

# Pay me fairly for crops or let me sell land: farmer

From page 1.

vocabulary.

There was no need for buzz words. His was a farmer's life.

In keeping with tradition, Mr. Holthrop planned to spend his old age where he spent his youth — on the farm.

Now approaching 60, Mr. Holthrop has good reason to re-think his plan.

Within the next 25 years, York Region's population is slated to increase from 920,000 to 1.5 million.

Farmers can't help but notice the 600,000 more people and wonder where they'll go.

Today's key agricultural questions are: will farm lands be sacrificed to accommodate people and will anyone be able to afford to farm in 2031?

Does it make any sense to build up the nutrient values and humus content of the soil when, in a decade or two, it might be stripped of top soil because of development?

Crop rotation today is often corn, wheat and then houses.

"That third rotation is permanent," Mr. Holthrop pointed out.

Most farmers are torn. Depressed pricing has knocked the wind out of the industry nationwide, resulting in many

farm bankruptcies.

Even though the industry has a \$95-billion impact on Canada, the farm's in serious trouble.

While many farmers predict the industry's problems will eventually threaten the availability and quality of our food, governments don't seem to be listening.

"If the agriculture problem can't be fixed, development could be an option for us," Mr. Holthrop said.

"But, with the Greenbelt (legislation) in place, why should I, as a farmer, have to take the hit on value? It's basically stealing our land.

"If people want the rabbits and other wildlife, why can't they, at least, pay me for what I'm producing? We, as a society, have to learn how to value our land and our food production and be prepared to pay for it. We're not asking for mega-bucks. Just let us make a living."

Of course, every level of government has its hand in the pie. Many of York Region's 1,000 farms, making up about 175,000 acres, are now protected under both the Greenbelt Act and the Oak Ridges Moraine Act.

Meanwhile, the provincial Places to Grow Act targets Markham, Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Newmarket as areas

where growth will be intensified during the next 25 years, Bryan Tuckey, the region's planning and development commissioner, said.

"The more we intensify, the less countryside and farmland will be used for housing," Mr. Tuckey stressed. "Development will be in compact, higher growth areas where there is existing development."

Still, neither Mr. Tuckey nor John Waller, the region's director of long-range planning, can guarantee farms, including those in Keswick, will not eventually be lost to development.

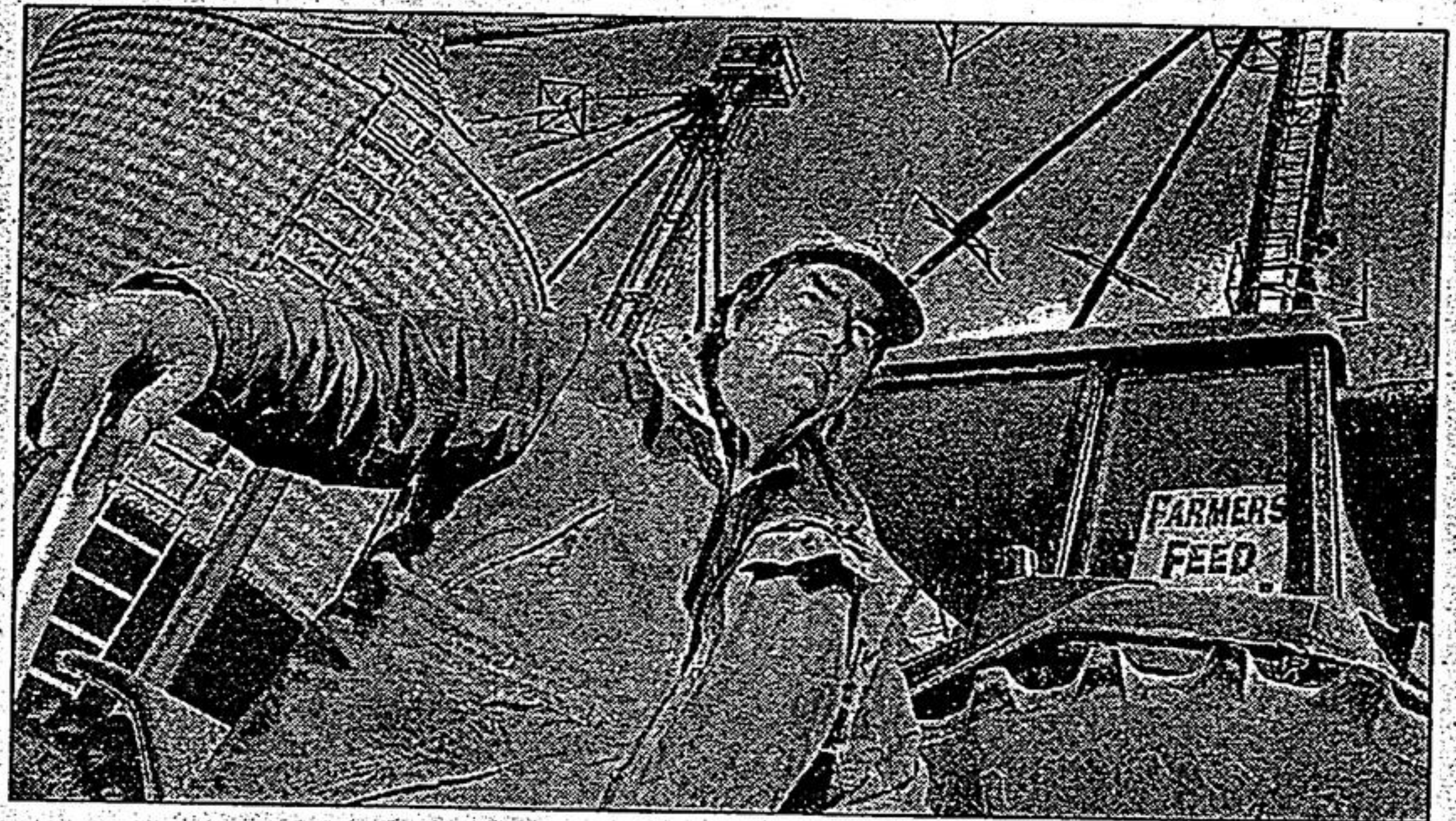
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Farm numbers are going down already.

In 1991, there were 1,210 farms in York Region, while in 2001, the figure dropped to 1,020.

Agriculture continues to be a critical part of York Region's economy, government officials maintain.

"Look at our horse industry alone," Mr. Waller said. "With about 20,000 horses on 1,500 (equestrian) farms, York Region has the highest concentration of horses in Ontario."



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

John Holthrop sees urban development closing in on his Georgina farm.

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