

Larger farms, fewer farmers in region

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or south wastes time and money and isn't good for the environment.

Several intersections, such as Bethesda Road and Tenth Line, are tough to get around for an 80-foot truck filled with wheat, corn or soybeans.

One or two of the grain trains travel Main Street each day during harvest time at the same speed as other traffic, Dr. O'Connor said.

"People want to buy a piece of property out in the country and then they start to complain about the smell and the tractors coming by," he said. "They don't appreciate farming as an industry."

"For every farm there are about seven businesses that spin off that," fourth-generation Whitchurch-Stouffville farmer Scott Paisley said.

Farmers have been criticized for using sprays and herbicides to raise their crops. But chemicals are strictly regulated, and



DR. TERRY O'CONNOR: Farm federation representative said industry deserves more respect.

they're expensive, too, farmers say. Herbicide use has been cut almost in half in recent years, Dr. O'Connor said.

"We have to abide by the toughest regulations in the world," he said.

As an area becomes more urbanized, prime farmland is often lost. Agriculture currently competes for land with urban development, recreational land uses, transportation corridors and aggregate extraction.

Between 1991 and 2001, 34,639 acres of farmland went out of production in York Region, said Margaret Walton-Roberts, assistant professor of geography and environmental studies at Wilfrid Laurier University in her 2003 study. The number of farms decreased by 25 per cent between 1986 and 2001, she said.

There are fewer than 800 farmers left in the region, and many of them have much larger farms than the previous generation. It's not uncommon for farmers to work 500 acres, including their own land and rented property. Some local farmers work 3,000 acres.

Farm acreage have been increasing during the past 20 to 30 years, Dr. O'Connor said, and fewer farms mean the community isn't seen as primarily a farming community anymore.

"There is no agricultural community anymore," Mr. Hulshof said. Newcomers from urban areas "don't understand the land like we do as farmers."

Mr. Hulshof, as a second-generation farmer, has

watched the infrastructure for agriculture dwindle. He farms around 240 acres in northern Whitchurch-Stouffville, milks an average of 40 cows and grows his own hay and other crops needed for the livestock. He began farming after graduating from university in 1972.

Fewer farms mean there

'The next generation (of farmers) coming on? There is no next generation.'

Scott Paisley, Whitchurch-Stouffville farmer

aren't as many farm suppliers now. Mr. Hulshof has fertilizer and feed shipped in, but can still buy seed locally. Where he could once buy equipment for his herd in Uxbridge, the closest dairy equipment supplier is now in Elmira.

A lot of the small dealers have disappeared, he said. And fewer young people want to farm, farmers said.

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