

Aging farmers say they're out of cash

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will welcome busloads of farmers, all committed to making Queen's Park aware of what they say is a dire need.

Mr. Doner doesn't mince words when he points out that agriculture is facing a two-fold crisis.

"There's no money for spring planting and farmers are getting old," Mr. Doner said.

"Forget spring planting. Farmers are trying to figure out how to pay last year's (seed) bill. There's proof that the industry is shutting down. Young people are not going into farming. Who can blame them? The chances of making it are slim to none."

The owners of York Region's 800 working farms aren't getting any younger and the average age of the Canadian farmer is now 60.

Meanwhile, more than 70 per cent of agricultural lands in Ontario are owned by people 60-plus.

Attracting young people hinges on economic stability, York Region Federation of Agriculture spokesperson Terry O'Connor said.

"You're just not going to get the young people if you don't make it economically viable," Mr. O'Connor said.

The huge financial crisis is hitting all of agriculture.

"It's across all sectors and it's unprecedented in any-



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Gormley's John Doner protests lack of funding for farmers at Queens Park this week.

body's lifetime," Mr. Doner said.

Something has to be put in place if the return on a farmer's goods fall below the cost of production, Mr. O'Connor said. "That's what risk management is all about. Other countries have it. It's needed here."

York farmers are quick to point out the United States pay whatever it takes to make sure American citizens will get a safe and secure supply of food, while governments in Europe are also standing behind their producers.

In York Region, agricultural officials continue to call for a risk management program, especially for the grains and oil seeds sector of the industry.

"York Region has had the highest number of corn producers in Ontario. They're in desperate need," Mr. O'Connor said.

Farming in York Region is serious business, taking in dairy, beef, horse, pork, sheep, poultry, grain, fruit and vegetables and mixed.

With more than 300, King has the largest number of farms, while Aurora has the least with less than 25.

The income crisis has placed spring planting and the fate of rural businesses in jeopardy, Ontario Federation of Agriculture spokesperson Ron Bonnett said.

"Ontario and Canadian governments must re-establish the role of agriculture in Ontario's economic future,"

Mr. Bonnett said.

Decisions today will impact the future of Ontario's food security and safety as well as the maintenance of the important role of agriculture in Ontario's economy, including 650,000 jobs, he added.

Earlier this month, the province announced \$125 million in short-term aid for the farm sector.

The funding does not impress Unified Voice for Agriculture spokesperson Joe Hickson.

"It only addresses past shortfalls," Mr. Hickson said.

"It's for damage already incurred. There's no indication of what they are doing for crops about to be put in the ground."

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