

CITY OF HAMILTON

AGRICULTURAL ACTION PLAN

Economic Viability for the Long-Term



October 9, 2007



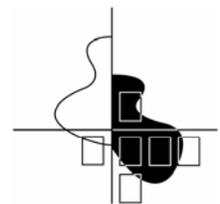
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PLANSCAPE



Hamilton Agricultural Action Plan

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Hamilton Agricultural Action Plan

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Section 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Agriculture is a significant component of the City of Hamilton economy. In the **Agriculture Economic Impact and Development Study**, completed in August of 2003, it was determined that agriculture generated approximately \$813 million in economic activity in the City's economy in 2001. All of the City's policies acknowledge the important contribution agriculture makes to the City's economy and the quality of life for its residents, and support activities that will promote the industry.

Despite this acknowledgement of the importance of agriculture and the supportive stance the City has taken to sustain the industry, it continues to be vulnerable. This vulnerability can be attributed to many factors including local pressures for growth, encroaching urban development, government policies, economic trends affecting food production, world trade issues, the aging farm population etc. While many of these forces are beyond the control of local governments or producers, there are steps that can be taken to strengthen and support the agricultural sector in Hamilton. These are steps which, given the value of the agricultural resource in Hamilton, its contribution to the City's economy and the increasing recognition of the importance of a local food supply, should be taken.

During the past year, the agricultural community has been considering what is required to support their sector. The outcome of this consultation is this action plan to support the economic viability of agriculture in the long term.

Farmers realize that to successfully promote their sector they must be united in purpose and persuasive in building widespread support. The action plan is designed to achieve this and focuses on:

- Economic Development
- Promotion
- Strategic Development and Direction
- Forming Partnerships, and
- Financial Tools.

1.2 Guiding Principles

In preparation for developing the agricultural action plan, the Hamilton Agricultural and Rural Affairs Advisory Committee which acted as the Steering Committee for the development of the



plan, consulted with the agricultural community and used the input received to articulate a vision for the industry as it moves forward in the 21st century. A workshop was held on February 27, 2006, to solicit the views of the agricultural community at large. The session was well attended with over 70 participants representing all facets of Hamilton agriculture. Based on the input from the workshop, the knowledge of the Steering Committee and background research that has been done regarding Hamilton agriculture, the vision was confirmed, goals and objectives to implement the vision were developed and criteria established to test its effectiveness.

The vision, goals, objectives and criteria for success were presented to Hamilton Council in July of 2006 and endorsed by the City as the basis upon which to build an agricultural action plan.

The vision endorsed by Council states:

Vision for Agriculture:

Agriculture is a vital component of the physical, environmental, economic, cultural and social structure of the City of Hamilton. The strength, diversity and potential of this industry is recognized by Council and the community it represents, and will be protected and promoted so it can continue to grow and evolve.

Goals

- *Maintaining the agricultural land base and promoting financial sustainability for future generations to continue farming;*
- *Preventing infiltration of conflicting uses that put the agricultural community at risk;*
- *Promoting an economic development program for agriculture;*
- *Raising the awareness of the quality of the agriculture sector in Hamilton;*
- *Establishing a higher profile for agriculture through informed media;*
- *Ensuring that agricultural interests are understood and factored into development of infrastructure;*
- *Fostering co-operation between agriculture and government agencies to support the industry through policies and programs;*
- *Adopting a broad definition of agriculture to allow flexibility in production and adaptation to market fluctuations and other factors that may change over time;*
- *Protecting long term food security for Canadians with an emphasis on locally produced food.*

Objectives

- *Maintain an agriculturally friendly area rating tax structure;*
- *Establish an economic development program specifically to support agriculture;*
- *Ensure City staff are educated about and factor in the needs of agriculture in all actions;*
- *Develop a rural infrastructure program;*
- *Create a rural servicing standard for soft and hard services;*



- *Establish a credible liaison between City Council and the Agricultural Advisory Committee.*

Measures of Success

- *Long term survival of agriculture in the City;*
- *Enhanced profile for agriculture;*
- *Firm urban boundaries maintained;*
- *Farm friendly infrastructure in place;*
- *Strong support industries;*
- *Farm friendly City policies.*

1.3 Community Confirmation of Issues

Using the vision, goals, objectives and criteria endorsed by Council, potential initiatives were identified and discussed with the Steering Committee. To ensure that the process was on track and to ensure a broad range of input, a Business Retention and Expansion (BR & E) questionnaire was administered to more than 50 farmers asking for input about the nature of their operations, the business climate, future plans, business development, markets, financial needs, workforce development, attributes of the local community, and possible components of an agricultural action plan.

The results of the survey were analyzed and considered by the Steering Committee. On the basis of these considerations, the details of an action plan were formulated.

1.4 Plan Structure

The plan is presented in two parts. The first part lays out the comprehensive set of actions that should form part of a long term strategy for supporting agriculture in Hamilton. The second part, contained in the final section of this plan contains the action plan deliverables that should be implemented immediately. It is based on the long range plan but selects and prioritizes those actions that if implemented, could provide an immediate boost to the agricultural sector.

The comprehensive actions are related to the goals and objectives identified by the Steering Committee and endorsed by City Council. The proposed actions that should be part of an ongoing strategy are identified in general terms and range in type from short term, one time actions to ongoing requirements that should be factored into all City initiatives. The actions have been grouped into categories on the basis of commonalities.

Although the recommended actions are divided into separate categories many of them overlap or are inter-related. They are all mutually supportive. Therefore coordination between the various departments and agencies responsible for implementation will be important. The Steering Committee should remain in place to oversee the implementation and to ensure that the desired goals are:



Economic Development: The area of economic development is wide ranging. It involves actions that support the ability of farmers to access required services, promote and sell their products and adjust to changes in market trends.

Promotion: Promotion has multiple goals for different audiences. There is a set of initiatives for the farm community designed to assist in marketing products, connecting with the consumer and enhancing skills. There is a set of tools designed to educate the public about farming, the sophistication of the industry, the quality of Canadian farmers, agriculture's contributions to the local economy and quality of life. Finally there are actions designed to promote career opportunities in agriculture and to encourage circumstances required for agriculture to operate efficiently.

Strategic Direction and Development: Land use planning has always been a vital component in the preservation of agricultural land. However sometimes the tools used are not effective and often the process imposed is onerous for operators. In Hamilton, the recent approval of the Rural Official Plan has implemented policies developed with significant rural input which have the potential to foster a strong agricultural sector. The ongoing consultation with the Agricultural and Rural Affairs Committee was a very positive process. The policies with respect to issues including the right to farm, value added operations, flexibility to allow employee housing are supportive of agriculture and fit within a framework that protects the integrity of the agricultural area. Now that there is a consolidated framework within which to make decisions, additional measures to support agriculture and assist land owners in dealing with the planning process can be considered.

Creating Partnerships: Support for agriculture cannot be achieved through local initiatives alone. Cooperation is required between all levels of government, various non government organizations, academic institutions and the public at large. What the local government can do is raise the level of awareness about the needs of the agricultural sector and encourage other agencies to undertake programs that are coordinated in efforts to support agriculture.

Financial Tools: In referencing financial support the intent is not to encourage payouts to farms. Rather it is to encourage adjustments where the system of taxation or fees and charges places an undue burden on farmers. Because agriculture is a land based activity and the property tax system in Ontario is based on the amount of land that is owned, the system tends to work against farmers. With downloading of responsibility for the farm property tax rebate program to the municipal level, an unfair burden has been placed on municipalities that could discourage the preservation of agricultural land. The lack of performance requirements to confirm if a property is a bona fide agricultural operation tends to encourage land banking and benefits non farm rural land owners. Competition for land is fierce in many areas of the city and speculative pressure on land prices inhibits farmers' ability to acquire land for production.



Section 2 Hamilton's Agricultural Action Plan

This section outlines all of the elements that should be included in a comprehensive, long term action plan to support agriculture in Hamilton.

2.1 Economic Development

1. **Develop a rural economic development program which encompasses a local food strategy.** Components of the program should include:
 - Ongoing support for the newly created Farm Fresh project to promote consumption of local products and opportunities for farmers to connect directly with the local consumers at farm markets, the farm gate and through direct linkages between restaurants, retailers and producers.
 - Introduction of programs such as farm tours or food trails to introduce urban residents to local growers.
 - Encouraging the use of local product at all government functions.
 - Establishment of school food programs using local produce.
 - Identifying key consumer groups and tracking changes in ethnic profiles that could change the demand for certain products.
 - Support farmers' markets including the continued operation of the Centre Mall Farmers' Market and Hamilton Downtown Farmers' Market and an expansion of the service to promote the mandate of the "eating local" campaign.

2. **Create a "facilitator" or "ombudsman" function in the City bureaucracy with responsibility for assisting operators.** This function would include:
 - Liaising with other City departments to identify and respond to issues affecting agriculture and related businesses;
 - Assisting farmers with the development approval process;
 - Expediting and providing input on agricultural related development applications;
 - Advising City departments in understanding and responding to industry needs; and,
 - Bringing an agricultural perspective to the review of proposed legislation and programs.



3. **Create an “open for business” strategy for agriculture.** Components of this strategy should include:
 - Establishing a task force of farmers and business leaders from other sectors of the Hamilton economy that could partner with agriculture (Hamilton Port Authority, Lakeport Breweries, etc.) to provide input on potential linkages and how they could work.
 - Investigating value added opportunities for agriculture both on farm and off farm and the actions required to support them.
 - Assisting farmers with marketing strategies that facilitate access to markets and identification of emerging markets.
 - Create and maintain an inventory of agriculturally related businesses. This inventory should categorize businesses as farm service businesses, processors and value added business with links to agriculture. This inventory should be monitored to identify trends, business opportunities or changes that could impact the sector.
 - Update the Agricultural Economic Impact Study once 2006 statistics are available. This will assist in building a data base for agriculture in Hamilton and help track trends.

2.2 Promotion

1. **Educate the public about agriculture.** This can be done through specific programming or by encouraging and supporting other groups and agencies that have programs to raise the level of understanding about agriculture. Efforts should focus on:
 - The nature of agriculture, how it works, who farms and the skills required to produce the food and related products; and
 - Raising awareness about the contribution of agriculture to the economy, environment, local character and quality of life in Hamilton.
2. **Encourage educational institutions at all levels to include agricultural programming in curriculum.** Initiatives could include:
 - Developing agriculturally based co-operative programs.
 - Building relationships with local post secondary institutions. McMaster’s recognized leadership in health issues could be a basis for the development of nutraceuticals, bio based products or non traditional products that contribute to health and well being.
 - Providing input to or creating curriculum modules for primary and secondary institutions to encourage teaching about agriculture.



3. **Encourage the provision of educational support for agriculture.**
 - Support the initiative to establish a world class agricultural research centre at Vineland Station and ensure that the interests of the Hamilton agricultural community are addressed as part of the program.
 - Monitor the activities of the Ontario Agricultural Research Institute as they consider the fate of the various provincial research stations to determine if and how Hamilton farmers could benefit.
 - Encourage the creation of an inventory of educational programs so farmers are aware of them and duplication is avoided.
4. **Support programs to assist with employment issues and to assist new operators entering the industry.**
 - To secure the long term future of farming, assistance should be provided for succession planning.
 - Co-operative, mentoring and apprenticeship programs should be implemented to encourage young farmers to enter the industry and for supporting them when they are starting out.
 - Support programs to assist recent immigrants in securing employment in the agricultural sector.

2.3 Strategic Direction and Development

1. **Ensure that decisions on development applications that could affect the agricultural community are constant and consistent and reinforce the position that agricultural land is a resource that must be protected.**
 - Maintain the Agricultural Advisory Committee to review applications and policies.
2. **In dealing with agriculturally related applications, institute a system specific to the agricultural sector.** Services should include:
 - “One stop shopping” for agriculturally related development approvals supported by coordination with outside agencies such as the Conservation Authority;
 - Streamlined procedures to eliminate duplication;
 - Establish tariffs and fees specific to agricultural;
 - Simplify and coordinate requirements for site plans and other development approvals related to agriculture; and



- Review development charges for farm related development in other jurisdictions and eliminate or reduce development charges for all development directly related to agricultural production including the development of greenhouses to ensure that Hamilton farmers are competitive with farmers in other jurisdictions.
3. **Continue the policy of maintaining large contiguous agricultural areas by prohibiting non farm development in agricultural areas.** To protect the agricultural properties some steps that could be taken include:
 - Use zoning to build in minimum distance separation criteria on the non agricultural land to allow farmers to retain maximum operational flexibility on farm land.
 - Monitor policies that allow value added and agri-entertainment operations to ensure that they are sufficiently flexible to allow farmers to generate additional revenue while ensuring that the operations are compatible with surrounding agricultural uses.
 4. **Address agricultural requirements in developing capital plans for long term infrastructure.** Consider the needs of the agricultural community and factor in the need to provide hard and soft rural infrastructure such as high speed internet access, irrigation water for agriculture, three phase power, a farm friendly transportation network and rural community services.

2.4 Creating Partnerships

1. **Encourage the articulation of a strong, well publicized provincial vision for agriculture.**
 - Establishment of the Greenbelt has been accompanied by a variety of programs to support its success. These programs should be identified and where possible, accessed to support the Hamilton sector. Liaison with organizations such as the Greenbelt Foundation and Friends of the Greenbelt should be ongoing. All areas in and around the Greenbelt are experiencing similar challenges in the implementation of this Act and strength can be gained through cooperation.
 - In working to support the success of the Greenbelt, support for agriculture outside the Greenbelt should not diminish.
2. **Test policies and actions against the goal of supporting agriculture.** The health of the agricultural sector is dependent on certainty – certainty that there is a long term future. Certainty arises from strong land use policies, rigorous enforcement of the “right to farm” and strong eco development programs. It must be a priority with all agencies associated with agriculture to create this certainty.
 - Participate with other municipalities in programs seeking to impose a higher level of protection on agricultural land.



- Support the work of the Ontario Farmland Trust in establishing a bundle of options for securing the agricultural land base.
3. **Co-ordinate with these other regions and other agencies in working toward common goals.** Many other regions including the Region of Niagara and the Regions of the GTA have developed and are implementing agricultural action plans.
- Develop partnerships with the Hamilton Public Health Department to promote consumption of local food and retention of local food production as a positive contribution to healthy living.
 - Partner with abutting upper tier municipalities, Halton and Niagara to implement supportive programs for agriculture.

2.5 Financial Tools

1. **Encourage the province to create a farm friendly property tax regime.**
- The province should assume direct responsibility for payment of the farm property tax rebate.
 - The system for assessing and taxing agricultural land should be reviewed and revised. This review should address the questions of incentives to reduce speculation in the urban fringe areas, to direct lower tax rates only to bona fide farmers and to recognize production value as the assessed value for agricultural land.
2. **Ensure equity in fees and charges.**
- The rates paid by farmers for bona fide farm related development on land outside of the rural area should be equivalent to the fees and charges paid by farmers in the rural area.
3. **Consider tools to address the increasing pressure placed on farmers by more rigorous environmental programs.**
- A tax rebate program to compensate for environmental stewardship.
 - Cooperative approaches to managing natural heritage systems and agricultural land use.



Section 3 Action Plan Deliverables for Immediate Implementation

This section outlines the actions that should be included in the first phase of the agricultural action plan. Each action listed below is included in the long range plan but has been selected by the Steering Committee as a priority for immediate implementation.

Economic Development

- Update the 2003 Economic Impact and Development Study to reflect new census information and to determine the current status of the industry in Hamilton.
- Develop a rural Economic Development program which encompasses a local food strategy. Develop a partnership with the "Eat Local Program" and Public Health Department to promote the consumption of local food and retention of local food productions as a positive contribution to healthy living.
- Develop a Resource Guide or Industry Profile for the agriculture sector that includes a sector overview, infrastructure information, new business, opportunities, industry resources, business / supplier profiles, business directory and employer incentives and opportunities.

Promotion

- Create an education and marketing strategy for agriculture to educate the public and to raise awareness about the contribution of agriculture to the economy, environment, local character and quality of life in Hamilton.
- Work with the education institutions at all levels to include agricultural programming in the curriculum and encourage the provision of education support and programs for farmers.

Strategic Development

- Create an "open for business" strategy and task force for agriculture to assist the agriculture industry during the development process. This open for business task force would work with staff to ensure equity in fees and charges for the industry that are comparable to other agriculture communities and streamline the development process.
- In dealing with agriculturally related development applications institute a system specific to the agricultural sector "one stop shopping" for all applications that includes specific staff expertise relating to the agriculture industry.
- Work with City officials to continue the policy of maintaining large contiguous agricultural areas prohibiting non farm development. Address agricultural requirements in development capital plans for Hamilton long term infrastructure improvements and enhancements.



Creating Partnerships

- Encourage the articulation of a strong, well publicized provincial and federal vision for agriculture by working with all levels of government and other abutting upper tier municipalities to implement support programs for agriculture (Niagara, Halton and GTA).

Financial Tools

- Work with the City of Hamilton to create a farm friendly property tax regime. In support of this a benchmarking exercise will be conducted to inventory agricultural tax regimes in other municipalities.
- Create tools to address pressure associated with rigorous environmental programs placed on farmers.

Section 4 Implementation and Accountability

The identified tasks are wide ranging. Responsibility for various tasks will need to be assigned to the appropriate agency with specific responsibility for the overall implementation and coordination of the plan clearly assigned to a specific City department. The process should start with immediate implementation of the actions identified in Section 3.

Key to the success of this plan will be the ongoing active participation of the agricultural community. To be successfully implemented, this plan must be promoted, its progress monitored and the partners convinced, cajoled and encouraged. Responsibility for this must come from the agricultural community. They must be willing to assume this responsibility, to take ownership to ensure the plan achieves its ultimate goal, to support the ongoing profitability of agriculture in Hamilton. To achieve this, the Steering Committee for development of this plan should be retained and given responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the plan.

For all of the components of the initiatives outlined above there is an existing model or an agency that could take action. What is needed is a coordinated approach to access resources, lobby for support and ensure that programs are mutually supportive not competitive or operating in isolation. The resources are there, it is often a case of agencies operating in isolation without being aware of similar programs and the benefits that could be realized from working together.



Summary of Recommended Actions

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	Task	Lead	Resources
1	Update the 2003 Economic Impact and Development Study to reflect new census information and to determine the current status of the industry in Hamilton.	City of Hamilton Economic Development Division	City of Hamilton, Hamilton Agricultural and Rural Affairs Advisory Committee Hamilton Federation of Agriculture Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA)
2	Develop a rural Economic Development program which encompasses a local food strategy. Develop a partnership with the "Eat Local Program" and Public Health Department to promote the consumption of local food and retention of local food productions as a positive contribution to healthy living.	City of Hamilton Public Health Department Environment Hamilton Eat Local Project	City of Hamilton Economic Development Division
3	Develop a Resource Guide or Industry Profile for the agriculture sector that includes a sector overview, infrastructure information, new business, opportunities, industry resources, business / supplier profiles, business directory and employer incentives and opportunities.	City of Hamilton Economic Development Division	Government of Canada Hamilton Training and Advisory Board Province of Ontario
4	Create an education and marketing strategy for agriculture to educate the public and to raise awareness about the contribution of agriculture to the economy, environment, local character and quality of life in Hamilton.	City of Hamilton	OMAFRA Foodland Ontario Hamilton Wentworth / Ontario Federations of Agriculture Christian Farmers Federations of Ontario / Brant Wentworth Commodity Groups Eat Local Project



Summary of Recommended Actions			
	Task	Lead	Resources
5	Work with the educations institutions at all levels to include agricultural programming in the curriculum and encourage the provision of education support and programs for farmers.	Ontario Agri-Food Education Inc. (OAFE) Ministry of Education Ministry of Colleges and Universities	Hamilton Wentworth School Board Hamilton Wentworth Separate School Board Hamilton Federation of Agriculture Hamilton Training Advisory Boards
6	Create an “open for business” strategy and task force for agriculture to assist the agriculture industry during the development process. This open for business task force would work with staff to ensure equity in fees and charges for the industry that are comparable to other agriculture communities and streamline the development process.	City of Hamilton Planning and Economic Development Department	Economic Development and Real Estate Division Planning Division Development Engineering Division Building Services Division Corporate Services Department Public Works Department
7	In dealing with agriculturally related development applications institute a system specific to the agricultural sector "one stop shopping" for all applications that includes specific staff expertise relating to the agriculture industry.	City of Hamilton Planning and Economic Development Department	Planning Division Development Engineering Division Building Services Division Hamilton Conservation Authority
8	Work with City officials to continue the policy of maintaining large contiguous agricultural areas prohibiting non farm development. Address agricultural requirements in development capital plans for Hamilton long term infrastructure improvements and enhancements.	City of Hamilton Planning Department and Economic Development Department	Planning Division Strategic Services / Special Projects Division OMAFRA



Summary of Recommended Actions			
	Task	Lead	Resources
9	Encourage the articulation of a strong, well publicized provincial and federal vision for agriculture by working with all levels of government and other abutting upper tier municipalities to implement support programs for agriculture (Niagara, Halton and GTA).	City of Hamilton OMAFRA Agriculture Canada	Region of Niagara Region of Halton GTA
10	Work to create a farm friendly property tax regime. In support of this a benchmarking exercise will be conducted to inventory agricultural tax regimes in other municipalities.	City of Hamilton Economic Development Division	City of Hamilton Corporate Service Department MPAC
11	Create tools to address pressure associated with rigorous environmental programs placed on farmers.	City of Hamilton in partnership with Ontario Federation of Agriculture and Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario	OMAFRA Ministry of Natural Resources
12	Support the continuation and expansion of Centre Mall and Hamilton farmers' markets to ensure the continued strong presence of local farmers' markets in Hamilton.	City of Hamilton Community Services – Culture Division	Local farm organizations City of Hamilton Economic Development

