler spoke to those affected most by urban growth... the farmers. They also examined what's happened in the past... Hagerman Corners... Markham was once famous for its farmland... which is covered by concrete and front lawns today. This supplement is not an indictment of development. Griffin and Adler's aim was to put a mirror up to the issues surrounding agriculture and progress in the late 1990s. They wanted to find out if indeed we are heading for a Last Harvest in Markham.



ADLER GRIFFIN

Last Harvest

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Last Harvest

Development and Agriculture in Conflict

OUR COVER: Photographer Sjoerd Witteveen captured the image of a farmer dusting his nose in Markham. Within 20 years, the area will be a residential development.

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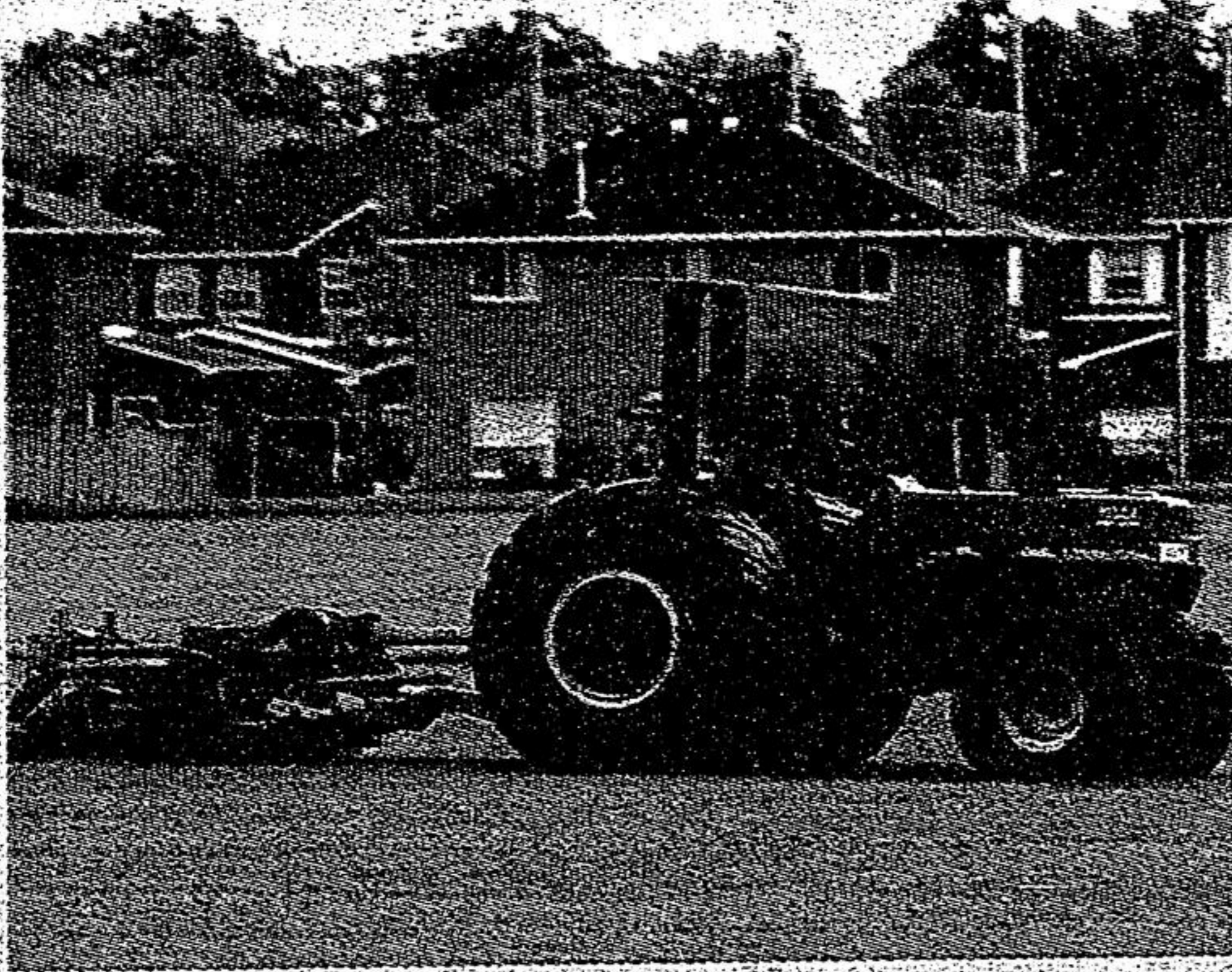
Going, going... gone?

• Markham's phenomenal growth is paving over prime agricultural land. In a generation, there may be none left to farm.

For more than 200 years, some of Canada's best farming land has supported Markham and its residents. But within a generation it could be gone. Urban sprawl is eating it up at a record rate. Within the next 15 years, close to 50,000 people will move to Markham, planners predict. They will all need a place to

live; housing, roads, services. They will live on what used to be the backbone of the community — prime agricultural land.

"The handwriting is on the wall," Howard Burkholder, 50, said in the office of the farm he leases at Elgin Mills Rd., east of Ninth Line. "Urbanization is pushing us off."



Farmland and development co-exist in an increasingly uneasy relationship.

Farming has changed

In one century, Markham farmers have gone from pouring whisky down an ox's throat to hooking cattle up to a computer.

Genetically altered seed for crops, high-tech machinery, artificial insemination and even corn driers have changed the way farmers do business.

"Thirty years ago the time to achieve corn maturity was much longer than it is today - and it can grow much farther north," said farmer Glen Brown. "Even cabs on tractors and air conditioning were huge improvements - you can work in the rain and you don't bake in the sun."

In the early part of this century, almost everything was done by hand. A farmworker's wage was \$1 a day, recalled Russ Reesor, 89, a retired farmer on Reesor Rd.

"Funny, too, everyone then was content," he said, sitting on porch of the house his grandfather built in 1857. "You aged well, ate good and wholesome food and were as strong as a horse."

Earlier, the land was cleared with oxen. Reesor's talkative uncle told him of a big pair he had seen, whose owner poured whisky down their throats, "and boy, did they pull!"

Artificial insemination has had a tremendous effect on cattle breeding.

"My dad had one bull for breeding. If that bull had bad legs, too bad," recalls Brown. "That would multiply quickly through the generations."

Today's farm animals have nutritionists and are tracked on computer to obtain maximum output. They thrive on half the feed they used to get because it's high octane.

"The cows are producing more than twice as much as they did," said Barry Little, a Steeles Ave. farmer, who has perhaps the oldest Jersey herd in Canada.

While Little's grandfather and his

neighbours took turns hauling milk to Locust Hill in time for the morning train, Little has seen the business go from a marketing agreement with one dairy to a marketing board quota system.

High-tech machinery has also made the job easier - but it doesn't come cheap.

A new tractor can cost \$130,000, and it's getting harder to find help you'd trust with such expensive equipment, said Little.

"In the old days, if you could handle a pitchfork, you'd be set - that sure has changed," he said.

But will better technology be enough as farmers are forced to colder and poorer land farther north? Agriculture adapts very easily, said Howard Burkholder. "You can always keep moving on, there is more land, but eventually you may run into a production problem."

Larry Schut of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs said he doesn't believe technology will make up for the lost land.

"Some people believe genetics will keep pace with the loss of land - but I'm not one of them. Despite advances we will always need somewhere to grow the crops," he said.

Little agrees. "I think I'll live to see the day when there's a big shift in technology in food growing or a shortage of food," he said.

Markham's recent growth has been tremendous. In 1981, its population was about 77,000. Now it's roughly 180,000 and by the year 2001, it's projected to be close to 215,000.

Land use change in Markham is similar to many rapidly growing urban centres in Ontario, especially those in the Golden Horseshoe area, said Larry Schut, of the resources and planning branch of Ontario's agriculture ministry.

Schut said 90 per cent of Markham's land is Class 1 and 2 and it ranks among the best in Canada.

"It is being reduced at a significant rate. And it's all expanding outwards into the best agricultural land in Canada, no ifs ands or buts," Schut said.

"When it's gone, it's gone, never to be retrieved in our province. There's no bank of agricultural land sitting waiting for us when we run out," he said.

The quality of its land made the old Markham Township and its villages famous as an agricultural centre. It brought the Berczy settlers, Pennsylvania Dutch families and others who arrived later, and Markham's farmers say it's producing more than ever.

"It's sad to see how fast the land has gone and to see good land, Class 1 land, the best in Canada, go to houses," said Arthur Schickedanz, a Markham farmer. "The rural aspect of life here in Markham is gone. As far as I'm

concerned, we're part of Toronto." Jim Baird, the director of planning for the Town of Markham, said the town has to manage development in order to insure logical, responsible growth.

"We can't close our eyes to it," he said. "We have to manage it. You don't find an outward sprawl of growth in Markham. We try to contain it in the most logical way possible, in the most appropriate locations."

In 1976, the town's official plan had 16th Ave. as a firm northern boundary for development. It lasted until 1993 when the town adopted Official Plan Amendment No. 5. It was approved by the region two years later.

"Before we adopted OPA 5, we had a municipal housing strategy, we conducted an urban land needs study for both employment and residential uses and we did the Natural Features Study," Baird said. "These studies formed the background for OPA 5 and had the effect of releasing additional land for future urban growth."

That turned out to be about 6,000 acres of prime farm land surrounding Markham.

And he pointed out, while the lands are zoned residential, the option to develop still belongs to the owners.

"We control and regulate development. We try to design development appropriately, recognizing the growth of urban expansion."

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Farmers see the end of tradition

As urban sprawl continues its unchecked route north, many of the generations-old Markham farms are directly in its path.

And most of farmers are tired of fighting it. They know it's inevitable. They accept it. They will continue as long as they can and then, defeat made sweeter by the value of their land, will leave Markham to begin a new life and a new tradition somewhere else. Somewhere farther north.

The Carrs have been farming 150 acres on the east side of Kennedy Rd., south of Elgin Mills, for three generations.

But it won't be four - Ruth Carr has sold the land. She didn't have much of a choice.

Her husband Albert passed away five years ago after a heart attack. Their two boys, Brian and Barry, both live on the land but only Brian has decided to become a farmer in the family tradition.

Ruth was brought up on her father's farm, less than a mile south on the west side of Kennedy, at Major Mackenzie.

"I milked cows until I was 72," she said with just a touch of well-earned pride. "I grew up on a farm, nobody needed to tell me how to milk a cow."

After Albert's death, Ruth and Brian ran the farm essentially by

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Class 1 Farmland

Class 1 land is the best agricultural land in Canada - and Markham is chock-full of it. More than 90 per cent of land in Markham is ranked Class 1 or 2, the best for growing common field crops like hay, oats, wheat, corn, and barley.

Class 1 means there are no limitations on the soil, which would include things like steep slopes, bedrock and poor drainage.

"Of course Class 1 land is also the best for development for the very same reasons," said Ray Valaitis, rural planner for the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

"In terms of sewers, pipes and roads, it's much cheaper to build on the best land than it is to fix drainage problems and blast rock. That costs developers a lot more money."

And Valaitis confirms what the farmers already know.

"The land in Markham is very productive. It is some of the best, if not the best, land in Ontario, indeed Canada, and it has been since the soil was created."