



STAFF PHOTOS/MIKE ADLER

Fewer farms, more developers in southern York Region

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expropriation many local farm families faced in the 1970s.

"We do not want to be enslaved into producing food, the cheapest food in the world, in perpetuity."

But it was men in blazers and suits — lawyers and government relations consultants — that did most of the talking as the farmers pressed provincial mediator David Crombie to drop a recommendation that the province enforce the easements even if Pickering lifts them.

Farmers who were provincial tenants paid \$4,000 to \$4,500 for most parcels on the Pickering side of the former Duffin Rouge Agricultural Preserve, an experiment in holding back the urban wave that was cancelled by the Tory government.

Mr. Crombie, facilitating a land swap to develop land within another mainly agricultural area in Pickering said the recommendation only reinforces current zoning for the preserve lands. The 5,000 acres sold, at prices kept low for intended agricultural use, included easements and the farmers knew it, added James McKellar, a business



Farmers 'welcome' provincial mediator David Crombie to meeting.

expert assisting Mr. Crombie. Many believe developers have secretly campaigned to rezone the protected land, now subject to a Pickering growth study. They want the easements kept and want others placed on about 2,500 acres of former preserve land in Markham.

"We the people own a wonderful strategic asset. Don't develop it," Markham farmer John Kay urged Mr. Crombie last week.

The future of the Markham parcels, officially for sale since 1996, is in limbo, but tenant farmers want the right to buy those lands too, and to sell them for development if need be.

Many, including Markham Mayor Don Cousens, had thought Mr. Crombie's recommendation to keep the preserve agricultural also included the Markham side.

Last week Mr. Crombie said it wasn't so, to Mr. Cousens's relief. "I'm not about to stand by quietly and allow a Pickering process to determine what happens in Markham," the mayor said.

Mr. Cousens said he wants Markham's preserve lands to stay agricultural after they are sold, but was uncertain whether easements or zoning is the best way to do that. "I've seen them both and I'm not sure which is really good."

Farming seems to have more of a future in Whitchurch-Stouffville, but it's changing there too. The local co-operative and implement dealers aren't as busy now that there are fewer farmers to the south, said Wayne Forsyth.

"A lot of it's development land now and speculators," said Mr. Forsyth, who recently sold part of his family's 10th Concession home farm for development so his father Floyd could retire.

'It's amazing how many farmers in this area have a second job.'

The family once had a dairy farm but now grows soybeans and winter wheat. Mr. Forsyth said he can sympathize with the cash-cropping Markham farmers hoping to sell at development prices.

"Farmers want their outs too," he said, though it's a shame so much land ends up in speculators' hands.

The days of the family farm are certainly gone in York Region, said Rodney King, who owns a Tim Hortons in Stouffville and cash-crops 1,000 acres from Uxbridge to Hwy. 7 in Markham. "It's amazing how many farmers in this area have a second job."

The economics of farming have changed for the worse in the last decade and the future looks no brighter, he said.

Oct 26 12 p.m. - 9 p.m.
Oct 27 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

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