Implementation Procedures for the Agricultural System in Ontario’s Greater Golden Horseshoe

DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

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This document, the agricultural land base map, and the Agricultural System Portal are drafts for consultation. Input is welcome on how best to strengthen our agri-food sector by approaching agriculture as a functional system involving land use planning and economic development.
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Summary

The Greater Golden Horseshoe\(^1\) (GGH) has one of North America's most significant agri-food clusters. It is a key economic driver in the GGH, providing one in nine jobs (Statistics Canada, 2015). The GGH comprises only 3.5\% of Ontario but contains 70\% of its population and 42\% of the province’s best (Class 1) agricultural land based on the Canada Land Inventory (CLI).

Ontario is taking an innovative approach to planning for agriculture across the GGH, referred to throughout this document as the “Agricultural System approach.” This approach recognizes that farmland and clusters of agri-food infrastructure and services need to co-exist alongside rapidly-growing communities and infrastructure so deliberate planning must take place to enable the continued growth and prosperity of the agri-food sector.

This document is focused on the geographic areas covered by the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe and the Greenbelt Plan.

The Agricultural System approach will require significant collaboration between land use planners and economic developers, and certainly between different levels of government, communities and the agri-food sector. The agri-food sector will be a priority for economic development and will be considered when infrastructure, services and programs are planned.

The Agricultural System approach will improve farmland protection while creating the conditions under which the agri-food sector can prosper. The agricultural land base is comprised of prime agricultural areas, including specialty crop areas, and rural lands where farming and related uses are ongoing. While the province and municipalities have traditionally focused on protection of prime agricultural areas, the Agricultural System approach also recognizes that rural lands in agriculture help to create a continuous land base for agriculture, link prime agricultural areas, and may support elements of the agri-food network.

Following consultation, the province will issue the agricultural land base map for the GGH. This mapping will be refined by municipalities in conjunction with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs (MMA). Municipalities have unique and important roles to play in supporting and planning for the agri-food sector.

In addition, OMAFRA has prepared a web-based tool – the Agricultural System Portal – including a series of maps on the agri-food network. This tool may be used by municipalities and others to advance opportunities for the agri-food sector and to enable negative impacts on the Agricultural System to be assessed and avoided from new development.

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\(^1\) Words in italics are defined in the Provincial Policy Statement, Growth Plan, Greenbelt Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, and/or the Niagara Escarpment Plan.
Part A of this document explains the *Agricultural System* approach and describes the province’s process to identifying the agricultural land base. It also describes components of the *agri-food network*.

Part B of this document consists of implementation procedures for the *Agricultural System*. The implementation procedures address municipal refinement of the province’s agricultural land base map and on-going integration of land use planning and economic development to achieve *Agricultural System* objectives.

While the *Agricultural System* approach builds logically on traditional approaches to agricultural land use and economic development, it links the two to more holistically address agricultural viability.

**Steps to Implement an Agricultural System in the Greater Golden Horseshoe**
Part A: Context / Background
1 An Agricultural System in Ontario’s Greater Golden Horseshoe Area

1.1 Introduction

The context/background (Part A) and the implementation procedures (Part B) of this document will help municipalities, decision-makers, farmers and others interpret and implement the Agricultural System references and policies in the land use plans for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH) - the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (Growth Plan), Greenbelt Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan. They aim to complement, be consistent with and explain the intent of Agricultural System policies in the four plans. While the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) does not make reference to an Agriculture System, it aligns with PPS prime agricultural areas, rural lands, long term economic prosperity, and other policies.

This document focuses on the entire GGH (Figure 1). While the Niagara Escarpment Plan extends beyond the GGH, only the portion within the GGH is covered. It recognizes that the Agricultural System does not stop at the boundaries of the GGH and that linkages exist outside of this area.

This document explains:

- the Agricultural System concept, including its purpose and desired outcomes
- OMAFRA’s approach to identifying the agricultural land base for the GGH and the process for municipal refinements
- the role of the agri-food network in the Agricultural System
- how municipalities and others can support a thriving agri-food sector through integrated land use planning and economic development

1.2 The Significance of the Agri-Food Sector

Ontario’s GGH contains one of North America’s largest agri-food\(^2\) clusters and Canada’s most diverse and productive agricultural areas. With a climate moderated by proximity to the Great Lakes, fertile soils, and access to value chains and major markets, the GGH supports a diverse and dynamic agri-food sector, one of the GGH’s most significant economic sectors.

\(^2\) For the purpose of the agricultural system, “agri-food” includes the broad range of agricultural uses defined in the Provincial Policy Statement (e.g. growing of crops and/or raising of livestock food, fur or fibre) plus the value chain agriculture depends on (e.g. agricultural services, infrastructure, processors, distributors, primary processing).
Figure 1: The Greater Golden Horseshoe (Source: Government of Ontario, 2017)
The agri-food sector is a significant contributor to the province’s prosperity. The GGH accounts for approximately 65% of the total number of agri-food jobs in Ontario (Synthesis Agri-Food Network, 2016). Over one in nine people in both urban and rural parts of the GGH work in the agricultural, food and beverage sector. Awareness of the sector’s significance to the local, regional and provincial economy may help decision-makers and citizens embrace the Agricultural System concept.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A thriving agri-food sector brings many benefits to communities in the GGH e.g.,</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• providing 1 in 8.75 jobs in both rural and urban areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• contributing to a diverse and stable municipal tax base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• contributing to the culture and vitality of rural communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• providing valued and necessary rural and environmental services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• building rural character and conserving cultural heritage resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• producing over 200 agricultural commodities (the most diverse agricultural area in Canada) with associated market and business opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• making healthy, local food available</td>
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</table>

The GGH comprises only 3.5% of Ontario’s land area, but contains 42% of the province’s best (Class 1) farmland (OMAFRA, 2015). High quality farmland is the foundation of the sector. Current and future generations depend on it to supply food, fibre, fur and other bio-feedstock; support a thriving agri-food sector and rural communities; provide habitat and many other valued amenities; and adapt to a changing climate. Good quality soil and water are under significant pressure and must be protected to enable local food production, agri-food exports and the growing bioeconomy, and significantly contribute to jobs and economic prosperity in Ontario.

While there are some market advantages that come with the concentration of the agri-food sector in a densely populated area, pressure to fragment and convert prime agricultural areas to non-agricultural uses is ongoing. Reconciling the dual goals of managing growth while protecting valuable resources including agriculture is at the heart of the Growth Plan and the Greenbelt Plan.

**Growth Plan** There was approximately 64,000 hectares (158,000 acres) less land in agriculture in 2011 than in 2006 (Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture, 2012). Today, over 40% of the GGH remains available for agricultural use³ (OMAFRA, 2015). Implementation of the Agricultural System will help to ensure this remaining farmland is protected and is viable over the long term. The Growth Plan directs growth to built-up areas and to be compact in greenfield areas.

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³ Estimated by OMAFRA using data from the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation and Southern Ontario Land Resource Information System.
1.3 Development of the Agricultural System Concept

Agriculture and food are shaped by a complex web of relationships between people and the land. This web of relationships is a ‘system’ or a group of interconnected elements (Caldwell, 2015).

Agricultural systems and natural systems are dependent on and influence the climate, soil, air, biodiversity and water. *Agricultural Systems* also depend on human systems involving farmers and rural communities, agri-food businesses, global and local economies, government, land-use planning and infrastructure.

Agriculture and food are central to Ontarians’ quality of life, health, environment, cultural expression and heritage, jobs and economic prosperity. By recognizing agriculture as part of a system, the *Growth Plan* and the Greenbelt Plan create the framework for informing decision-making and integrating economic development and land use planning to promote the sector.

The PPS requires municipalities to protect *prime agricultural areas* for long-term agricultural use. To also address agricultural viability, a more integrated approach extending beyond land use planning is required.

In 1976, *A Strategy for Ontario Farmland* declared the province’s commitment to maintaining a permanent, secure and economically viable agricultural industry, not only as a producer of food, but as an important component of the economic base, a source of employment, and the basis of the rural community and the rural way of life (Government of Ontario, 1978). The strategy included measures to ensure the better land was kept for agriculture and programs to ensure the economic feasibility of agriculture. The Food Land Guidelines (1978) and the PPS (1997, 2005 and 2014) followed, with a focus on ensuring the land base was protected for agriculture.

In 2005, the *Greenbelt Plan* recognized the concept of an agricultural system. It referred to the agricultural system as a continuous and permanent land base necessary to support long-term agricultural production and economic activity. Along with *prime agricultural areas* and *specialty crop areas*, the Greenbelt Plan recognized that areas of on-going active agriculture and related activities were part of the agricultural system.

At around the time the Greenbelt was established, the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) Agricultural Action Committee was formed, bringing the local Federations of Agriculture together with municipal land use planners and economic developers to develop an action plan to achieve a thriving and integrated food and farming cluster in the GTA. In 2012, this evolved to a more encompassing 10-year *Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan*, led by an expanded Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (GHFFA). To advance the GGH as a leading food and farming cluster, the GHFFA, with the help of affected municipalities and OMAFRA, developed *agri-food asset mapping for the GGH*. This robust data portal and mapping tool covers the entire agri-food value chain in the GGH. It lays the foundation for an integrated, *Agricultural System* approach which recognizes the infrastructure, services and other assets the agri-food sector depends on.
In 2015, Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation commissioned a study entitled *The Agricultural System: Components, Linkages, and Rationale* to explore the *Agricultural System* concept. Later that year, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) and Environmental Defense, again with the help of the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, produced the report *Farmland at Risk*. It discussed the need for Ontario to do a better job of protecting farmland and helping farmers thrive in the GGH. It recommended that the province identify and map an *Agricultural System* for the GGH, including a productive land base and the full range of inputs and outputs from agriculture.

The report *Regional Agri-Food Strategies for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH)* (Planscape, 2015) identified options for protecting the land base while linking with tools, programs and incentives to enhance the viability of agriculture.

The Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance, with the support of 21 municipalities and OMAFRA, created robust *Agri-Food Asset Mapping for the GGH*. By combining many data sources and using GIS, they produced a database and mapping to help identify the strengths and weaknesses of existing agri-food assets, gaps and new opportunities. This is one of the data sources used in OMAFRA’s Agricultural System Portal.

To support the ten-year review of the *Growth Plan, Greenbelt Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan* and *Niagara Escarpment Plan*, the province appointed an *advisory panel*, led by David Crombie, to develop recommendations on how to amend and improve the plans. The panel’s recommendation 28 reads: “Building on the *Agricultural System* approach in the current *Greenbelt Plan*, work with municipalities, the agriculture sector and other stakeholders to provide policy direction and guidance towards the consistent identification, mapping and protection of an integrated *Agricultural System* across the GGH” (Advisory Panel on the Coordinated Review of the *Growth Plan*, the *Greenbelt Plan*, the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan* and the *Niagara Escarpment Plan*, 2016).

In addition to these provincial, GGH and Greenbelt initiatives, municipalities have completed agricultural economic impact studies and developed agricultural action plans that address both land use and economic development, e.g., Niagara (PlanScape, 2010), Northumberland (County of Northumberland, 2008) and Wellington (Millier, Dickinson, Blais, 2012).

Over the years, agricultural stakeholders also suggested that a systems approach be applied to agriculture, similar to that used for natural heritage. They suggested treating agriculture, natural heritage and water equitably and emphasized the need to recognize the synergies and overlapping geographies of these systems.

The *Agricultural System* references and policies in the provincial plans, these implementation procedures, OMAFRA’s agricultural land base map, and the agri-food mapping portal together provide a framework to protect farmland while supporting the viability of the agri-food sector.
1.4 Purpose and Outcomes

As noted, the 2005 Greenbelt Plan put forward the notion of an Agricultural System focused on the land base for agriculture. The updated plan takes a more holistic approach, expanding the focus beyond farmland protection to include measures that help create the conditions under which the agri-food sector can prosper. Applying an Agricultural System approach recognizes the importance of the agri-food sector to regional and provincial economies. It recognizes agri-food assets along the value chain and the services the agri-food sector needs to thrive. By working together, municipalities, economic developers, land use planners, farmers, agri-food businesses, and the province can reinforce and advance the GGH’s position as one of North America’s most significant agri-food clusters.

The desired outcomes of the Agricultural System approach are:

1. Active planning for agriculture and rural economic development based on reliable mapping, data and tools
2. Improved viability of agriculture and growth of the agri-food sector
3. Better protection of the agricultural land base
4. Increased consistency and certainty across municipalities
5. Reinforcement of the synergies between agricultural, natural heritage and water systems, as outlined in provincial policy
6. Collaboration between the province, municipalities, farmers and businesses with a common interest in a strong agri-food sector

1.5 Effect of the Implementation Procedures and Provincial Planning Context

The implementation procedures presented in Part B of this document are meant to complement, be consistent with, and explain the intent of Agricultural System references and policies in the Growth Plan, Greenbelt Plan, Niagara Escarpment Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan.

The GGH land use plans build upon the policy foundation provided by the PPS. As such, they should be read in conjunction with the PPS. The policies of the GGH plans take precedence over the policies of the PPS to the extent of any conflict, except where the relevant legislation provides otherwise. The only exception is where the conflict is between policies relating to the natural environment or human health. In that case, the direction that provides more protection to the natural environment or human health prevails.

PPS policy 2.3.2 guides planning authorities to utilize provincial guidelines when designating prime agricultural areas and specialty crop areas. Provincial guidelines would help planning authorities interpret provincial policy and reduce variability in protection. OMAFRA’s website includes FAQ Prime.
**Agricultural Areas.** These *Agricultural System* implementation procedures are intended to serve the purpose of provincial guidelines on designating *prime agricultural areas* in the GGH and may provide insights for areas beyond the GGH.

Many key provincial initiatives also link to *Agricultural Systems*. For example, the Ontario Climate Change Action Plan includes actions related to healthy soils and the carbon sequestration potential of agricultural lands. OMAFRA’s forthcoming soil strategy will address soil health and productivity for societal, economic and environmental needs.

The GGH is covered by a number of Treaties that provide for treaty rights. In addition, Indigenous communities may have Aboriginal rights within this area. OMAFRA recognizes the role that Indigenous peoples have in the growth and development of this region. Provincial policy will be implemented in a manner that is consistent with the recognition and affirmation of existing Aboriginal and treaty rights under section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.

Below is a brief summary of the plan policies that pertain to the *Agricultural System*. Please refer to the actual provincial land use plans for the full set of policies and definitions. The plans should be read in their entirety and in conjunction with all other applicable land use planning policy and law.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Agricultural System</strong> – The system mapped and issued by the Minister in accordance with this Plan, comprised of a group of inter-connected elements that collectively create a viable, thriving agricultural sector. It has two components:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. An agricultural land base comprised of <em>prime agricultural areas</em>, including <em>specialty crop areas</em>, and <em>rural lands</em> that together create a continuous productive land base for agriculture;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. An <em>agri-food network</em> which includes <em>infrastructure</em>, services and assets important to the viability of the agri-food sector.</td>
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**Agri-Food Network** – Within the *Agricultural System*, a network that includes elements important to the viability of the agri-food sector such as regional *infrastructure*; on-farm buildings and infrastructure; agricultural services, farm markets, distributors, and primary processing; and vibrant, agriculture-supportive communities.

_Growth Plan, 2017_
1.5.1 Growth Plan and Greenbelt Plan

While the Growth Plan focuses on growth management and the Greenbelt Plan on protecting the Agricultural System and natural heritage system, the two plans have similar Agricultural System policies. They

- Specify that the Province will identify an Agricultural System for the GGH that includes a continuous land base, comprised of prime agricultural areas including specialty crop areas, and rural lands, as well as a complementary agri-food network that supports long-term agricultural production and the economic viability of the agri-food sector.
- Require municipalities to update official plan mapping in accordance with provincial mapping of the agricultural land base and guidance to protect these areas for long-term use in agriculture.
- Require that municipalities avoid, minimize or mitigate impacts on the Agricultural System when considering new or expanded settlement areas, aggregate operations and infrastructure projects, and in some cases, other non-agricultural uses. In some cases, an agricultural impact assessment (AIA) or equivalent analysis as part of an Environmental Assessment for infrastructure will be required (see Section 3.2.3). Other studies may also be required.
- State that in prime agricultural areas, new aggregate operations, where possible, will maintain or improve connectivity of the Agricultural System.
- Require that land use compatibility be achieved, in particular in areas where agricultural uses and non-agricultural uses interface.
- Permit a variety of uses in prime agricultural areas (agricultural, agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses), aligned with the PPS and the Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Prime Agricultural Areas (OMAFRA, 2016).
- Require municipalities to implement strategies to support and enhance the Agricultural System when undertaking integrated planning for growth management, including goods movement and transportation planning.
- Encourage municipalities to support the long-term economic prosperity and viability of the agri-food sector, for example, through
  - local food initiatives (e.g. food hubs, procurement policies)
  - integration of agricultural economic development, infrastructure, goods movement and freight considerations with land use planning
  - preparing regional agri-food and economic development strategies
  - engaging with local farmers and agri-food experts (e.g. through agricultural advisory committees and liaison officers)
  - providing outreach and education opportunities

The Greenbelt Plan states that the Agricultural System, along with a natural heritage system, water resource systems and settlement areas, is part of the Protected Countryside. The Greenbelt Plan states that the natural heritage system is an overlay on top of the prime agricultural area and rural lands.
designations, not a designation in or of itself. The Growth Plan states that the natural heritage system is an overlay outside of settlement areas.

In addition, Growth Plan policies allow the full range of agricultural, agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses in natural heritage systems outside of natural heritage features (e.g. provincially significant wetlands) and key hydrologic features. In natural heritage features and key hydrologic features, expansions or alterations to existing buildings or structures for agricultural uses, agriculture-related uses and on-farm diversified uses may be permitted subject to conditions. The Greenbelt Plan contains similar provisions.

A natural heritage evaluation or hydrologic evaluation (commonly referred to as an Environmental Impact Study) is not required for new or expanded agricultural buildings and structures in lands adjacent to natural heritage features and key hydrologic features provided a 30 metre buffer is maintained from the feature (e.g. wetland, forest). In the Niagara specialty crop area, minimum setbacks of 15 metres may be permitted from permanent or intermittent streams where the stream also functions as an agricultural swale, roadside ditch or municipal drain, as determined through provincially approved mapping.

Both the Greenbelt Plan and Growth Plan recognize that farms within the Agricultural System contain important natural heritage and hydrologic features and functions, as well as water resource systems. Good stewardship of farms benefits both the environment and agriculture. Policies in the Growth Plan and Greenbelt Plan recognize the complimentary nature of the three systems.

The plans also identify the need to protect cultural heritage resources, including built heritage, cultural heritage landscapes and archaeological resources. These cultural heritage resources may be located on farms and/or agri-food operations.
“The GGH contains a broad array of important hydrologic and natural heritage features and areas, a vibrant and diverse agricultural land base, irreplaceable cultural heritage resources, and valuable renewable and non-renewable resources. These lands, features and resources are essential for the long-term quality of life, economic prosperity, environmental health and ecological integrity of the region. They collectively provide essential ecosystem services, including water storage and filtration, cleaner air and habitats, and support pollinators, carbon storage, adaptation and resilience to climate change.

These valuable assets must be wisely protected and managed as part of planning for future growth. This is of particular importance in the fast-growing GGH, which supports some of the most diverse vegetation and wildlife in Canada, including the Niagara Escarpment (a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve) and the Oak Ridges Moraine - two of Ontario's most significant landforms...”

Section 4.1, Growth Plan, 2017

1.5.2 Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan

This is an ecologically and hydrologically-based plan that includes Agricultural System references to better protect prime agricultural areas and recognize the infrastructure, services and assets that support the viability of the agri-food sector. Prime agricultural areas are frequently found within the Countryside Area designation, but may also be located in Natural Core Areas and Natural Linkage Areas. To implement the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, prime agricultural areas and rural lands within the agricultural land base should be identified in accordance with the broader Agricultural System approach, recognizing both the agricultural land base and agri-food network components. Linkages to the Agricultural System outside of the Oak Ridges Moraine area should also be considered. The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan also recognizes the moraine’s important cultural heritage resources, and supports the identification, conservation, use and wise management of cultural heritage resources to support the social, economic and cultural well-being of all communities. Recognizing the cultural heritage value of agricultural areas supports the agricultural sector and provides sustainable benefits to all communities.

1.5.3 Niagara Escarpment Plan

This an ecologically-based plan implemented by the Niagara Escarpment Commission through a development control permit system in the plan area. This contrasts with the other three GGH plans
which are implemented through municipal official plans and zoning by-laws. The approach to implementing the *Agricultural System* in the *Niagara Escarpment Plan* area is similar to that outlined for the *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan*. Within the *Niagara Escarpment Plan* area, *prime agricultural areas* are frequently found within the *Escarpment Rural Area* designation, but portions of the *Escarpment Natural Area* and *Escarpment Protection Area* designations may also have *prime agricultural areas*.

In both *Escarpment Rural Areas* and *Escarpment Protection Areas*, the protection and maintenance of cultural heritage resources and their histories is identified as an objective along with protection of agricultural lands. Similar to the other provincial plans, the recognition of the cultural heritage value of agricultural areas can support the agricultural sector and provide sustainable benefits to all communities.

In the context of implementing the *Niagara Escarpment Plan*, it is important to understand that *prime agricultural areas* and *rural lands* within the agricultural land base in the *Niagara Escarpment Plan Area* should be identified in accordance with the broader *Agricultural System* once established, recognizing both the agricultural land base and the *agri-food network* components. Linkages to the *Agricultural System* outside of the *Niagara Escarpment Plan Area* should also be considered.

Given the unique approvals process under the *Niagara Escarpment Plan*, once the province’s *Agricultural System* implementation procedures and mapping are released, the *Niagara Escarpment Plan*’s policies may be updated through a plan amendment. It is anticipated that this amendment will include *Agricultural System* policies to align with other provincial plans and the PPS.

Appendix 1 provides plan policy references under main topics related to the *Agricultural System*. Appendix 1 is provided for convenience only and is not intended to be comprehensive.

### 1.6 Innovations in the Agricultural System Approach

The *Agricultural System* approach differs from conventional land use planning approaches for agriculture in Ontario in a few key ways:

1. It aims for continuity of protection of *prime agricultural areas* across the GGH using common nomenclature for land use designations
2. It recognizes the important role of *rural lands* in agriculture and supporting elements of the *agri-food network*
3. It reinforces the need to integrate agricultural viability considerations with farmland protection

At this time, protection of agricultural land varies across the GGH. Similar land may be designated *prime agricultural area* in one municipality and designated *rural lands* across the municipal boundary, even
when soils and other land use characteristics are comparable (Figure 2). While all planning decisions must be consistent with the PPS and conform with other applicable provincial land use plans, there may be differences in policy interpretation and application due to differing study methodologies and growth pressures from one municipality to another.

**Prime agricultural area**: means areas where prime agricultural lands predominate. This includes areas of prime agricultural lands and associated Canada Land Inventory Class 4 through 7 lands, and additional areas where there is a local concentration of farms which exhibit characteristics of ongoing agriculture. Prime agricultural areas may be identified by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food using guidelines developed by the Province as amended from time to time. A prime agricultural area may also be identified through an alternative agricultural land evaluation system approved by the Province.

**Prime agricultural land**: means specialty crop areas and/or Canada Land Inventory Class 1, 2, and 3 lands, as amended from time to time, in this order of priority for protection.

PPS, 2014

Consistent mapping of the agricultural land base and use of common nomenclature are needed to:

- ensure provincial agricultural resources are consistently protected for long-term agricultural use across municipal boundaries
- provide a strong basis for agricultural and rural land use designations, policies and planning decisions which impact agriculture
- direct non-agricultural uses away from prime agricultural areas wherever possible
- use a common approach across municipalities and land use plans in terms of farmland to be protected, avoidance of conflicting uses, permitted uses, and implementing other measures to enhance agricultural viability

During consultations as part of the Coordinated Plan Review, many stakeholders expressed the desire for additional assurance that farmland would be protected over the long term. They were concerned that historical losses of farmland were unsustainable. Agricultural stakeholders in particular, said they needed greater certainty that the land would remain in agriculture in order to make long-term business decisions.

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4 In areas covered by the Growth Plan, Greenbelt Plan and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, conformity with the plan is required.
Along with the goal of continuity of protection across the GGH, it is important to recognize how the PPS defines prime agricultural areas. Prime agricultural areas include specialty crop areas, CLI Classes 1 to 3 lands and associated Classes 4 through 7 lands, and additional areas with a local concentration of farms exhibiting characteristics of ongoing agriculture. This is broader than only prime agricultural lands (CLI Classes 1 to 3 lands) and may go beyond the areas municipalities have already identified.

Figure 2: Conventional vs. Agricultural System Approach (outside of the Greenbelt)

While protection of prime agricultural areas has been provincial policy since the 1970s, the Agricultural System approach broadens the land protection concept by recognizing the important role of rural lands in agricultural production and the agri-food network. Even if rural lands do not include prime agricultural land (i.e. CLI Classes 1 to 3 land), these lands may be used to grow crops or raise livestock. They may link prime agricultural areas into a more continuous land base and/or support assets that are part of the agri-food network. In essence, they are integral to a functional agricultural land base.

To consistently identify the agricultural land base across the GGH, the province has mapped the agricultural land base. The methodology OMAFRA used to do this is described in Section 2.1 and in the accompanying Agricultural System Mapping Method report (OMAFRA, 2017).

OMAFRA’s agricultural land base map will be refined during municipal comprehensive reviews based on additional information and important local context (Section 3.1). The province will support these refinement efforts by sharing data and providing guidance.
A key focus of the *Agricultural System* approach is agricultural viability. To help support the integration of agricultural viability with the agricultural land base, OMAFRA has mapped elements of the *agri-food network* and identified a range of information and tools that may be used to support the agri-food sector (Section 3.2). Municipalities and others can use the mapping and tools to identify existing agri-food clusters and assess the potential to develop new opportunities.
2 Provincial Identification of the Agricultural System

Provincial identification of the agricultural land base and the agri-food network is summarized in this section. Details can be found in OMAFRA’s Agricultural System Mapping Method document.

Throughout the process, OMAFRA consulted with stakeholders, municipalities, experts and leaders including economic developers, land use planners, farmers, agri-food businesses and environmental groups.

An in-depth explanation of the province’s mapping methodology is provided in the companion document Agricultural System Mapping Method (OMAFRA, 2017).

2.1 Agricultural Land Base

While protection of agricultural land has long been a provincial priority, different approaches have been used by municipalities over the years to identify and protect these lands.

OMAFRA has developed an agricultural land base map for the GGH. The following principles guided the process:

- use of consistent, rigorous and transparent methods across the entire study area
- use of the best available information appropriate for regional-scale analysis as a basis for land use designations and planning decisions
- recognition of the overlap and synergies between the natural heritage system, water resource systems and the Agricultural System and the need to protect and maintain the health of all three systems.

2.1.1 Existing Prime Agricultural Areas

Core elements of the agricultural land base include provincially identified specialty crop areas and municipally designated prime agricultural areas.

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5 This map is being consulted on and is subject to change.
2.1.1.1 Specialty Crop Areas
The PPS and other provincial plans require that specialty crop areas be given the highest priority for protection of all prime agricultural areas. Specialty crop areas are areas where crops are grown like tender fruit (e.g. peaches, cherries, plums), grapes, other fruit crops, vegetable crops, greenhouse crops, and crops from agriculturally-developed organic soil. Usually a combination of suitable soil, climate, specialized production skills, and capital investments enable successful specialty crop production.

Specialty crop areas are unique and their significance is assessed based on factors such as production diversity and concentration, agricultural investments, specific soil types, microclimate, infrastructure, and economic significance (e.g. jobs, tourism, agri-food businesses, tax dollars).

The Greenbelt Plan recognizes and delineates two specialty crop areas: the Niagara Tender Fruit and Grape Lands and the Holland Marsh. The boundaries of the specialty crop areas in the Greenbelt Plan cannot be refined by municipalities.

2.1.1.2 Existing Designated Prime Agricultural Areas
Traditionally, prime agricultural areas were designated by municipalities after completing studies and consultation. In many cases, provincial staff supported municipalities throughout this process.

Generally, upper- and single-tier municipalities lead the identification of prime agricultural areas in the municipality. Lower-tier municipalities then adopt the upper-tier mapping in their lower tier official plans. For the agricultural land base map, existing designated prime agricultural areas in upper- and single-tier official plans were mapped as prime agricultural areas. Most of the area shown in OMAFRA’s agricultural land base map as prime agricultural areas are already designated as such by municipalities.

2.1.2 Additional Prime Agricultural Areas

In addition to existing designated prime agricultural areas, the prime agricultural areas shown in OMAFRA’s agricultural land base map include additional lands identified by OMAFRA through its Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR) and other analysis.

2.1.2.1 Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR)
LEAR is a commonly-used tool in Ontario developed by OMAFRA to quantitatively assess the relative importance of lands for agriculture based on the inherent characteristics of the land and other factors affecting agricultural potential. LEARs are a starting point to identify prime agricultural areas. LEARs
are supplemented with additional analysis and field verification prior to designating prime agricultural areas.

Within the GGH, four of the 21 upper- and single-tier municipalities have undertaken LEARs within the past 12 years: City of Hamilton, Region of Halton, Region of Peel and Region of York (Figure 4). There are many commonalities between these LEAR studies, in part because they follow OMAFRA’s recommended assessment procedure. However, municipal LEARs vary as they frequently consider unique local circumstances and may interpret data slightly differently, resulting in designation differences. Even if there are local differences, official plan designations go through an approvals process that provides for consistency with provincial policy.

OMAFRA recently surveyed LEAR practitioners from across Ontario to learn from their experiences. It then developed a rigorous LEAR process to use across the entire GGH using consistent factors, datasets, and weightings. This was used to identify areas of agricultural potential using consistent criteria across the GGH.

While OMAFRA’s LEAR used consistent criteria across the GGH, municipal LEARs may add different data and field verification. Municipal LEARs may help to inform refinements to the agricultural land base mapping (Section 3.1.1).

There are two parts to a LEAR evaluation:

1. Land Evaluation (LE), which assesses inherent soil and climatic conditions for agriculture. OMAFRA’s CLI mapping is used to identify and compare the agricultural capability for common field crops.

2. Area Review (AR), which considers other factors important to agricultural potential such as fragmentation of the land base and how land is used.

Scores from the LE and AR components are weighted and combined to provide an overall LEAR score for each evaluation unit in the study area. The highest scoring evaluation units represent areas with the greatest agricultural potential. Additional analysis and criteria are involved in delineating prime agricultural areas, including mapping areas with high LEAR scores to identifiable boundaries (See Section 2.1.2.2 and OMAFRA’s Agricultural System Mapping Method document).
For the GGH LEAR, OMAFRA assigned 60% of the LEAR score to LE and 40% to AR factors. Like all municipal LEARs, greater weighting was given to the LE score because provincial policy emphasizes the need to recognize the inherent quality of the land for agriculture. The two AR factors used were: fragmentation of the land base and area in agricultural production. The GGH municipal LEARs also used these AR factors, but some used additional AR factors and/or different data sets for mapping.

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Use of these combined factors means that areas may still receive a high LEAR score even if there are a small number of non-agricultural uses and small residential lots because the area as a whole is predominantly in agriculture and the land base is relatively intact.
Once the total LEAR score for each evaluation unit in the study area was calculated, evaluation units with high, medium and low scores were grouped based on specific threshold scores arrived at through sensitivity analysis and consultation.

The LEAR mapping was then used to help identify prime agricultural areas (high LEAR scores) and rural lands (medium LEAR scores) within the agricultural land base.

**Principles for OMAFRA’s GGH LEAR:**

1. Alignment with provincial objectives and policies
2. Use of the most recent and robust data available for the entire study area
3. Factors are mutually exclusive to avoid double counting
4. The number of factors is limited to avoid diffusing the importance of each factor
5. Factors are well-reasoned and understandable to the public, agricultural stakeholders and decision-makers
6. The method addresses differences between municipalities
7. A balanced approach is used where the agricultural and natural heritage systems overlap

**2.1.2.2 Prime Agricultural Areas in the Agricultural Land Base**

As noted, prime agricultural areas are intended by provincial policy to incorporate areas where prime agricultural lands (CLI Classes 1 to 3) predominate plus other associated Classes 4 to 7 lands and additional areas where there is a local concentration of farms which exhibit characteristics of ongoing agriculture. OMAFRA identified the following as prime agricultural areas for the purposes of its agricultural land base mapping:

1. Areas already designated as prime agricultural areas in approved official plans
2. Parcels where the majority of evaluation units have a high LEAR score
3. Small areas of lower scoring lands that abut high scoring areas\(^7\)

These areas are combined to form the prime agricultural areas layer in OMAFRA’s agricultural land base map. Prime agricultural areas are a high priority for protection for long-term agricultural use.

While OMAFRA’s mapping is based on best available data and reasoned assumptions, like all models, it may not capture exceptions or unique local circumstances. This prime agricultural area mapping is intended to be reviewed and refined during municipal comprehensive review based on the methodology outlined in Section 3.1.

\(^7\) This is explained in *Agricultural System Mapping Method (OMAFRA, 2017)*
2.1.2.3 Candidate Areas for the Agricultural Land Base

The definition of the agricultural land base includes those rural lands, that together with prime agricultural areas, create a continuous productive land base for agriculture. Such rural lands are outside of settlement areas and prime agricultural areas and are used for agriculture, link prime agricultural areas, and/or support elements of the agri-food network. While some Agricultural System policies apply to rural lands within the agricultural land base, they are otherwise intended to be treated as rural lands are defined in the PPS, Growth Plan and Greenbelt Plan which allow for a wider range of uses than prime agricultural areas.

**Rural lands** are defined in the PPS as lands which are located outside of settlement areas and which are outside of prime agricultural areas.

For the purpose of the Agricultural System,

**Rural lands within the agricultural land base** are those rural lands where active agriculture and related uses are ongoing. The lands may be used for farming, link prime agricultural areas and may support elements of the agri-food network.

OMAFRA identified the following areas as candidate areas for the agricultural land base (either as prime agricultural areas or rural lands):

1. Areas used for agriculture based on Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada’s Annual Crop Inventory remote sensing
2. Areas with a medium LEAR score based on OMAFRA’s analysis. These areas are likely in agriculture or have good potential to support agriculture.

Areas numbers 1 and 2 are mapped in OMAFRA’s agricultural land base map as Candidate Areas for the Agricultural Land Base. There is flexibility for municipalities regarding whether or not to include these candidate areas as prime agricultural areas or rural lands within the agricultural land base. The options are discussed in Section 3.1.1.

Where municipalities choose to map rural lands within the agricultural land base, OMAFRA recommends that identifiable boundaries be used as with prime agricultural areas. This is discussed in Section 3.1.1.2.
Policy implications for rural lands within the agricultural land base:

- Municipalities are required to maintain and enhance the geographic continuity of the agricultural land base (including rural lands) and functional and economic connections to the agri-food network.
- Municipalities are encouraged to plan for the success of the agri-food sector, in part by recognizing and supporting the agri-food network, some of which may be located on rural lands.
- On lands within the agricultural land base, impacts to the Agricultural System from non-agricultural uses need to be avoided, minimized and mitigated. This includes rural lands within the agricultural land base.

(See policy references in Appendix 1)

2.1.2.4 Interactions Between the Natural Heritage System, Water Resource System and the Agricultural Land Base

Both the Greenbelt Plan and the Growth Plan speak to the fact that farms within the Agricultural System contain important natural heritage and hydrologic features and functions, and the good stewardship of these farms facilitates both environmental benefits and agricultural protection.

Farms often provide ecological goods and services, and natural heritage and water resource systems in turn provide benefits to farms. For example, wetlands help to store and replenish water supplies to streams and aquifers which are relied on for agriculture and provide habitat for pollinators that may enhance agricultural production.

When OMAFRA undertook the GGH LEAR and prepared the agricultural land base map, lands with natural heritage and hydrologic features and functions were included in the evaluation. This recognized that some lands within natural heritage and water resource systems are and will continue to be used for agriculture. It is important to identify large, contiguous prime agricultural areas, even where lands are crossed by wetlands or other significant features.

Under OMAFRA’s GGH LEAR, areas with extensive natural heritage features and areas received a lower LEAR score than lands in agricultural use because whether an area is used for agriculture is a LEAR factor. The greater the extent of natural heritage features and areas (or other non-agricultural use) in an area, the lower the LEAR score, and the less likely the area would be to be identified as a prime agricultural area.
2.2 Agri-Food Network

The second component of the Agricultural System is the agri-food network. It complements and supports the agricultural land base. The agri-food network includes the infrastructure, services and other agri-food assets that are needed to sustain agriculture and support the agri-food sector. OMAFRA’s Agricultural System Portal contains information on the agri-food network, covering the value chain from production through to primary processing.

The Greenbelt Plan and Growth Plan encourage municipalities to plan for the success of the agri-food sector, in part by recognizing and supporting the agri-food network. This may be done in a variety of ways, discussed in detail in Section 3.2.

The study area for the agri-food network was the entire GGH plus a one kilometer buffer beyond the GGH. The intent of the buffer is to reflect the functional Agricultural System which extends into adjoining municipalities. Where mapping was available provincially, it was included beyond the one kilometer buffer.

2.2.1 Network Elements

Agriculture depends on a complete value chain to thrive in the modern economy. The agri-food network includes but is not limited to the following elements:

- infrastructure such as
  - transportation infrastructure (e.g. roads, rails, ports, airfreight airports)
  - drainage systems
- regional agri-food assets and services
  - food and beverage processors (e.g. dairies, cheese plants, wineries, cideries, canners, biomass processors, abattoirs)\(^8\)
  - grain elevators
  - refrigerated warehousing and storage
  - livestock assets (e.g. auctions, meat plants, abattoirs)
  - agricultural research facilities
  - fresh produce terminals, food hubs, distributors, wholesalers, markets

\(^8\) While the agri-food network is intended to capture the value chain of agricultural commodities, for the purposes of this Agricultural System work, it stops at primary processing (e.g. granary, dairy, abattoir, winery) and does not extend to secondary processing further down the value chain (e.g. bakeries, frozen meal plants, beer and liquor stores, restaurants). While secondary processing is important to the value chain, it is beyond the scope of this Agricultural System work.
• agricultural inputs and services such as
  o mechanical services
  o equipment dealerships
  o feed mills
  o seed, fertilizer and feed suppliers
  o grading, packing and distribution facilities
  o custom operators
  o large animal veterinarians
  o crop and nutrient management consultants

• on-farm buildings/structures and infrastructure such as
  o barns
  o feed storage
  o grain dryers
  o maple syrup shacks and honey houses
  o tobacco kilns
  o aquaculture facilities
  o manure storage
  o climate-controlled growing and storage facilities
  o drainage and irrigation systems
  o on-farm biogas facilities
  o accommodations for full-time farm labour when the size and nature of the operation requires additional employment

• vibrant, agriculture-supportive communities

Many of these elements can be mapped for economic development purposes e.g. to map value chains and identify opportunities to create or grow clusters.

In addition to these agri-food network elements, infrastructure such as high-speed broadband internet, natural gas and electrical utilities are important to the growth and innovation of the sector and are part of the agri-food network.

Access to reliable broadband services is increasingly essential for businesses to monitor buildings and equipment, place orders, track performance, enhance efficiencies, market products, and access information on weather, sales, market opportunities, etc. Energy is required for heating, ventilation, feed systems, processing, lighting, motors, etc.

Elements of the agri-food network may be located in prime agricultural areas, on rural lands or in settlement areas. Urban or rural, these elements are all part of the agri-food network.
Vibrant, agriculture-supportive communities are communities that encourage businesses in the \textit{agri-food network} to establish in their communities. They may provide the sector with a workforce, trades people, customers and supplies, as well as social, health, financial, insurance, legal, agrology, veterinary, educational, research and technology services. While agriculture-supportive communities cannot be mapped in the same way that most other elements of the \textit{agri-food network} can, they are critical to the success of the sector.

Examples of vibrant, agriculture-supportive community initiatives that specifically target the agri-food sector for growth include:

- Durham Region: Durham Farm Connections (e.g. agricultural education and mobile educational exhibits); Durham Agricultural Strategy
- Haldimand County: Rural Business and Tourism Community Improvement Plan
- Halton Region: Agricultural Community Development Fund; Halton Agricultural Advisory Committee; Agricultural Liaison Officer
- Hamilton Port Authority: flour mill and grain terminal for exports
- Niagara-on-the-Lake: extension of municipal water to farms
- Northumberland County: integration of agri-food into most economic development activities; Ontario Agri-Food Venture Centre (OAFVC)\textsuperscript{9}; support for beverage farming\textsuperscript{10} (Figure 4).

\subsection*{2.2.2 Data Sources}

Information on the \textit{agri-food network} is available from OMAFRA’s Agricultural System Portal. Much of the data displayed in the maps originates from the Agri-Food Asset Mapping for the Greater Golden Horseshoe developed by the GHFFA. The GHFFA database, covering the entire GGH, was developed with the support of municipalities and OMAFRA. While OMAFRA’s mapping of the \textit{agri-food network} is accessible via a web portal, municipalities can access detailed data on the GGH directly from the GHFFA’s asset mapping.

The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) was used to classify agri-food assets within the GGH. OMAFRA identified and consulted on the specific components to include in the \textit{agri-food network} of the \textit{Agricultural System}.

\textsuperscript{9} OAFVC supports niche fresh fruit and vegetable value-added opportunities to provide second source revenues to farm operations. The facility provides niche food processing facility rental, refrigeration and freezer cold storage, training, research and development, batch testing, as well as pack, label and store products.

\textsuperscript{10} Northumberland County identified “beverage farming” as an economic development opportunity and began offering courses to attract and train new businesses. In addition, at the request of local hop growers, it added a hop pelletizer to the OAFVC, helping to fill a critical gap in the value chain.
OMAFRA used its own data to cover a one kilometer band beyond the GGH to recognize that functional supply chains extend beyond the GGH boundaries. Where mapping was available provincially, it was added to the Agricultural System Portal.

OMAFRA’s agri-food network mapping and the GHFFA’s asset mapping are starting points for municipalities and others seeking to become aware of current agri-food assets important to the viability of the sector. As noted, other elements should be considered such as availability of high-speed broadband, natural gas and 3-phase power. These may be mapped at the local level.

Figure 4: Example of an Agri-Food Value Chain from Growing the Crops to Primary Processing - from hops to beer (courtesy of Northumberland County)
2.2.3 Uses of Agri-Food Network Information

As discussed in Section 3.2, awareness of the *agri-food network* and its importance to the sector should inform economic development strategies, investment decisions, local food initiatives and AIAIs. When land use, infrastructure planning and economic development initiatives are aligned, the agricultural sector benefits.

Information on the *agri-food network* will enable municipalities to look beyond their own boundaries at existing clusters and cluster development opportunities with adjoining communities.

The GGH land use plans require AIAIs for *settlement area* boundary expansions, aggregate resources applications and major infrastructure projects in *prime agricultural areas*. AIAIs are encouraged on rural lands, with the exception of aggregate operations. The location of *agri-food network* assets needs to be considered when identifying how negative impacts on the *Agricultural System* can be avoided, minimized or mitigated. AIAI requirements are explained in more detail in section 3.2.

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**Figure 5**: Sample map, for illustration purposes only, created from select mapping layers in the [Agricultural System Portal](#).
Part B: Implementation Procedures
3 Implementation of Agricultural System Policies

Implementation of the Agricultural System policies of the GGH land use plans involves designation of prime agricultural areas and recognition of the role of rural lands within the agricultural land base. This is supplemented with the implementation of a range of planning and economic development tools to help the agri-food sector prosper. Designation and implementation processes are described in this section.

Through the implementation of the Agricultural System policies, municipalities have the opportunity to actively plan for agricultural and food systems. This means recognizing the importance of agriculture in decision-making and considering how a vibrant agri-food sector can be promoted over the long term through strategic municipal decisions. Municipal actions are not expected to fully address the challenges farmers face in a global marketplace. However, municipalities play a crucial role in protecting the land base for agriculture so that it can adapt and grow, promoting agricultural viability by preventing conflicting uses and enhancing services and infrastructure through the agri-food network.

Official Plan review is one of the most important opportunities to take a positive planning approach to agriculture, and is outlined in section 3.1. Just as importantly, the Agricultural System policies are implemented through economic development initiatives, asset management plans, and multi-regional collaborations, as described in section 3.2. By integrating economic development actions with a positive land use planning approach to agriculture, municipalities and the province can more successfully achieve the Agricultural System outcomes.

3.1 Official Plan Review

Municipalities in the GGH are required to bring their official plans into conformity with the provincial plans. The official plan review process involves comprehensively addressing multiple provincial interests such as agriculture, natural heritage, growth management and infrastructure.

The typical steps towards updating an official plan include:

- Studies are undertaken
- Advice is sought from stakeholders and advisory committees
- Land use schedules and policies are drafted
- The public is notified and consulted, and input considered
- Council makes a decision whether to adopt the new plan
- Council gives notice of adoption and sends plan to approval authority
- The approval authority makes a decision and gives notice of decision
More detail is available in the *Citizen’s Guide, Official Plans* (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2010).

Under Ontario’s One Window Planning System, within the GGH, upper- and single-tier municipal conformity exercises require MMA approval. OMAFRA’s rural planners comment on official plan mapping and agricultural policies in terms of consistency with the agricultural policies of the provincial plans and these implementation procedures. Where MMA is not the approval authority (e.g. for lower-tier official plans), OMAFRA can assist municipalities by providing input on agricultural studies and technical information.

Municipal comprehensive reviews may only be initiated by an upper- or single-tier municipality. Many aspects of conformity cannot be addressed by a lower-tier municipality unless work has already been undertaken by the upper-tier municipality (e.g. growth forecasts, mapping refinements).

### 3.1.1 Municipal Refinement of the Agricultural Land Base

While Section 2.1 of this document summarizes OMAFRA’s process for identifying the agricultural land base, this section focuses on municipal refinement of the agricultural land base mapping and its incorporation into official plans.

The *Growth Plan* and the *Greenbelt Plan* require municipalities to incorporate the agricultural land base into their official plans, subject to refinements. The *Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan* and *Niagara Escarpment Plan* refer to the *Agricultural System* and defer to the other GGH plans for implementation details.

OMAFRA and MMA will support municipalities as they undertake this refinement. OMAFRA will share detailed data to assist the process and will ask municipalities to share any updated *prime agricultural area* mapping, if changes were made since the 2015 mapping used in the draft agricultural land base map was created.

For some municipalities, particularly those with recent LEARs or other advanced agricultural land use analysis, the effort required for refinements may be minimal. Municipalities will analyze differences between their existing official plan schedules and OMAFRA’s agricultural land base map and work with OMAFRA to ensure consistent identification, mapping and protection based on provincial policy and these implementation procedures. The rationale for each area proposed for refinement should be documented based on provincial policy and these implementation procedures.
In some cases, refinements may closely reflect existing designated prime agricultural areas, with the possible addition of rural lands within the agricultural land base. In some cases, changes could focus primarily on cross-boundary discrepancies with neighbouring municipalities.

Municipalities that have not undertaken recent studies to identify their prime agricultural areas could rely more heavily on provincial mapping to identify prime agricultural areas, essentially adopting the prime agricultural area mapping in OMAFRA’s agricultural land base map after applying the refinement factors.

Alternatively, municipalities could choose to undertake additional studies to inform the refinement process including assessing how to address candidate areas for the agricultural land base. OMAFRA will provide advice and share data to assist with this process.

Consultation during official plan reviews is key to the success of the agricultural land base mapping process. To refine agricultural land base mapping, municipalities should consult with:

- a broad range of stakeholders who understand how Agricultural Systems function (e.g. agricultural, environmental, local food interests, Indigenous communities)
- adjoining upper- and lower-tier municipalities to ensure the agricultural land base is continuous and consistently identified across municipal boundaries
- OMAFRA, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and MMA

This should include agricultural advisory committees (where they exist) and representatives from local agri-food organizations who understand how Agricultural Systems function and functional linkages across municipal boundaries.
Figure 6 illustrates how refinements are to occur, in keeping with the descriptions to follow.

**Figure 6: Approach to refining the provincial Agricultural Land Base Map**

### 3.1.1.1 Prime Agricultural Areas

As noted, *specialty crop areas* identified in the agricultural land base map are not subject to refinement.

*Prime agricultural areas* designated in municipal official plans or identified by OMAFRA based on high LEAR scores are shown in OMAFRA’s agricultural land base map. These areas are core elements of the agricultural land base. These areas warrant a *prime agricultural area* designation unless recent studies (e.g. municipal LEAR or the equivalent) have been completed that demonstrate that existing designated areas are not *prime agricultural areas*. In general, OMAFRA’s agricultural land base map is to be used to augment existing *prime agricultural areas* to achieve a continuous, productive land base for agriculture.

In general, refinements to *prime agricultural areas* mapped in OMAFRA’s agricultural land base map are expected to be minor in nature, based on consistent mapping methods and specific refinement criteria. Minor refinements may be considered for the following:
• Extension of prime agricultural areas to identifiable boundaries (beyond what the province did to create the agricultural land base map)\textsuperscript{12}

• Systematic review of local data including municipal LEARs and unique local circumstances not found in other areas

• Recognition of large areas of existing, permitted non-agricultural land uses that could not be rehabilitated to agriculture (e.g. developed rural industrial park, aggregate extraction below the water table)

• Minor, technical adjustments (e.g. different geodatabase projections)

• Recognition of certain lands under other jurisdiction (e.g. Indigenous land, airports regulated by the federal government)

Municipal refinements to prime agricultural areas in the agricultural land base map should not be considered for the following:

• Refinements that do not align with the mapping principles for the agricultural land base listed in sections 1.6 and 2.1

• Refinements that would present significant discrepancies with provincial mapping or inconsistencies across municipal boundaries, unless the result is a higher degree of agricultural land protection than would have been achieved through consistency

• Refinements that would result in an overall reduction in prime agricultural areas compared to previous official plans in the same jurisdiction

• Refinements that exchange higher quality lands for lower quality lands

• Exclusion of small pockets of land in non-agricultural uses (e.g. severed lots, small commercial or industrial uses)

• Information presented in agricultural studies completed based on earlier provincial policies that do not adequately address current provincial policies.

\textsuperscript{12} For OMAFRA’s agricultural land base map, OMAFRA extended prime agricultural areas to property lines. Prime agricultural area boundaries should not divide individual parcels. Individual parcels should be included or excluded as a unit to be clear where prime agricultural policies apply. This helps to protect large, continuous areas and avoid scattered site-specific exceptions for non-agricultural uses. Municipalities should consider further extending prime agricultural areas to other identifiable boundaries such as roads, railways, large water bodies and settlement area boundaries. The following should not be used as identifiable boundaries: topographic features (e.g. cliffs), buildings, small creeks or drainage ditches or provincial plan boundaries.
Beyond *prime agricultural areas*, OMAFRA’s agricultural land base map labels certain areas “candidate areas for the agricultural land base.” Some of these lands may meet the definition of *prime agricultural areas* even if they did not receive a high LEAR score (i.e. they are associated with *prime agricultural land* or form a local concentration of farms which exhibit characteristics of on-going agriculture). If so, they could be added to the designated *prime agricultural area*.

Unlike the more prescriptive approach for refinements to the *prime agricultural areas* indicated on OMAFRA’s agricultural land base map, the process for candidate areas for the agricultural land base is flexible. Municipalities may wish to undertake further analysis and consult on candidate lands during *municipal comprehensive review* prior to classifying these lands. OMAFRA will provide advice and data to aid in municipal decision-making and municipalities will document the rationale for including or not including these areas within the agricultural land base.

### 3.1.1.2 Rural Lands

Certain areas have some characteristics of *prime agricultural areas* but require additional local interpretation to determine if they meet the definition of *prime agricultural areas*. Where these areas do not qualify as *prime agricultural areas*, they could still be considered *rural lands* within the agricultural land base play important roles in the *Agricultural System*. The following comprise *rural lands* within the agricultural land base if they support agriculture:

- lands that help to create a continuous, productive land base for agriculture:
  - areas with good agricultural potential (i.e. mapped in OMAFRA’s agricultural land base map as *prime agricultural areas* or candidate areas for the agricultural land base that have not been added to *prime agricultural areas* during municipal refinement)
  - areas in agricultural production (based on AAFC’s crop inventory maps)

In addition, areas that support elements of the *agri-food network* could be added to *rural lands* within the agricultural land base. OMAFRA’s Agricultural System Portal can be used to help municipalities identify qualifying lands.

*Rural lands* within the agricultural land base may be described in policy, identified in an information map or designated in a land use schedule. If the policy approach is used, all areas in agricultural production (as shown in AAFC’s crop inventory maps) could be defined as being *rural lands* within the agricultural land base. If a municipality opts to map *rural lands* within the agricultural land base, a more comprehensive assessment could be undertaken to identify lands, considering all of the components noted above. Section 2.1.2.3 identifies the policy implications for *rural lands* within the agricultural land base.

In general, areas not meeting the above criteria should be classified *rural lands* outside of the agricultural land base. *Rural lands*, whether within or outside of the agricultural land base, are addressed by the PPS and GGH plans’ *rural lands* policies. A wide variety of uses are permitted, including cemeteries, fairgrounds, campgrounds and recreation sites. This helps to keep non-agricultural uses out of *prime agricultural areas*.
3.1.1.3 Agricultural Land Base Refinements Related to Natural Heritage Features and Areas

In Growth Plan and Greenbelt Plan areas, plan policies require the natural heritage system to be mapped as an overlay outside of settlement areas. Natural heritage system and Agricultural System policies would both apply where they overlap. Within settlement areas of the Growth Plan, the natural heritage system is required to be a separate designation rather than an overlay.

Outside of settlement areas, natural heritage features and areas (e.g. provincially significant wetlands, not linkage areas) may be shown in official plans as an overlay or as separate natural heritage features and areas designation. If a separate designation is used for natural heritage features and areas, it is important to ensure that the natural heritage features and areas designation includes policies to prohibit non-agricultural uses, prevent lot creation and fragmentation and allow agricultural uses to continue. This will ensure that agriculture receives equivalent policy protection as in prime agricultural areas and that the natural heritage features and areas benefit from this protection.

The policy implications are outlined in Section 1.5.

3.1.2 Official Plan Designations

3.1.2.1 Nomenclature

To achieve consistency across municipalities within the GGH, it is recommended that common nomenclature be used for designations.

**Recommended Agricultural and Rural Nomenclature**

Within the agricultural land base: specialty crop areas, prime agricultural areas, and rural lands within the agricultural land base

Outside of the agricultural land base: rural lands

3.1.2.2 Designation Scenarios

There are different scenarios for implementing the agricultural land base through official plans, depending on the make-up of the municipality.

1. In municipalities where nearly all the area outside of settlement areas is prime agricultural area (based on the PPS’s broad definition), the entire area outside of settlement areas should be designated prime agricultural area. Municipalities that currently take this approach would
continue to do so e.g., Brant County and Haldimand County. In this case, the entire area beyond settlement areas would be within the agricultural land base.

2. In municipalities where the majority of land outside of settlement areas is in or supports agriculture, but some lands do so more substantially than others, designations could include prime agricultural areas and rural lands within the agricultural land base.

3. In municipalities with a more mixed landscape comprised of prime agricultural areas and different types of rural lands, only some of which support agriculture (e.g. Peterborough, Kawartha Lakes and Simcoe County), designations could include prime agricultural areas, rural lands within the agricultural land base and rural lands outside of the agricultural land base. (See Section 2.1.2.3 for policy implications).

As discussed, municipalities may opt to refer to rural lands within the agricultural land base in official plan policy rather than designate these lands in a land use schedule.

3.1.2.3 Existing and Future Site Specific Designations

As noted in Section 3.1.1.2, municipalities may refine the agricultural land base map where there are large areas of existing, permitted non-agricultural land uses that cannot be rehabilitated to agriculture (e.g. large, rural industrial park) or where provincial and municipal planning jurisdiction is restricted (e.g. airport). These areas may be shown in a different designation. Existing land uses that are capable of being rehabilitated back to agriculture should maintain their prime agricultural area designation.

While agricultural, agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses are permitted in prime agricultural areas, PPS policies 2.3.5 and 2.3.6 do not permit non-agricultural uses in prime agricultural areas except under limited circumstances. This is addressed in OMAFRA’s Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario’s Prime Agricultural Areas. The process involves the rigorous assessment of need, evaluation of alternative locations and mitigation of impacts on agriculture.

The provincial plans build on the PPS 2014. Non-agricultural uses are not permitted in prime agricultural areas in the Greenbelt Plan, except for a defined list of uses (e.g. infrastructure and existing uses). Like the PPS, the Growth Plan does not permit non-agricultural uses except under limited conditions. The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Niagara Escarpment Plan are also designed to protect environmental features and agriculture from non-agricultural uses.

In those rare circumstances where a limited non-agricultural use has been justified in a prime agricultural area as a site specific exception, that land is to remain part of the prime agricultural area, as described in the Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario’s Prime Agricultural Areas.
New site-specific removals of land from prime agricultural areas are not anticipated after the agricultural land base has been refined, with limited exceptions (e.g. settlement area expansion, subject to an AIA and other studies). Municipalities are required to provide the province with updated official plan schedules and information reflecting any refinements to the agricultural land base map.

### 3.1.2.4 Connection to Water Resources System

Unlike the provincially led process for identifying the Agricultural and Natural Heritage Systems, under the provincial plans, municipalities are required to identify and incorporate Water Resource Systems in official plans and will apply appropriate designations and policies to provide for the long-term protection, restoration or improvement of Water Resource Systems including key hydrologic features, key hydrologic areas and their functions within and between these features and areas. The Water Resource Systems will be informed by watershed planning and will build upon available information and mapping such as that derived from source protection planning under the Clean Water Act and through conformity with PPS 2014 policies which speak to the identification of Water Resource Systems.

The agri-food sector relies on water for such uses as irrigation and value-added processing. Agriculture in Ontario faces challenges similar to those of other North American jurisdictions because farming consumes large amounts of water while releasing nutrients and other contaminants to the water system. Agricultural and rural lands provide important vegetative cover that helps maintain our water resources system, including playing a major role in groundwater recharge and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Farmers and the agri-food sector play an important role in managing and conserving water and protecting the features, areas and functions within the Water Resource Systems.

### 3.1.3 Official Plan Policies

To conform with the Agricultural System policies of the GGH plans, new Agricultural System official plan policies will be developed by municipalities during municipal comprehensive review.

Official Plan policies are needed on the following, in conformity with the applicable provincial land use plans and the PPS:

- Protection of prime agricultural areas, including specialty crop areas, for long-term use in agriculture.
- The agricultural land base, including the need to maintain and improve the continuity of the agricultural land base and respect the important role of rural lands in the Agricultural System. This is partially achieved by identifying the agricultural land base, but also requires policies on avoidance of non-agricultural uses in prime agricultural areas. By avoiding, minimizing and
mitigating impacts to prime agricultural areas in the agricultural land base, planning authorities can maintain and improve the continuity of the agricultural land base.

- Permitted uses in prime agricultural areas and rural lands, consistent with the PPS and OMAFRA’s Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario’s Prime Agricultural Areas.
- Identifying when AIAs are required and what needs to be considered, consistent with provincial guidance on AIAs. This includes addressing non-agricultural uses in proximity to prime agricultural areas.
- Where settlement area expansions are being considered as part of a municipal comprehensive review, priority for expansion should be given to land outside of prime agricultural areas13.
- Strengthening the functional and economic connections between local elements of the Agricultural System and the broader Agricultural System of southern Ontario.
- The commitment to implement strategies to sustain and enhance the Agricultural System and the long-term prosperity and viability of the agri-food sector.
- The natural heritage system and mapping using the overlay approach over the agricultural land base.
- The water resource systems mapping and designations to provide for the long-term protection of key hydrologic features and key hydrologic areas and their functions.
- The land use schedule in the official plan that designates prime agricultural areas, including policies and mapping for rural lands within the agricultural land base, and rural lands outside of the agricultural land base, consistent with these implementation procedures.
- A reference to an appendix in the official plan, mapping in OMAFRA’s Agricultural System Portal or another approved source showing assets listed in section 2.2.1, which identifies (by listing and/or mapping) the critical assets, infrastructure and services in the agri-food network. It must be clear when an AIA would be required because of potential impacts to the agri-food network. Other maps and lists of the agri-food network may be useful for economic development purposes, either in the official plan or an accompanying economic development strategy.
- In addition to policies pertaining to the Agricultural System, policies on lot creation, minimum distance separation, permitted uses, and normal farm practices are needed to ensure agricultural activity is supported.

When considering new or expanded non-agricultural uses, municipalities must ensure there are insufficient opportunities for development within existing settlement areas, rural lands and lower priority agricultural lands within the prime agricultural area, in that order of priority. Where possible, non-agricultural uses should be directed outside the agricultural land base.

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13 Prior to considering settlement area expansions, refinements to the agricultural land base should be completed and site options evaluated via an AIA, amongst other requirements.
3.1.4 Final Agricultural Land Base Map

After municipal refinements have been made and included in adopted official plan schedules, the province will prepare a final agricultural land base map for the GGH. This map will incorporate the detailed, approved agricultural land base mapping adopted in municipal official plans across the GGH.

3.2 Toolbox for Implementing the Agricultural System

In addition to protecting the agricultural land base, a range of tools may be used to help the agri-food sector prosper. While many municipalities are already actively supporting the agri-food sector, they should continuously look for opportunities to make improvements.

In broad terms, municipalities can support a thriving agri-food sector by:

- Considering impacts on the agri-food sector when municipal decisions are made on investments, growth and infrastructure, and new programs, policies, by-laws and services.
- Undertaking economic development and planning to help the strengthen and grow the sector

3.2.1 Considering Agri-Food Impacts when Municipal Decisions are Made

The Growth Plan and the Greenbelt Plan require municipalities to consider opportunities to enhance the Agricultural System when undertaking growth management planning including goods movement and transportation planning.

Before municipal decisions are made on investments, future growth areas, infrastructure, etc., the impacts on the agri-food sector must be considered. Consultation with agricultural advisory committees and/or other local agri-food stakeholders would be helpful.

OMAFRA’s Agricultural System mapping portal can help inform decisions. For example, when infrastructure projects or settlement area expansions are proposed, this mapping can be used to identify crop production areas, livestock operations and elements of the agri-food network where adverse impacts should be avoided where possible, and where avoidance is not possible, this mapping can be used to assist with minimizing and mitigating adverse impacts. Road and bridge designs should factor in use by area farmers, ensuring large, slow-moving farm vehicles can move safely and efficiently.
Section 3.2.3 addresses AIAs and other planning tools that can be used to support the agri-food sector.

3.2.2 Agriculture Economic Development

Municipalities can actively foster competitiveness and innovation. This may be done for the agri-food sector through agricultural economic development. Traditional economic development principals and practices are tailored to focus on agriculture as a sector-specific strategy to influence the growth, well-being and quality of life in a community, create and retain jobs and increase the tax base. This could include: workforce development, retention and expansion of local agricultural production and agri-businesses, promotion and marketing, networking and capacity building, implementing supportive infrastructure, and reducing barriers that may restrain the entrepreneurial spirit of this sector.

The main steps in agriculture economic development are:

1. Preparing for agricultural economic development
2. Analyzing and planning for the agri-food sector
3. Implementing actions to support growth of the agri-food sector

OMAFRA’s Agriculture as an Economic Development Opportunity resource supports communities as they undertake these steps.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture also has several resources under Growing Agriculture in your Municipality that can support Agricultural System implementation:

- Guide to Support Agricultural Growth in Your Municipality
- Checklist to Support Agricultural Growth
- Agricultural Economic Development Initiatives
- Agriculture Funding Programs

3.2.2.1 Preparing for Agricultural Economic Development

When embarking on community-driven agriculture economic development, there are important considerations to ensure the community is prepared. These involve identifying key stakeholders and community leadership, recruiting a team and/or building staff support, communicating local strengths and opportunities, developing terms of reference to clarify roles and responsibilities, and identifying a vision and mission for agriculture economic development. These steps will be described in OMAFRA’s forthcoming Agriculture as an Economic Development Opportunity resource.
Identifying key stakeholders and champions is an important step. This may include representatives from general farm organizations, commodity groups, local agri-food businesses, farm fresh organizations, soil and crop associations, food policy organizations and municipal agriculture advisory committees. These stakeholders should cover a diverse cross-section of local agriculture to contribute insights and information, and to serve as champions for the overall process.

When working with the agri-food sector, it is often community members who identify the need for studies or initiatives. A community-based approach to economic development usually generates more support, sense of ownership and commitment than a municipally-driven or consultant-driven approach developed in isolation. Community volunteers can help to drive projects and also benefit from collaboration with government. Often they are provided with organizational support (e.g. administration, training) and recognition.

OMAFRA offers support for organizational development through an e-learning module and through its regional advisors. OMAFRA's regional advisors can help a municipality prepare for agriculture economic development based on their specific needs.

3.2.2.2 Analyzing and Planning for the Agri-Food Sector
Communities often recognize qualitatively that agriculture is a significant contributor to the local, regional and provincial economy. Measuring its significance and building a baseline of information can provide the evidence needed to garner support for new initiatives. It can also enable changes to be tracked over time as different measures are put in place.

Data analysis on the agri-food sector and plans or strategies for supporting the sector are often completed together. They may need to extend beyond municipal boundaries to capture functional agri-food clusters where they occur. Neighbouring municipalities may partner in such work, or at a minimum, be consulted.

Data may be assembled from the data sources listed in the text box. To achieve a general understanding of the sector, OMAFRA’s Agricultural System Portal would be a good starting point. Municipalities can access more detailed, geocoded business information from GHFFA’s agri-food asset mapping to create a database of agri-food assets in the community. Information may also be obtained directly from business owners within the agri-food sector via a Business Retention and Expansion (BR+E) approach, a community-based economic development program focused on supporting existing businesses. The primary goal of BR+E or a similar community consultation, is to have conversations across the agri-food network to understand where there are opportunities for expansion or growth, and where supports are needed to retain businesses.
Many municipalities have completed agriculture economic development studies, as have many regional organizations. For example, the GHFFA completed an *Agriculture Profile* study on the Golden Horseshoe based largely on the Census of Agriculture (PlanScape, 2014) and an *Analysis of Food and Farming Assets in the Greater Golden Horseshoe* using GHFFA’s agri-food asset mapping and OMAFRA’s Analyst tool (Synthesis, 2016).

Once data are collected, it should be summarized, and key observations on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats should be noted. Findings should be shared locally with decision-makers and stakeholders. This could be done through focus groups, agricultural profiles, info-graphics and presentations.

The next step is to identify strategic directions and priorities to maintain and grow the agri-food sector. These strategies build on the data collected, identifying how to act on the strengths and take advantage of opportunities. OMAFRA’s *Introduction to Strategic Planning Resource Manual* is a handy reference on developing a strategy. It provides a step-by-step process as well as resources and tools for leading groups through strategic planning. Depending on the strategic priorities of the municipality, there are different types of strategies that could be used.
Examples of Agri-Food Sector Specific Strategic Plans:

- Durham Region Agriculture Strategy 2013-2018
- Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan 2012 - 2021
- Halton Region – Rural Agriculture Strategy
- Kawartha Lakes Agricultural Action Plan

OMAFRA offers a range of programs, tools and resources to plan, implement, measure, assess and report on the progress of agriculture economic development. Detail is available below and on OMAFRA’s website.

**Business Retention & Expansion (BR+E)**

BR+E is an approach to economic development that focuses on nurturing existing businesses as key drivers of ongoing economic health and vitality in a community. Recognizing that the majority of new jobs created come from existing businesses, BR+E initiatives engage local business owners in a dialogue in order to understand the challenges businesses are facing and the opportunities they see on the horizon. A specialized survey exists for agriculture and local food. Where possible, strategies are developed to assist the agri-food business community in addressing those challenges and realizing opportunities for growth.

**Analyst**

Analyst is a web-based tool that provides data on regional economies and work forces. It helps economic development organizations better understand their regions and use evidence-based decision making to build strong regional economic strategies. Analyst combines multiple data sources e.g. Census, Canadian Business Patterns, employment and labour force surveys, Canadian Occupational Projection System, CANSIM Demographics and Postsecondary Student Information System Education Data. It can be used to identify regional strengths, conduct workforce analysis, conduct cluster analysis, business attraction and regional comparison/competitiveness analysis. Training on use of Analyst is available and advice and guidance may be obtained from OMAFRA specialists and advisors.

**Supply Chain Analysis (input-output analysis of the agri-food value chain)**

Asset mapping data could be analyzed by conducting an input-output analysis of the agri-food supply chain within identified clusters and considering the flow of capital from all sources (e.g. industries, income, government) throughout the regional economy to determine how much of an industry is export-oriented, and how its impact multiplies across the economy. This could lead to development of agri-food import replacement strategies and may inform agri-food investment attraction strategies. OMAFRA’s Analyst tool can be used for input-output modelling.
**Human Capital and Workforce Development**

Economic development strategies may need to consider human capital and workforce development. Local workforce planning and development boards, in partnership with industry, can develop agri-food labour force strategies that may include training and education including apprenticeships, engagement and retention of youth in the industry, identification of emerging careers in agri-food and agriculture technology, attraction of newcomers to the sector and working with industry for potential job fairs for the sector.

**Regional Agri-Food Strategies (RAFs)**

Planscape (2015) defines a RAFs as “a strategy for combining land use planning with economic development to deliver programs that will protect the Permanent Agricultural Land Base, create the circumstances required for agriculture to be sustainable, and link primary production and the larger agricultural system. RAFs must address agriculture as a business that requires both certainty and flexibility to thrive.”

### 3.2.2.3 Implementing Actions to Support Growth of the Agri-Food Sector

Analysis of the sector and the community’s strategic priorities lead to the identification of potential supportive initiatives. Understanding a community’s strategic priorities, working with stakeholder groups and understanding the capacity of that municipality to deliver these services will all be factors in assessing if these are a good fit. These activities support the agri-food sector by delivering on BR+E and other strategic planning recommendations. For example, this could include providing entrepreneur and business counselling, business incubators, mentorship programs, professional development, export and trade development, business networking, business recognition, and buy local programs. A selection of tools are described below. OMAFRA’s regional advisors can help municipalities identify which might be appropriate for their community.

In the Peterborough area, the Chamber of Commerce partnered with the Peterborough County Cattlemen’s Association to establish Kawartha Choice (now Kawartha Choice Farm Fresh) to promote buying local beef. This program grew to include a neighbouring municipality (City of Kawartha Lakes) and to create a successful branded buy-local campaign for the region.

**Entrepreneurship and New Farmer Business Counselling Program**

Business counselling refers to one-on-one business consulting services provided to owners/managers of a single business entity. The business could be an agri-food entity that is a new start-up or an existing business. Information provided to the client might include advice on financing, marketing, exporting, human resources, or any other functional area of the operation.
Business counselling resources for new farm businesses can be found in *Starting a Farm in Ontario*. The Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association also offers *Growing Your Farm Profits Workshops* to help entrepreneurs maximize their long-term business goals.

OMAFRA’s [website](https://www.omafra.gov.on.ca) provides information on developing agri-tourism operations and training on value-added agriculture is available through workshops such as OMAFRA’s *Exploring Value-Added Opportunities* and *Selling Food to Ontario*.

**Agri-Food Promotion and Tourism**

Agri-tourism initiatives may include seasonal tours, dinners, flavour trails and events. They may involve farms, markets, restaurants, wineries, cideries and other venues that profile local food. Hosting Ontario Farm Fresh workshops helps to promote agri-tourism. Municipalities may develop plans for destination tourism focused on agri-food experiences (e.g. Headwaters Horse Country).

Municipalities may consider initiatives that support access to local food and build awareness of agriculture through “buy local” maps and websites, directional road and farm gate signage and regional or local brand development. Municipalities may undertake these initiatives themselves or support local farm fresh organizations by distributing maps, developing websites, using social media, and funding summer students to conduct buy local activities.

**Headwaters Horse Country**, Ontario’s Centre of Equine Excellence, is a great example of municipalities working together to support an agricultural cluster. It involves a collaboration between Dufferin County, Caledon, Erin and King Township to promote the Headwaters region as Ontario’s premier equine cluster.

**Local Food Procurement**

Municipalities and public institutions may adopt local food procurement targets. Beside supporting local agriculture, these initiatives fit with Ontario’s Climate Change Action Plan in terms of greenhouse gas emission reductions and access to more local, healthy, affordable food choices. The [Association of Municipalities of Ontario](https://www.amao.ca) has a guide to best practises in local food for municipalities (Deloitte, 2013).
The City of Kawartha Lakes Food Charter identifies and communicates the community’s vision for the local food system. It was inspired by recommendations from the Regional Local Food BR+E project in Eastern Ontario. The Kawartha Lakes Food Coalition is implementing several activities related to food security, growth and sustainability of the production and processing sector, and achieving regulatory compliance.

Hamilton City Council has endorsed a 10 year food strategy that sets direction for resource allocation and decisions for how the City and community will address food issues.

Infrastructure to Support the Agri-Food Sector

As discussed, agri-food businesses depend on a variety of infrastructure including transportation assets such as bridges, roads, rail and ports; electricity; natural gas; broadband internet; water for irrigation, livestock and processing; and more. Investments into rural Ontario infrastructure can boost agri-food production, processing and distribution, while expanding the commercial and industrial tax base and creating jobs.

Municipalities should consider identifying infrastructure improvements needed to support the agri-food sector. They may also develop design guidelines for roads, bridges and traffic circles that allow for safe passage of large farm equipment. Municipalities could lead or support initiatives to increase access to natural gas, broadband and multi-modal transportation (e.g. rail or deep-water port). Regional agri-food strategies or BR+E studies may identify infrastructure priorities.

For example, the Eastern Ontario Local Food BR+E identified a need for additional food processing space for small and medium businesses. The collaborators involved in the BR+E responded by developing the Ontario Agri-Food Venture Centre.

Durham Region sheep and beef producers expressed a desire for a federal abattoir in the region. The Region’s economic development department worked with the Durham Region Cattlemen’s Association to secure funding to conduct both a feasibility study and later a business plan for a federal meat plant in the region. To date, a federal meat plant has not been developed but sheep producers in the region have enlisted an abattoir in York Region to meet the needs of a growing customer base.

Investment Attraction

Municipalities with high capacity economic development departments may engage in investment attraction activities related to the agri-food sector. Generating leads, attending trade shows where buyers and suppliers connect, and marketing local assets suited to a particular industry can help to attract potential investors. They may host familiarization tours to bring investors to specific properties or work with site selectors. The importance of having staff available to respond to questions on short notice cannot be underestimated. Engaging the province (i.e. OMAFRA and Ministry of Economic
Development and Growth) is recommended to help ensure provincial investment attraction specialists are aware of the assets, sector strengths and opportunities in their respective regions.

**Agricultural Economic Developer/Facilitator/Coordinator**

Some municipalities have dedicated staff with expertise and connections in agriculture, food, agri-tourism, bio-products and/or food processing in their portfolio. This gives entrepreneurs, local farmers, and agricultural advisory committees a point of entry into the municipality to explore new ideas, and learn about processes and resources.

Municipal councils and staff may also benefit from having an agricultural facilitator/coordinator on staff to consult with on policies and programs. Often these staff help to bridge the planning department, the building department, the clerk’s office, the tourism department and economic development department, helping agricultural interests navigate the municipal system and ensuring all departments are aware of local agricultural issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GGH municipalities with dedicated agricultural-focused economic development staff include:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Durham Region</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Halton Region</td>
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<tr>
<td>• City of Kawartha Lakes</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Region of Niagara</td>
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<td>• County of Northumberland</td>
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</table>

**Tax Assessment**

Eligible farm properties have their farmland and associated outbuildings placed in the farm property class. These are normally taxed at up to 25% of the municipal residential tax rate. Municipalities have the option of lowering the tax ratio below the 25% to reduce the tax burden on farmers. Options may also be considered for reducing tax assessment for value-added agriculture. Such incentives can help highlight farm-friendly municipalities within which to establish a farm or agri-food business.

**Events and Training**

Municipalities may want to consider linking with organizations to deliver events and training that would be of value to the local agri-food community. Agricultural advisory committees or commodity organizations could identify topics of interest.

Appendix 3 provides examples of education and training events to support the agri-food sector. Appendix 4 identifies potential groups that may provide organizational, developmental or financial support for agri-food sector training.
OMAFRA Dateline is an online calendar to share information on upcoming events, workshops, conferences and meetings. Events may be hosted by OMAFRA or other groups. Local media and agricultural organizations may also distribute information on training events.

Georgian College, in partnership with Simcoe County Economic Development, OMAFRA and the Agriculture Management Institute, delivered food entrepreneurship training to over 1000 individuals through five seminars and a two-day conference held in Barrie in March 2016. Many in attendance were farmers interested in adding value to the products they produced on the farm.

3.2.3 Planning for Agriculture

Below are examples of initiatives to support the agri-food sector falling under the land use planning realm.

Agricultural Advisory Committees

The Growth Plan encourages municipalities to establish agricultural advisory committees and consult with them on decisions that affect agriculture including growth management. The on-going involvement of agricultural advisory committees ensures farmers have a voice in the municipality. This is particularly important as the number of farmers declines and municipal councils may lack representation from farmers as elected officials.

Agricultural advisory committees can have planning and/or economic development as a priority. Many organize annual agriculture tours that host elected officials, senior municipal staff, building department staff, school board representatives, conservation authority representatives, health board staff, provincial staff, local media and others to provide exposure to local agriculture industry issues. Advisory committees are typically supported administratively by municipal staff who help to keep council informed on agricultural issues.

Within the Greater Golden Horseshoe, upper- and single-tier municipalities with agricultural advisory committees include Durham, Halidmand, Halton, Hamilton, Kawartha Lakes, Niagara, Northumberland, Peel, Peterborough, and York.

Agricultural Impact Assessments and Edge Planning

The Growth Plan and Greenbelt Plan may require AIAs for settlement area expansions, aggregate applications and infrastructure projects, as summarized in Table 2. To support these policies, OMAFRA is preparing AIA guidelines. AIAs will need to identify how to avoid, minimize and mitigate impacts on the Agricultural System. Impacts on both the agricultural land base and agri-food network are to be
considered. The Agricultural System Portal maps can be used to identify agriculture and elements of the agri-food network occurring in the area.

Farming close to urban areas can be challenging, with farmers facing trespass issues, having to move slow-moving farm machinery down roads designed for cars, lighting conflicts, and complaints about noise, dust or odour.

Edge planning addresses the interface between settlement areas and active farmland and aims to achieve compatibility between these two uses. Given the proximity of high quality farmland to areas of concentrated growth, edge planning is vital to agriculture in the GGH. Agriculture must be able to continue to change and grow.

London, ON uses edge planning to address the rural/urban interface of land between urban growth areas and the municipal boundary, including lands abutting Middlesex County. Development proposals within 300 metres of this interface are required by the official plan to provide for separation and buffering, and register development agreements identifying agricultural operations that could result in noise, odours, dust and other nuisances associated with farm practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prime agricultural areas</th>
<th>Infrastructure Projects (Growth Plan reference)</th>
<th>Settlement Area Expansions (Growth Plan reference)</th>
<th>Aggregate Applications (Growth Plan reference)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes (AIA or equivalent analysis as part of an Environmental Assessment) (S. 3.2.5.1(b))</td>
<td>Yes (S. 2.2.8.3(h)(j))</td>
<td>Yes (S. 4.2.8.3)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Rural lands within the agricultural land base</th>
<th>Infrastructure Projects (Growth Plan reference)</th>
<th>Settlement Area Expansions (Growth Plan reference)</th>
<th>Aggregate Applications (Growth Plan reference)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maybe if impacts to the agricultural systems (Growth Plan) (S. 3.2.5.1(c))</td>
<td>Yes, to confirm avoidance (S. 2.2.8.3(h)(j))</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<th>Rural lands</th>
<th>Infrastructure Projects (Growth Plan reference)</th>
<th>Settlement Area Expansions (Growth Plan reference)</th>
<th>Aggregate Applications (Growth Plan reference)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, to confirm avoidance of impacts to ag operations or agri-food network (S. 2.2.8.3(j))</td>
<td>No</td>
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**Table 1: When Agricultural Impact Assessments are Required**
In British Columbia, edge planning strategies include:

- defining edge planning areas on both the urban and agricultural sides of the boundary for the application of mitigation techniques
- developing communication tools such as brochures, signage, restrictive covenants, and websites to enhance public awareness
- amending and adopting by-laws that encourage more intensive land use with a strengthened land management regime along the edge.

(British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, 2009)

British Columbia requires edge planning in the interface between urban areas and the agricultural land reserve to ensure long term security for farming. The province of British Columbia has a comprehensive manual of best practices for edge planning on the urban side.

Diversification of Land Uses On- and Off-Farm

The PPS and the four GGH land use plans permit a wide range of uses in prime agricultural areas – agricultural, agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses. These uses are often present in the Agricultural System, making a positive contribution to the agricultural industry either directly or indirectly. They may result in new farm products or necessary and/or valued rural services. Details are available in OMAFRA’s Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario’s Prime Agricultural Areas.

Haldimand County’s Rural Business and Tourism Community Improvement Plan has a suite of financial incentives to encourage growth of existing businesses including value-added agriculture.

Community Improvement Plans

Ontario’s Planning Act gives municipalities the power to implement Community Improvement Plans as a vehicle for providing financial incentives (grants or loans) to private property owners to undertake physical improvements in areas that are designated within the municipal official plan. This tool has traditionally been used in urban areas but a growing number of municipalities in Ontario are directing CIPs to agricultural and rural areas, such as in Niagara, Norfolk, Haldimand and Halton Hills. MMA has a handbook on community improvement plans.
3.2.4 Other Measures to Support the Agri-Food Sector

Other measures not easily categorized into economic development or land use planning could be implemented to help support the Agricultural System, as long as they do not conflict with any policies in the provincial plans or legislation, e.g:

Access to Farmland

Access to land for farming can be a significant challenge, especially for beginning farmers. There are several opportunities to facilitate this and examples to draw on, whether by linking prospective farmers up with landowners, leasing public land to farmers, or using agricultural easements and land trusts.

FarmLink.net connects farm seekers, farmers and landowners. This on-line match-making service posts information on farm seekers, their vision, experience and skills. It also identifies farm businesses seeking farmers to run or partner with in running their farms. Additionally, FarmLink supports broader municipal efforts to attract farmers to their community.

Municipalities, provincial and federal agencies often have land holdings that could be used for farming or urban agriculture. For example, Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA) has a Sustainable Near-Urban Agriculture Policy and 405 hectares (1001 acres) in agriculture. Diverse farming models are used and crops grown to enable food to be grown close to urban areas.

Agricultural easements and land trusts also have a role in protecting farmland and making land available for agricultural use, particularly in strategic locations. Information is available from the Ontario Farmland Trust.

Education

Formal and informal education is important for the professional development within the agri-food sector and for economic developers and planners.

At the elementary and high school level, agriculture education is provided by a charitable organization called AgScape. This is Ontario’s agriculture in the classroom organization. At the local level, many communities have agricultural awareness committees that provide agricultural programming connected to the curriculum for primary and high school students.

A list of post-secondary programs relating to agriculture, food and culinary arts offered in Ontario can be found at Ontario Colleges Agricultural Programs, Ontario Colleges Food and Beverage Programs or Ag Explorer.

Several universities in Ontario offer degree level programs in Economic Development. The Economic Developers Association of Canada (EDAC) and University of Waterloo are partnering to offer a suite of
professional development programming for economic developers that are accredited by EDAC and help economic developers get their [Certified Economic Developer designation (EcD)](#).

Rural, urban and regional planning programs are offered in Ontario at a bachelor, masters or doctorate level. Information is available at [Information on rural, urban and regional planning programs offered in Ontario](#).

**Integration with Food Systems Planning**

At least 25 rural and urban communities in Ontario have food charters and/or food policy councils (MacRae and Donahue, 2013). These initiatives often involve participants from across the food system including producers, municipal leaders, universities, schools, hospital, public health and food and beverage businesses. When developing food charters/strategies or establishing food policy councils, agricultural representation would be beneficial.

[Sustain Ontario’s Municipal Food Policy Network](#) brings together planners, community organizers, public health professionals, food producers, distributors and other food champions to share ideas and knowledge in order to develop and influence policies at the municipal or regional level. They pool resources and experiences to distill best practices and develop solutions to include food in municipal policy decisions. Sustain Ontario’s “greenhouse” is an online collection of community vetted food strategies, tools and tactics organized by initiative.
Appendix 1: Key References and Policies in the Four Plans

Please note that this list is not complete. The actual plans should be referred to for the complete references and policies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic Area</th>
<th>References and Policy Numbers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural System</td>
<td>Growth Plan</td>
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<td>2.2.8 Settlement Area Boundary Expansions 2.2.8.3 h)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3.2. Infrastructure Corridors 3.2.5.1 c)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4.1 Context</td>
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Appendix 2: Examples of Education and Training Events to Support the Agri-Food Sector

- Business to Business (B2B) networking opportunities (connecting buyers, sellers and distributors)
- Sharing information on the significance of the sector and emerging opportunities (e.g. agriculture impact studies or profiles showing statistics from the sector)
- Promoting agri-food innovation and entrepreneurship (e.g. food entrepreneurship and the Premier Awards for Agri-Food innovation)
- Encouraging partnerships along the value chain (e.g. the Evaluating Value-Added Agriculture Opportunities, Selling Food to Ontario training session)
- Supporting agricultural/business leadership and youth development opportunities (e.g. the GayLea Leadership training program and the 4-H program)
- Promoting agri-tourism opportunities (e.g. Ontario Farm Fresh workshops)
- Annual Municipal Agriculture Economic Development Forum for municipal agriculture economic developers
- Friends of the Greenbelt and/or the Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance workshops
- Ontario Federation of Agriculture and OMAFRA’s Agriculture Economic Development Community of Practice, bringing together economic developers, planners and other professionals
- Ontario Culinary Tourism workshops that “leverage the power of food tourism.”
- Rural Ontario Institute’s Advanced Agriculture Leadership Program, a 19-month executive development opportunity for people who want to shape the future of the agri-food industry and make a positive difference in rural communities across Ontario
- Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association’s training on topics such as developing an environmental farm plan, growing farm profits, food safety and biosecurity
- Ontario 4-H’s skills training for rural youth, teaching leadership and life skills, fostering vibrant rural communities and promoting stewardship of sustainable agriculture, food and the environment
- AgScape’s curriculum-linked food literacy programs and resources for Ontario's educators and students
- Other workshops and training hosted by lenders, feed dealerships, genetics companies and more
Appendix 3: Examples of Local Partnerships to Support the Agri-Food Sector

Below are examples of potential groups that may provide organizational, developmental or financial support for agri-food sector training:

- **Workforce Planning Ontario** is made up of a network of 26 Workforce Planning Board areas covering four regions across the province. Workforce Planning Boards gather intelligence about the supply of labour and the demand side of the local labour market by working with employers to identify and meet their current and emerging skills needs. The primary role of Workforce Planning Boards is to help improve understanding of and coordinate community responses to labour market issues and needs. Municipalities may partner with their local workforce planning board to address issues in the agri-food sector and provide training as required.

- **Community Futures Ontario** represents 61 Community Futures Development Corporations (CFDCs) - 37 in southern Ontario and 24 in the north - that offer free business counselling, loans for start-up and expansion of small business, strategic planning on local projects and community economic development in rural areas. CFDCs provide flexible, repayable loans to small- and medium-sized businesses and are locally managed by a volunteer board of directors and funded with federal government support. A municipality may be able to leverage funding to support agriculture and food projects by working with their local CFDC.

- The **Agri-Food Management Institute** (AMI) promotes new ways of thinking about agribusiness management and aims to increase awareness, understanding and adoption of beneficial business management practices by Ontario agri-food and agri-based producers and processors. They support business management events and business advisory groups for farmers. AMI supports networking events designed to encourage collaborations and bring processors and producers together to encourage business expansion and development. The organization provides financial support to business networking workshops being hosted by regional economic development corporations, or regional groups who work in a local food value chain capacity. Event topics range from local food, local economic hubs and sourcing, to establishing value chains and value chain management. They attract local farmers and food businesses, community future group representatives, economic development professionals, regional and local municipalities, local food and farmers’ markets groups, academics and consumers.
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