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

Supplementary Direction to A Place to Grow:
Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe

**Publication 856**

Ontario

# IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES

## for the Agricultural System in Ontario's Greater Golden Horseshoe

### March 2020

These implementation procedures and the accompanying mapping for the *Agricultural System* are Supplementary Direction to A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the *Greater Golden Horseshoe*, 2019. They were issued by the Province in March 2020 and take effect immediately.

Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

**Disclaimer**
This document is for informational purposes only. It is intended to serve as a guide and not as expert advice.

Cover Photo credits
Grain elevators and railway line – Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2016

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# Summary

This document replaces the original *Implementation Procedures for the Agricultural System in the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (February 2018). It has been updated to align with A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2019.

Ontario's *Greater Golden Horseshoe* (*GGH*)[1] is one of the most dynamic and fastest growing regions in North America and is the economic engine of Ontario. It contains a large agri-food cluster and Canada's most diverse and productive agricultural area. The agri-food cluster is a key economic driver, providing one in eight jobs. The *GGH* comprises only 3.5% of Ontario's land base but contains 70% of its population and 42% of the province's best (Class 1) agricultural land, based on the Canada Land Inventory (CLI)[2].

The Province is committed to making rural Ontario and Ontario's agri-food sector open for business, investment and jobs. The agri-food sector is a significant economic contributor, poised for growth.

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*, services and assets need to coexist and be compatible with rapidly growing communities. To be successful, deliberate and strategic planning should address the needs of the agri-food sector so it can grow and prosper.

This document is focused on the geographic areas covered by A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe and the Greenbelt Plan.

Implementation of the *Agricultural System* approach requires cooperation between land use planners, economic developers, different levels of government, communities and the agri-food sector. Given the significance of the agri-food sector, it should be a priority for economic development and a major consideration 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* used for agriculture help create a continuous land base for agriculture, link *prime agricultural areas* and may support elements of the *agri-food network*.

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[1] Words in italics are defined in the Provincial Policy Statement, A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, Greenbelt Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and/or the Niagara Escarpment Plan.

[2] CLI is an interpretative system for assessing the effects of climate and soil characteristics on the limitations of land for growing common field crops.

## Summary

The Province has issued the agricultural land base map for the *GGH*. This map may be refined by municipalities in conjunction with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) in advance of or as part of a *municipal comprehensive review*. Municipalities have important roles to play to support and plan for the agri-food sector.

In addition, OMAFRA's web-based tool, the Agricultural System Portal, includes a series of maps detailing the *agri-food network* that may be used by municipalities and others to advance economic opportunities for the agri-food sector. The portal maps can also inform and enable assessment of potential adverse impacts of new development on the *Agricultural System*. Impacts must be avoided, or where avoidance is not possible, minimized and mitigated.

This document explains the *Agricultural System* approach and describes the agricultural land base and the *agri-food network*. It provides implementation procedures for the *Agricultural System* to guide municipal refinement of the agricultural land base map and the integration of land use planning and economic development to achieve *Agricultural System* objectives.

The *Agricultural System* approach builds on traditional approaches to agricultural land use planning and economic development, and links the two to more holistically consider agricultural viability.

**Agri-Food Network**

| Identification of the Agri-Food Network | Recognition in Municipal Official Plan Policies | Toolbox for Implementing the Agricultural System |

**Agricultural Land Base**

| Provincial Identification of the Agricultural Land Base | Municipal Refinement in Conjunction with OMAFRA and MMAH | Municipal Official Plan Map/Schedule and Policies | Final Agricultural Land Base Map |

Implementation of the Agricultural System

**Steps to Implement an *Agricultural System* in the *Greater Golden Horseshoe***

# Part A:
# **Context**

# 1   An Agricultural System in Ontario's Greater Golden Horseshoe Area

## 1.1   Introduction

This document will help municipalities, farmers and others interpret and implement the *Agricultural System* references and policies in the four land use plans for the *Greater Golden Horseshoe* (*GGH*) — A Place to Grow:  Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (A Place to Grow), Greenbelt Plan, Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and Niagara Escarpment Plan.

This document focuses on the entire *GGH* (Figure 1). While the Niagara Escarpment Plan Area extends beyond the *GGH*, only that portion in the *GGH* is addressed. This document recognizes that linkages to the *Agricultural System* extend outside of the *GGH*.

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* and
- how municipalities and others can support a thriving agri-food sector through integrated land use planning and economic development.

Agriculture and food are central to Ontarians' quality of life, economic prosperity, health, environment, cultural expression and heritage. Effective farmland protection and a thriving agri-food sector are integral to these values and priorities.

## 1.2   The Significance of the Agri-Food Sector

Ontario's *GGH* is one of the fastest growing regions in North America, containing a significant agri-food cluster and Canada's most diverse and productive agricultural area. 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 drivers.

The agri-food sector accounts for approximately one in eight jobs in Ontario. There is global and local demand for safe, sustainable, nutritious food, other agricultural products and demand is rapidly growing. Awareness of the sector's significance to the economy and quality of life may help decision-makers and citizens embrace the *Agricultural System* concept.
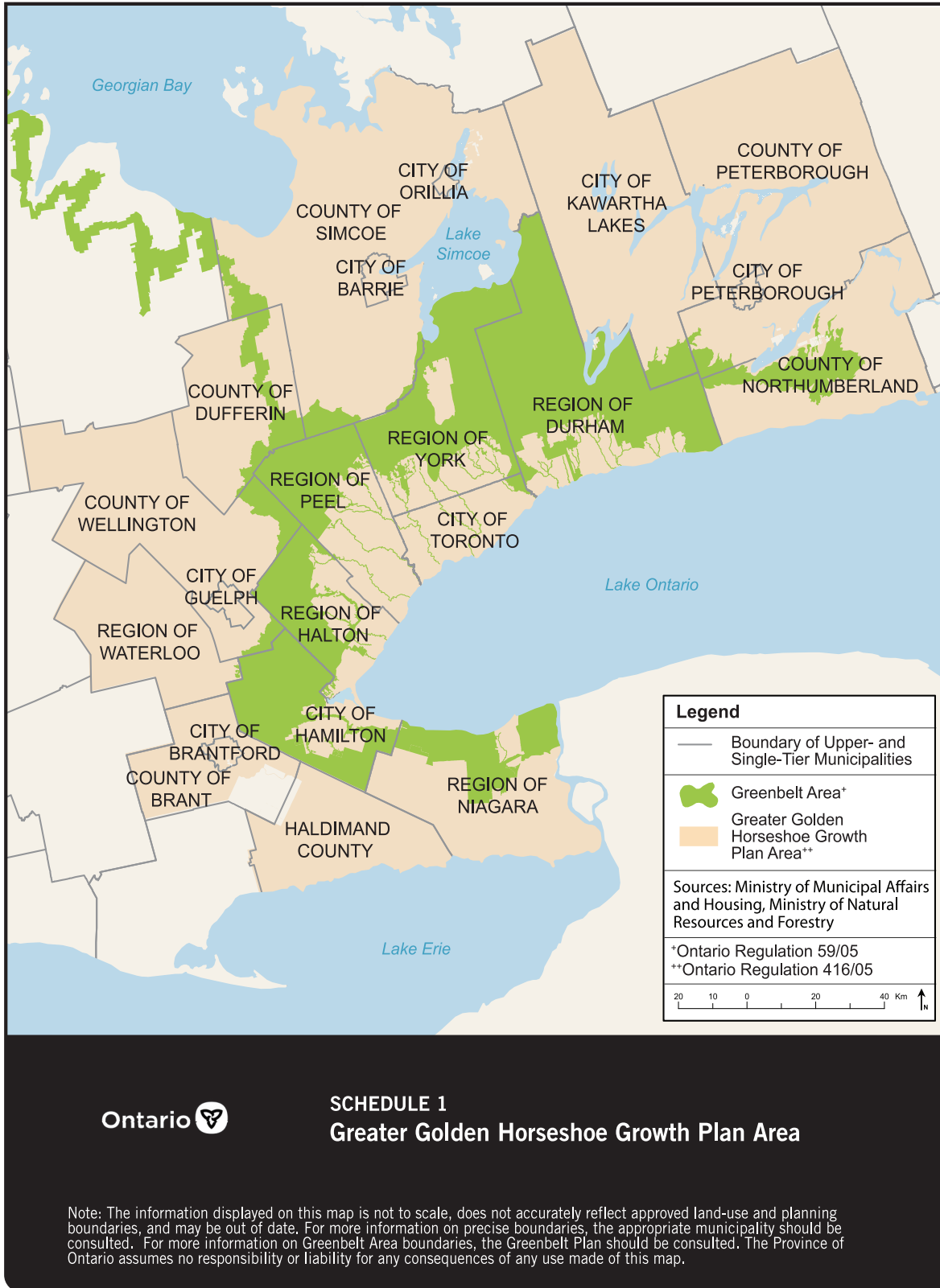
**Figure 1. The *Greater Golden Horseshoe*** (Source: Government of Ontario, 2019)

Ontario's thriving agri-food sector:

- creates jobs in rural and urban areas
- contributes to a diverse and stable municipal tax base
- stimulates the cultural vitality of rural communities
- supports essential rural and environmental services
- builds rural character and conserves cultural heritage resources
- produces more than 200 agricultural commodities (the most diverse agricultural area in Canada) with associated market and business opportunities and
- makes locally grown food available.

The *GGH* comprises only 3.5% of Ontario's land area, but contains 42% of the province's best (Canada Land Inventory 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 the *prime agricultural area* to non-agricultural uses is strong and ongoing. Managing growth while protecting valuable resources, including agriculture, is at the heart of A Place to Grow and the Greenbelt Plan.

The Census of Agriculture indicated that between 2001 and 2016, the area reported to be in agriculture fell by more than ten per cent in the *GGH*, an area of approximately 170,00 hectares or 420,000 acres (Statistics Canada, 2001 and 2016). Over the past 15 years, an area more than two and a half times the size of the City of Toronto is no longer reported to be in agriculture.

Even so, over 40% of the *GGH* remains available for agriculture today[3] (OMAFRA, 2018). Implementation of the *Agricultural System* will help to ensure this remaining farmland is better protected and is viable over the long term. A Place to Grow 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    Evolution of the Agricultural System Concept

Over the past 40 years, efforts were made to integrate land use planning and economic development to support the agri-food sector.  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, 1976). The strategy included measures to ensure that better agricultural land was protected and programs were in place to support 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. To also address agricultural viability, a more integrated approach extending beyond land use planning is required.

In 2005, the Greenbelt Plan first used the agricultural system terminology. It referred to the agricultural system as a continuous and permanent land base necessary to support long-term agricultural production and economic activity. Around the same time as 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 for a thriving and integrated food and farming cluster in the GTA. In 2012, this evolved to a more encompassing *Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan 2021*, led by an expanded Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance (GHFFA). The GHFFA, with the help of member municipalities and OMAFRA, produced agri-food asset mapping for the agri-food value chain, including infrastructure, services and other assets the sector depends on.

In 2015, the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation commissioned a study, *The Agricultural System: Components, Linkages, and Rationale*, to explore the agricultural system concept (Caldwell, 2015). Later that year, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) and Environmental Defence, again with the help of the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, produced the report, *Farmland at Risk: Why Land-use Planning Needs Improvements for a Healthy Agricultural Future in the Greater Golden Horseshoe* (Ontario Federation of Agriculture and Environmental Defense, 2015). It discussed the need for Ontario to do a better job of protecting farmland and helping farmers thrive in the GGH. Further, 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 Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance, with the support of 21 municipalities and OMAFRA, created robust **agri-food asset mapping for the GGH**, under the banner ConnectON. By combining many data sources and using Geographic Information Systems, 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. See Section 2.2.2 for more detail.

The ten-year review of the Growth Plan and Greenbelt Plan resulted in new *Agricultural System* policies and definitions incorporated into the provincial plans in 2017. Then in 2019, an update to the Growth Plan resulted in more flexible *Agricultural System* policies in A Place to Grow. As a result, these implementation procedures were developed as a Supplementary Direction to A Place to Grow.

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

Over the years, agricultural stakeholders also suggested that a systems approach be applied to agriculture, like 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.

Together, 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 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 plans 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 *infrastructure*, services and agri-food assets along the value chain that the agri-food sector needs to thrive. 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 land use planning 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 and explain the intent of *Agricultural System* references and policies in A Place to Grow, 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 law provides otherwise. Provincial guidelines help planning authorities interpret provincial policy and reduce variability in protection. These *Agricultural System* implementation procedures are intended to serve the purpose of provincial guidelines for designating *prime agricultural areas* in the *GGH* and may provide insights for areas beyond the *GGH*.

A Place to Grow states that the Province will identify, establish or update the *Agricultural System* for the *GGH* as Supplementary Direction (policy 5.2.2.2). These implementation procedures and accompanying mapping are the Supplementary Direction referred to in A Place to Grow. In the area under A Place to Grow, municipalities may refine provincial mapping in a manner that conforms with the A Place to Grow policies and these implementation procedures (A Place to Grow policy 4.2.6.9). Provincial mapping only applies after it has been incorporated into an approved upper- or single-tier official plan. In contrast, in the Greenbelt area, the provincial agricultural land base mapping applies immediately. However, municipalities are required to refine and augment their official plan mapping to bring it into conformity with provincial mapping and these implementation procedures.

Under both A Place to Grow and the Greenbelt Plan, *prime agricultural areas* must be identified as directed in these implementation procedures to consistently protect and achieve geographic continuity of the agricultural land base. These implementation procedures also identify elements of the *agri-food network* and recommend how to maintain and enhance functional connections within the network, as required by A Place to Grow policy 4.2.6.4 and Greenbelt Plan policy 3.1.2.6.

The *Agricultural System* approach also links to provincial initiatives related to environmental protection, climate change adaptation and mitigation, soil health and water quality to meet societal, economic and environmental needs.

The *GGH* is covered by a number of treaties that provide for treaty rights. Indigenous communities may have Aboriginal rights in 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*.

The subsections below briefly summarize provincial plan policies that pertain to the *Agricultural System*. Appendix 1 lists provincial plan policy references under main topics related to the *Agricultural System*. 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.

> ***Agricultural System*** – The system mapped and issued by the Province 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:
>
> 1. An agricultural land base comprised of *prime agricultural areas*, including *specialty crop areas*, and *rural lands* that together create a continuous productive land base for agriculture;
> 2. An *agri-food network* which includes *infrastructure*, services and assets important to the viability of the agri-food sector.
>
> ***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.
>
> A Place to Grow

## 1.5.1　　A Place to Grow and Greenbelt Plan

A Place to Grow addresses growth management, and both A Place to Grow and the Greenbelt Plan contain policies on protecting the *Agricultural System* and natural heritage systems. The two plans have similar policies that relate to agriculture and the *Agricultural System* by:

- specifying that the provincially-identified agricultural land base 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.

- allowing for mapping refinements. However, the plans differ on when provincial mapping applies, as discussed in these implementation procedures.

- requiring municipalities to designate *prime agricultural areas*, including *specialty crop areas*, in accordance with mapping and implementation procedures issued by the Province, and protect these areas for long-term use for agriculture.

- requiring municipalities to maintain and enhance the functional and economic connections to the *agri-food network*. Unlike *prime agricultural areas*, the *agri-food network* is not a land use designation within an official plan.

- indicating in A Place to Grow that upper- and single-tier municipalities, in advance of or as part of their *municipal comprehensive review*, may consider a *settlement area* boundary expansion if certain conditions are met. *Prime agricultural areas* are to be avoided where possible through the evaluation of alternatives across the upper- and single-tier municipality based on avoiding, minimizing and mitigating impacts on the *Agricultural System* (A Place to Grow policy 2.2.8.3 f). Adverse impacts on the *agri-food network*, including agricultural operations, from expanding *settlement areas* are to be avoided, or if avoidance is not possible, minimized and mitigated as determined though an *Agricultural Impact Assessment (AIA)*[4] (A Place to Grow policy 2.2.8.3 h).

- requiring *AIA*s or equivalent analysis as part of an environmental assessment for *infrastructure* projects (e.g., *planned corridors*) that cross *prime agricultural areas* to avoid or, if avoidance is not possible, minimize and mitigate impacts to the extent feasible.

- requiring applications for new *mineral aggregate operations* within *prime agricultural areas* to be supported by an *AIA* and, where possible, to maintain or improve connectivity of the *Agricultural System*.

- requiring that land use compatibility be achieved, in particular in areas where *agricultural uses* and non-agricultural uses interface. Mitigation measures should be incorporated within the area being developed. Where appropriate, this should be based on an *AIA*.

- permitting 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).

- requiring municipalities to implement strategies to support and enhance the *Agricultural System* when undertaking integrated planning for growth management, including goods movement and transportation planning.

- encouraging 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)
  - integration of agricultural economic development, *infrastructure*, goods movement and freight considerations with land use planning

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[4] OMAFRA's AIA guidance document provides additional detail. Other studies may also be required for proposed *settlement area* boundary expansions, proposed *infrastructure*, applications for *mineral aggregate operations* and other proposed non-agricultural uses.

- ○ 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) and
- ○ providing outreach and education opportunities.

The Greenbelt Plan aims to protect the agricultural land base, as well as ecological and hydrological features, areas and functions within the Greenbelt area. It states that the *Agricultural System*, along with a Natural Heritage System, water resource system and *settlement areas*, are part of the Protected Countryside. The Greenbelt Plan states that the Natural Heritage System is an overlay[5] on top of the *prime agricultural area* and *rural lands* designations, not a separate, distinct designation. Likewise, A Place to Grow states that the *Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan* is an overlay outside of *settlement areas*.

A Place to Grow and Greenbelt Plan  policies allow the full range of *agricultural*, *agriculture-related*, *on-farm diversified uses* and *normal farm practices* in the *Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan* / Greenbelt Plan Natural Heritage System, respectively, subject to *key natural heritage feature* and *key hydrologic feature* policy tests outlined in Greenbelt Plan policy 3.2.5 and A Place to Grow policies 4.2.3 and 4.2.4. The Greenbelt Plan requires that decisions on permitted uses be based on the provincial Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Prime Agricultural Areas (OMAFRA, 2016).

More specifically, new *agricultural uses* that would involve *development* or *site alteration* would not be permitted in *key natural heritage features* within the *Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan* or Greenbelt Natural Heritage System and *key hydrologic features* (A Place to Grow policy 4.2.3.1 and Greenbelt Plan policy 3.2.5.1). However, expansions or alterations to existing agricultural buildings may be permitted, subject to the criteria outlined in A Place to Grow policy 4.2.3.1 and Greenbelt Plan policy 4.5.5 (e.g., the expansion is directed away from the feature to the maximum extent possible). Activities not involving approval under the *Planning Act* may also be permitted (e.g., agro-forestry and maple syrup production) subject to other approvals, if required.

For *development* or *site alteration* within 120 metres of a *key natural heritage features* within the *Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan* or Greenbelt Natural Heritage System and *key hydrologic features*, new agricultural buildings will be required to undertake a natural heritage or hydrologic evaluation, unless a minimum 30 metre[6] *vegetation protection zone* (i.e., buffer) is provided from the feature (A Place to Grow policy 4.2.4.4 and Greenbelt Plan policy 3.2.5.7).

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[5] An overlay is applied overtop of a certain geographic area already designated within an official plan. The intent of an overlay is to apply additional regulations on development in the overlay area. The conditions imposed by an overlay are in addition to, and not in lieu of, the permissions or restrictions associated with any underlying designation.

[6] In the Niagara Peninsula Tender Fruit and Grape Area, new buildings or structures for *agricultural*, *agriculture-related* and *on-farm diversified uses* are permitted within 30 metres of a permanent or intermittent stream if the stream also functions as an agricultural swale, roadside ditch or municipal drain, as determined through provincially-approved mapping and a minimum 15 metre *vegetation protection zone* is established. (See Greenbelt Policy 3.2.5.8)

Where *natural heritage features* and areas are located outside of the *Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan* or the Greenbelt Natural Heritage System, development or *site alteration* is generally not permitted unless no negative impacts on the feature or its functions can be demonstrated (PPS policy 2.1.5). However, *agricultural uses* may continue, in accordance with the PPS.

> The Province's Infosheet on agriculture and natural heritage in the provincial plans describes the connections between natural heritage and the *Agricultural System* in the *GGH*, and provides an overview of the policies governing land uses in these areas.

Both the Greenbelt Plan and A Place to Grow recognize that farms within the *Agricultural System* contain important natural heritage and hydrologic features and functions, as well as *water resource systems*. With good stewardship, these farms can bring both environmental benefits and agricultural protection.

The plans also identify the need to protect *cultural heritage resources*, including *built heritage resources*, *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, A Place to Grow

## 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 is 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 like 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. Like 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, *prime agricultural areas* in the Niagara Escarpment Plan Area should be identified in accordance with the broader *Agricultural System*, 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 (Niagara Escarpment Plan, Landscape Approach).

# 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.

4.  It recognizes overlaps and synergies between agriculture and natural heritage.

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 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.
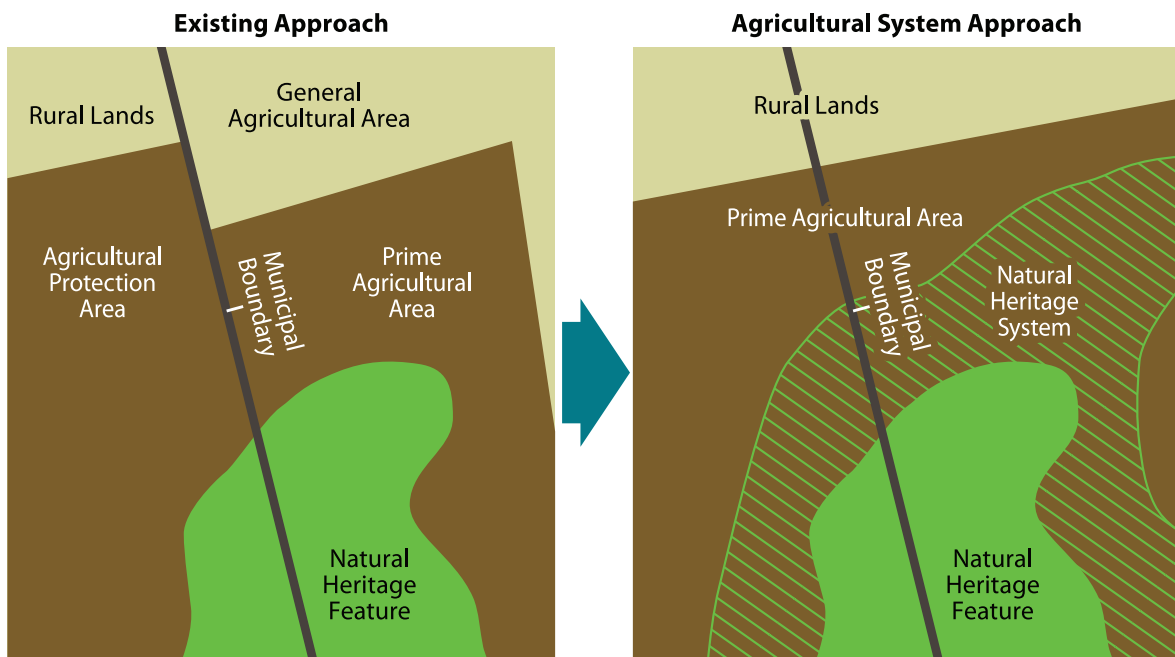


**Figure 2. Conventional vs. *Agricultural System* Approach (outside of the Greenbelt)**

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 *prime agricultural area* and *rural lands* designations, policies and planning decisions which impact agriculture.

- direct non-agricultural uses away from *prime agricultural areas* wherever possible.

- set a consistent approach to farmland protection across municipalities and land use plans, avoid conflicting uses, and implement other measures to enhance agricultural viability.

During consultations for the Coordinated Plan Review, many stakeholders expressed the desire for additional assurance that farmland be protected over the long term. Agricultural stakeholders, in particular, said they needed greater certainty that farmland would remain in agriculture to make long-term business decisions.

> ***Prime agricultural area:*** an area 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* are to be identified by OMAFRA using guidelines developed by the Province as amended from time to time.
>
> ***Prime agricultural land:*** *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.
>
> A Place to Grow and Greenbelt Plan

Along with the goal of continuity of protection across the *GGH*, it is important to recognize how *prime agricultural areas* are defined. *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 *prime agricultural lands* (CLI Classes 1 to 3 lands) and may go beyond the areas municipalities have already identified.

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 are often used to grow crops or raise livestock and may link *prime agricultural areas* into a 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, 2018).

OMAFRA's agricultural land base map may be refined by upper- and single-tier municipalities before or during *municipal comprehensive review* based on additional information and important local context (Section 3.2). The Province will support these refinement efforts by sharing data and providing guidance. Refinements will be submitted to the Province for review and approval.

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 3.4). Municipalities and others can use the mapping and tools to identify existing agri-food clusters and assess the potential to develop new opportunities.

Additionally, the Greenbelt Plan and A Place to Grow recognize the linkage between agriculture and natural heritage. By requiring the *Natural Heritage System* to be an overlay and supporting connectivity of the systems across the landscape, the plans recognize their complementary nature.

While commercial food production is a significant focus of the *Agricultural System*, the *Natural Heritage System* supports traditional Indigenous food sources such as wild rice, wild berries, wild leeks and game.

# 2    Provincial Identification of the Agricultural System

Provincial identification of the agricultural land base and the *agri-food network* is summarized in this section.

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

> Details on OMAFRA's mapping method can be found in Appendix 2, with a more in-depth explanation of the mapping methodology provided in the document, *Agricultural System Mapping Method* (OMAFRA, 2018). This document is available by request.

## 2.1    Agricultural Land Base Methodology

By its definition, the agricultural land base comprises *prime agricultural areas*, including *specialty crop areas*, and *rural lands* that together create a continuous productive land base for agriculture[7]. OMAFRA's agricultural land base map identifies *prime agricultural areas* and candidate areas for the agricultural land base. When municipalities undertake refinements, these candidate areas may be added to *prime agricultural areas* or designated *rural lands*. This is explained in the sections to follow.

In preparing the agricultural land base map for the *GGH*, the Province was guided by the following principles:

- 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 and
- 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.

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[7]  In the *Agricultural System* definition, the word "agriculture" is intended to capture the full range of uses under the *agricultural uses* definition (e.g., the growing of crops and raising of livestock).

# 2.1.1 Prime Agricultural Areas

*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 with 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 as per the most up-to-date mapping available to OMAFRA.

2. Areas identified by OMAFFRA as meeting the definition of *prime agricultural areas*.

Certain lands were excluded from these areas, such as First Nation reserves, airports regulated by the federal government, and large *key natural heritage features* described below. The remaining land area comprised the *prime agricultural areas* layer in OMAFRA's agricultural land base map. *Prime agricultural areas* are a high priority for protection for long-term use for agriculture.

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 by municipalities based on the methodology outlined in Section 3.3.

## 2.1.1.1 Existing Designated Prime Agricultural Areas

As noted, core elements of the agricultural land base include Provincially identified *specialty crop areas* and *prime agricultural areas* designated in approved official plans.

**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 and 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., employment, tourism, agri-food businesses, tax revenue).

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

**Municipally Designated Prime Agricultural Areas**

OMAFRA's agricultural land base map includes *prime agricultural areas* that were designated or recognized by upper- and single-tier official plans and in effect at the time the provincial agricultural land base map was created. Approximately 83 per cent of the *prime agricultural areas* shown in OMAFRA's agricultural land base map are already designated as such by municipalities.

### 2.1.1.2 Additional Prime Agricultural Areas Identified by OMAFRA

In addition to existing designated *prime agricultural areas*, the *prime agricultural areas* shown in the provincial agricultural land base map include lands identified by OMAFRA through its Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR) and other analysis. The LEAR method completed for the *GGH* calculates a quantitative score for each unit of land that reflects the land's relative potential for agriculture. Large areas that predominantly received high LEAR scores were identified as *prime agricultural areas* in the agricultural land base map. Details on the LEAR process, principles and methods are in Appendix 2 and in OMAFRA's Agricultural System Mapping Method document.

## 2.1.2 Candidate Areas for the Agricultural Land Base

OMAFRA identified candidate areas for the agricultural land base as areas that are equal to or larger than 250 hectares which received medium LEAR scores and are in agricultural production (based on Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Annual Crop Inventory).

Municipalities must assess whether to include candidate areas as *prime agricultural areas* or *rural lands* in the agricultural land base. The options are outlined in Sections 3.3.2.2. and 3.3.2.3.

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

The natural heritage and agricultural policies in A Place to Grow and the Greenbelt Plan recognize the linkages between agriculture and natural heritage by stating that the *Natural Heritage System* is to be an overlay, allowing the full range of existing and new *agricultural*, *agriculture-related* and *on-farm diversified uses* and *normal farm practices* in the *Natural Heritage System*. *Key natural heritage features* such as *wetlands* may occur within or beyond the *Natural Heritage System*. While *agricultural uses* may continue in *key natural heritage features*, protection of these features is required by provincial policy.

Farms often contribute societal benefits such as clean air, clean water, groundwater recharge and wildlife habitat and *Natural Heritage Systems* and *water resource systems* provide benefits to farms (e.g., *wetlands* help to store and replenish water supplies to streams and aquifers which are relied on by agriculture and provide habitat for pollinators that may enhance agricultural production).

When OMAFRA undertook the *GGH* LEAR, lands in *key natural heritage features* within and outside of the *Natural Heritage System* and *key hydrologic features* and areas were included in the evaluation. This recognized that some lands within the *Natural Heritage System* and *water resource systems* are and could continue to be used for *agricultural uses*. For example, *agricultural uses* sometimes occur in water recharge areas, valleylands, woodlands and other features. Including these lands in the *GGH* LEAR analysis enabled the appropriate inclusion of large, continuous *prime agricultural areas* that may include *wetlands* or other natural features. Areas predominantly in natural cover received a lower LEAR score than areas with more land in agriculture, all other factors being equal. (See OMAFRA's Agricultural System Mapping Method document).

> For the purpose of the GGH LEAR, *prime agricultural areas* include large, continuous areas, generally 250 hectares or larger. They may have some areas of lower capability land and scattered non-agricultural uses. *Prime agricultural areas* should not divide individual property parcels or exclude small, non-agricultural uses that are surrounded by *agricultural uses*.
>
> *Prime agricultural areas* frequently include *wetlands* and other natural features. Likewise, natural features may contain lands in existing *agricultural uses*. Given their overlapping nature, it is important to recognize this relationship appropriately in official plan policy and mapping (see Sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.4).

When developing the agricultural land base map, OMAFRA identified large, continuous areas (larger than 250 ha) of provincially significant *wetlands* and provincially significant Life Science ANSIs, and all areas designated in the Niagara Escarpment Plan as "Escarpment Natural Area." These areas were removed from the *prime agricultural area* because even though agriculture may continue in these areas, they do not qualify as *prime agricultural areas*. Provincial mapping of these areas throughout the *GGH* was also available.

As with other smaller non-agricultural uses that occur within *prime agricultural areas*, smaller natural heritage features were not removed from *prime agricultural areas*.

# 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 and enhance agriculture and the prosperity and viability of the broader agri-food sector. OMAFRA's Agricultural System Portal contains information on the *agri-food network*, covering parts of the value chain from production through to primary processing.

The Greenbelt Plan and A Place to Grow 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 3.4.

The study area for the *agri-food network* was the entire *GGH* plus a one kilometre 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 in the mapping portal beyond the one kilometre 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* used by the agri-food sector such as:
  - transportation infrastructure (e.g., roads, rails, ports, airfreight airports)
  - drainage and irrigation systems
  - highspeed, broadband internet[8]
  - natural gas and electrical utilities[9]

- Regional agri-food assets and services including:
  - food and beverage primary processors (e.g., dairies, cheese plants, wineries, cideries, canners, biomass processors)[10]
  - 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

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[8] The agri-food sector uses broadband services to monitor buildings and equipment, place orders, track performance, enhance efficiencies, market products, access information on weather, sales and market opportunities, etc.

[9] Energy may be needed for heating, ventilation, feed systems, processing, lighting and motors.

[10] While the agri-food sector captures the entire value chain of agricultural commodities, for the purposes of this *Agricultural System* work, the *agri-food network* 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). Secondary processing and retailing are still important to the agri-food value chain and the entire *Agricultural System*, however.

- agricultural inputs and services such as:

  ○ mechanical services

  ○ equipment dealerships

  ○ feed mills

  ○ seed, fertilizer and feed suppliers

  ○ grading, packing and distribution facilities

  ○ custom operators

  ○ large animal veterinarians

  ○ crop and nutrient management consultants

- agricultural operations
- on-farm buildings/structures and infrastructure including:

  ○ barns

  ○ feed storage

  ○ grain dryers

  ○ maple syrup shacks and honey houses

  ○ tobacco kilns

  ○ aquaculture facilities

  ○ manure storage

  ○ climate-controlled growing and storage facilities

  ○ on-farm biogas facilities

  ○ 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., value chain mapping to identify opportunities to create or grow clusters).

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*.

Urban agriculture may also be part of the *Agricultural System*, including the growing of plants and raising of animals on private property, in community gardens, school gardens, indoor agriculture, food and beverage primary processing and distribution (e.g., farmers markets, food terminal). OMAFRA, Sustain Ontario and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario have resources to support urban agriculture. Urban agriculture elements can be mapped by municipalities and linkages to the broader *Agricultural System* recognized.

*Cultural heritage resources* are also important to the *Agricultural System*, including archaeological sites, built heritage resources and *cultural heritage landscapes*. These areas may be mapped, conserved and considered in terms of their role in supporting the agri-food sector (e.g., value to agri-business and agri-tourism uses).

Vibrant, agriculture-supportive communities are communities that encourage businesses in the *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 *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.

- Town of Lincoln: identifies itself as a "Centre of Excellence for Agriculture" with a specific focus on horticulture.

- Northumberland County: integration of agri-food into most economic development activities; Ontario Agri-Food Venture Centre (OAFVC[11]); support for beverage farming[12] (Figure 3).

## 2.2.2 Data Sources

Information on the *agri-food network* is available from OMAFRA's Agricultural System Portal. It identifies agri-food assets, clusters and supply chains within a single municipality and across municipalities. Much of the data displayed in the maps originates from ConnectON: 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.[13] While OMAFRA's mapping of the *agri-food network* is accessible via web portal, municipalities can access detailed data on the *GGH* directly from the GHFFA's asset mapping.

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[11] The Ontario Agri-Food Venture Centre supports niche fresh fruit and vegetable value-added opportunities to provide second source revenues to farm operations. The facility provides food processing facility rental, refrigeration and freezer cold storage, training, research and development, and batch testing, as well as packing, labelling and storage services.

[12] 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.

[13] Outside of the *GGH*, ConnectON asset mapping is also available for Eastern Ontario and may be developed for other Ontario municpaltiies on request.

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 *agri-food network* of the *Agricultural System*.

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 *infrastructure*, services and 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 3. Example of an Agri-Food Value Chain** (source: Northumberland County)

## 2.2.3    Uses of Agri-Food Network Information

Awareness of the *agri-food network* and its importance to the sector should inform economic development strategies, investment decisions, local food initiatives and *AIA*s. When land use planning, *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 functional clusters and cluster development opportunities with adjoining communities (Figure 4).
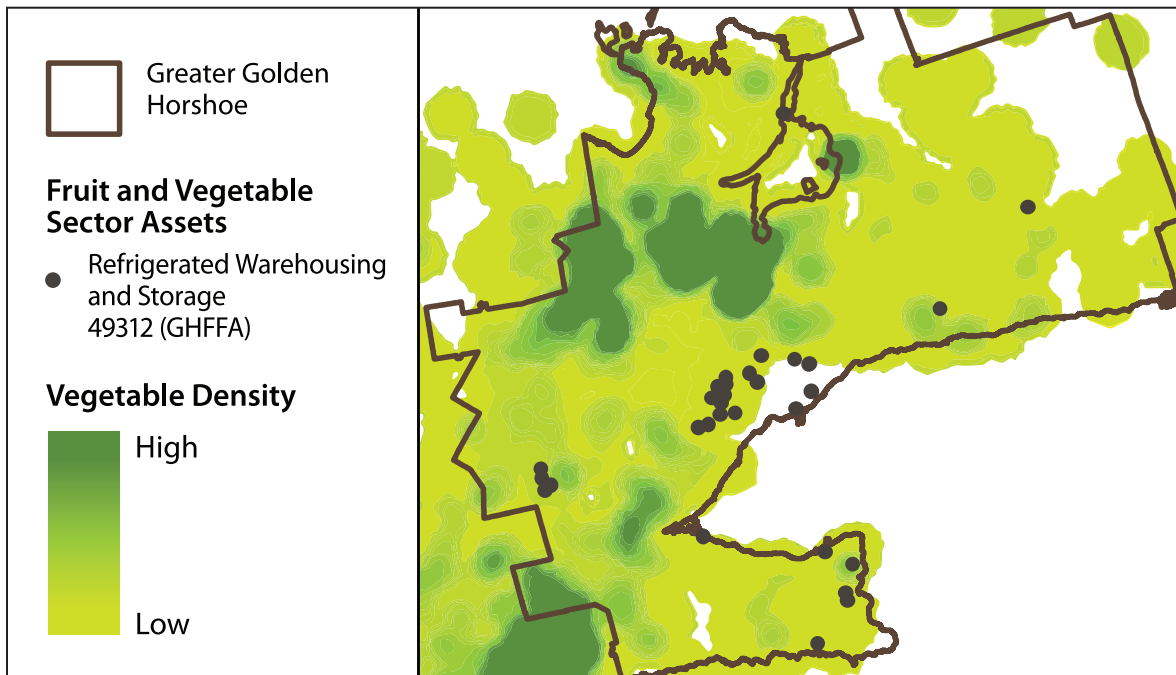


**Figure 4. Example Map with Selected Mapping Layers from the Agricultural System Portal**

The provincial land use plans for the *GGH* contain policies regarding *AIA*s for development such as *settlement area* boundary expansions, new *mineral aggregate operation* applications in *prime agricultural areas* and applicable *infrastructure projects*. An *AIA* evaluates the potential impacts of non-agricultural uses on agricultural operations and the *Agricultural System*, and recommends ways to avoid, or if avoidance is not possible, minimize and mitigate adverse impacts.

Even where an *AIA* is not explicitly required (e.g., on *rural lands*),  an *AIA* can be an effective tool to meet policy outcomes. The Agricultural System Portal can be used to identify the locations of *prime agricultural areas* and *rural lands* within the agricultural land base, and *agri-food network* elements that together comprise the *Agricultural System*.

Part B:
# Implementation Procedures

# 3   Implementation of Agricultural System Policies

This section focuses on implementation of the *Agricultural System* policies in the provincial plans through official plans and other processes and strategies. Implementation involves consistent designation of *prime agricultural areas*, including *specialty crop areas*, and a recognition that *rural lands* may be part of the agricultural land base. It also involves maintaining and improving the *agri-food network*. While the Agricultural System Portal maps elements of the *agri-food network*, the network itself is not expected to be designated in official plans. Rather, awareness of the *agri-food network* is needed for economic development purposes and for completion of *AIA*s.

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 local and global markets. 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 supporting and enhancing agriculturally-related services and *infrastructure* through the *agri-food network*. It is also important for municipalities to consider Indigenous harvesting and cultural practices when making decisions.

The official plan review process is one of the most important opportunities to take a positive planning approach to agriculture, and is outlined in Section 3.1. Just as important, the *Agricultural System* policies can be met through economic development initiatives, asset management plans, and multi-regional collaborations, as described in Section 3.4. By integrating economic development actions with a positive land use planning approach to agriculture, municipalities and the Province can more effectively achieve the *Agricultural System* outcomes identified in Section 1.4.

## 3.1   Official Plan Review

When official plans in the *GGH* are reviewed, municipalities must consider how to comprehensively address multiple provincial interests such as agriculture, natural heritage, growth management and *infrastructure* to conform with A Place to Grow and the other applicable provincial plans.

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, consulted and input is considered.
- Council makes a decision whether to adopt the new plan.
- Where the decision is made to adopt a new or amended plan, Council gives notice of adoption and sends the plan to the applicable approval authority.
- The approval authority makes a decision and gives notice of the decision.

More detail is available in the _Citizen's Guide: Official Plans_ (Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, 2010).

# 3.2 Status of Agricultural Land Base Mapping

In accordance with A Place to Grow policy 4.2.6.1, the Province has identified an _Agricultural System_ for the _GGH_. This was achieved with the release of _Agricultural System_ mapping on February 9, 2018.

Both the Greenbelt Plan and A Place to Grow state that the continuity of the agricultural land base and the functional and economic connections to the _agri-food network_ shall be maintained and enhanced.

Within the Greenbelt area, the provincial agricultural land base mapping of _prime agricultural areas_ was in effect as soon as it was issued by the Province on February 9, 2018. Land use planning decisions made after that date need to conform to provincial mapping.  Municipalities have the opportunity to refine the provincial agricultural land base mapping within the Greenbelt area. The refined mapping will take effect after it is incorporated into the applicable upper- or single-tier official plan (i.e., adopted through an upper- or single-tier official plan or official plan amendment, then approved by the minister of Municpal Affairs and Housing).

According to A Place to Grow policy 4.2.6.8, outside the Greenbelt area, provincial mapping of the agricultural land base does not apply until it has been implemented in the applicable upper- or single-tier official plan. Until that occurs, for the purpose of applying A Place to Grow policies outside the Greenbelt area, the agricultural land base is comprised of designated _prime agricultural areas_ in upper- and single-tier official plans that were approved and in effect as of July 1, 2017.  In other words, until the provincial mapping is refined and incorporated into an official plan, development applications pertaining to lands outside of designated _prime agricultural areas_ in upper- or single-tier official plans are not subject to _prime agricultural area_ policies even if the unrefined provincial agricultural land base mapping shows it as _prime agricultural area_. Once the provincial agricultural land base mapping has been refined and incorporated into an official plan, it prevails and all land use planning decisions must conform.

Across the *GGH*, for candidate areas identified in the provincial agricultural land base map, current in-effect land use designations in official plans apply until the mapping has been refined and lands meeting the definition of *prime agricultural area* are designated in the applicable official plan.

# 3.3        Agricultural Land Base Refinements

## 3.3.1        Timing and Approval of Refinements

The provincially mapped *Agricultural System* includes a continuous productive land base, comprised of *prime agricultural areas*, including *specialty crop areas*, and certain *rural lands*, as well as a complementary *agri-food network* that together support a viable, thriving agricultural sector. Policy 4.2.6.2 of A Place to Grow states that "*prime agricultural areas*, including *specialty crop areas*, will be designated in accordance with mapping identified by the Province and these areas will be protected for long-term use for agriculture."

Upper- and single-tier municipalities have the option of undertaking refinements in advance of and/or during their *municipal comprehensive review*. In addition, upper-tier municipalities may undertake refinements for each lower tier municipality separately, or all together across the upper-tier municipality.

As set out in O. Reg. 525/97 of the *Planning Act, 1990*, within the *GGH*, any official plan amendment to designate, amend or revoke a *prime agricultural area* must come to the minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for approval (other than for the purposes of including all of the applicable land within a *settlement area*). This means that refinements to the agricultural land base mapping must still come to the Province for approval even where they are proposed outside of an official plan review or *municipal comprehensive review*. The Province is also the approval authority for new official plans, 10-year reviews, and five-year reviews of official plans, provided the official plan or official plan amendment is subject to Section 26 of the *Planning Act, 1990*, and/or not exempt from approval. As part of the One-Window Planning System, OMAFRA will review mapping and agricultural policies in official plans and official plan amendments for consistency with provincial plans and these implementation procedures. Throughout the refinement process, consultation with adjoining municipalities (regardless of the stage they are at in refining the mapping), agricultural advisory committees and other relevant stakeholders is important.

The refinement process is intended to be collaborative between the upper- or single-tier municipality and the Province. Technical changes that may be based on updated mapping or data, as well as issues raised by landowners will be considered based on the criteria discussed in Section 3.3.2.1. Reaching agreement on potential refinements before the municipality submits the official plan or official plan amendment to the Province will help create a more predictable, efficient process.

Once the official plan amendment is approved, lower-tier municipalities will continue to be responsible for updating their official plans to align with the approved and in-effect upper-tier official plan that conforms with A Place to Grow and the Greenbelt Plan.

In addition to maintaining and enhancing the geographic continuity of the agricultural land base as well as the functional and economic connections to the *agri-food network*, other policies in A Place to Grow and the Greenbelt Plan must be implemented (e.g., *AIA* requirements, integrated planning for growth management). Municipalities are also encouraged to implement strategies to sustain and enhance the *Agricultural System* before, during and after *municipal comprehensive review*.

## 3.3.1.1 Before Municipal Comprehensive Review

As noted, A Place to Grow (policy 4.2.6.9) specifies that upper- and single-tier municipalities may refine the provincial mapping of the agricultural land base map in advance of a *municipal comprehensive review*. The Greenbelt Plan (policies 3.1.1 and 5.3) requires that upper- and single-tier municipalities refine and augment official plan mapping to bring *prime agricultural areas* and *rural lands* into conformity with provincial mapping according to these implementation procedures. In the Greenbelt Plan area, an initial refinement exercise may be completed in advance of or during a *municipal comprehensive review*.

An upper- or single-tier municipality could undertake a thematic official plan amendment under Section 26 of the *Planning Act, 1990*, to adopt agricultural land base mapping refinements across the entire upper-tier before a *municipal comprehensive review*.

Before a *municipal comprehensive review*, an upper-tier municipality also has the option to refine the provincial mapping of the agricultural land base separately for one or more lower-tier municipalities (A Place to Grow policy 4.2.6.9). This process would likely use an official plan amendment under Section 17 (i.e., it would be outside a thematic update under Section 26 of the *Planning Act, 1990*, and outside a *municipal comprehensive review*). Official plan amendments adopted under Section 17 of the *Planning Act, 1990*, may be appealed to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal.

Whether refinements are initially made across the entire upper-tier municipality or separately for each lower-tier municipality, care must be taken to ensure that the agricultural land base is continuous and *prime agricultural areas* are consistently identified across municipal boundaries. That means that the same transparent approach is used to refine the agricultural land base across the upper-tier municipality. This is especially important for refinements based on natural heritage features and non-agricultural uses that overlap with *prime agricultural areas*.

Lands on both sides of municipal boundaries within and adjoining the upper-tier municipality should be edge-matched. Lands in agricultural production (as observed directly or as shown in AAFC's crop inventory mapping) and identified in the provincial agricultural land base map as *prime agricultural area* (or in some cases, candidate area) should be designated *prime agricultural area* continuously across municipal boundaries. When edge-matching, connections to the *agri-food network* also need to be considered because clusters of agri-food activity may span across municipal boundaries. The Agricultural System Portal may help to identify elements of the *agri-food network*. Consultation with adjoining municipalities and other stakeholders is critical to the edge-matching process.

### 3.3.1.2 During Municipal Comprehensive Review

While the initial refinement of the agricultural land base may occur in advance of a *municipal comprehensive review*, any subsequent refinement may only occur through a *municipal comprehensive review* (A Place to Grow policy 4.2.6.9). As discussed under initial refinements, edge-matching and consultation with adjoining municipalities and others are essential. Mapping refinements incorporated through a *municipal comprehensive review* cannot be appealed to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal.

## 3.3.2 Municipal Refinement Process

While Section 2.1 summarizes OMAFRA's process for identifying the agricultural land base, this section focuses on municipal refinement and augmentation of the agricultural land base mapping.

A Place to Grow and the Greenbelt Plan require municipalities to designate *prime agricultural areas*, including *specialty crop areas*, in their official plans according to provincial *Agricultural System* mapping and these implementation procedures.

The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Niagara Escarpment Plan refer to the *Agricultural System*. In these two Plan areas, as elsewhere in the *GGH*, *prime agricultural areas* need to be mapped so that it is clear where *prime agricultural area* policies apply. Policies in the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Niagara Escarpment Plan prescribe the uses that are permitted in different designations, including *prime agricultural areas*. These permitted uses may differ from permitted uses for *prime agricultural areas* in A Place to Grow and the Greenbelt Plan.

OMAFRA and MMAH will support municipalities as they undertake the refinement process. OMAFRA will share data and work with municipalities to address data errors, incorporate new information supplied by municipalities and consider issues raised by landowners.

When undertaking mapping refinements, municipalities need to 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 the *Agricultural System* mapping method, purpose, outcomes and the refinement circumstances described in these implementation procedures. In many municipalities, existing designated *prime agricultural areas* align well with the provincial agricultural land base map. In these cases, only minor changes may be needed to municipally designated *prime agricultural areas*, including the possible addition of candidate areas for the agricultural land base (see Section 3.3.2.2). In most cases, changes will be required to existing designated *prime agricultural areas* to address cross-boundary discrepancies with neighbouring municipalities and provide for continuity across municipalities. In some municipalities, existing designated *prime agricultural areas* may require more substantial changes to achieve consistency with *Agricultural System* mapping principles, purpose and outcomes. Recognition of *rural lands* that are part of the agricultural land base will also be important (Section 3.3.2.3).

Consultation during official plan reviews will be 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,[14] environmental and local food interests)

- Indigenous communities and organizations

- lower-tier municipalities within the upper-tier municipality

- adjacent municipalities to ensure that as much as possible, the agricultural land base is continuous and consistently identified across municipal boundaries and

- OMAFRA and MMAH.

Figure 5 illustrates how refinements are to occur, in keeping with the descriptions to follow.

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[14] This should include agricultural advisory committees (where they exist) and representatives from local agri-food organizations who understand how the *Agricultural System* functions and who understand the links across municipal boundaries.
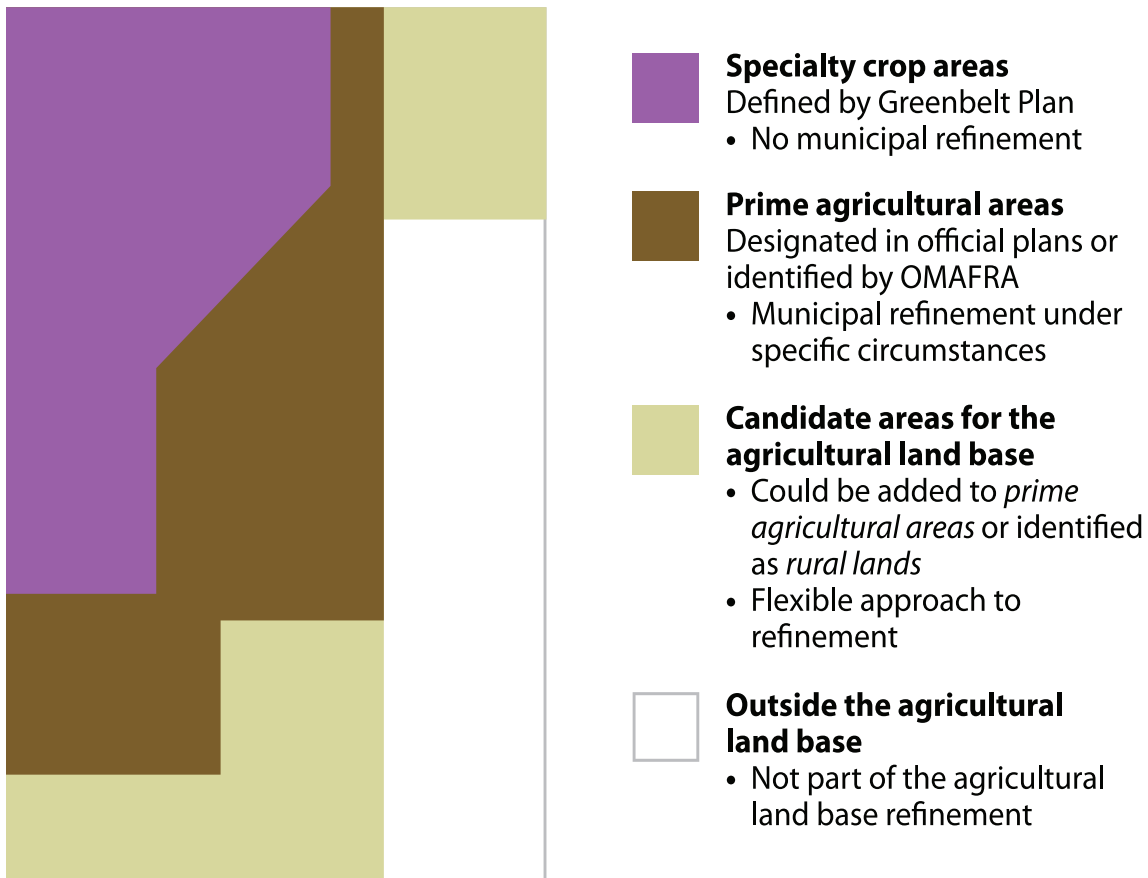
**Specialty crop areas**
Defined by Greenbelt Plan
• No municipal refinement

**Prime agricultural areas**
Designated in official plans or identified by OMAFRA
• Municipal refinement under specific circumstances

**Candidate areas for the agricultural land base**
• Could be added to *prime agricultural areas* or identified as *rural lands*
• Flexible approach to refinement

**Outside the agricultural land base**
• Not part of the agricultural land base refinement

**Figure 5. Agricultural Land Base Map Refinement**

The refinement process is intended to be collaborative between municipalities and the Province. Early engagement with OMAFRA is essential if upper- and single-tier municipalities propose differences between the provincial agricultural land base mapping and proposed *prime agricultural areas*.

For each area the municipality proposes to refine, documentation should be provided to the Province including location, applicable refinement criteria and supporting information. This is to be submitted to the Province for review and approval along with the proposed official plan or official plan amendment(s).

### 3.3.2.1    Prime Agricultural Areas

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

*Prime agricultural areas* shown in OMAFRA's agricultural land base map are those areas designated in municipal official plans or identified by OMAFRA based on high LEAR scores. These areas are core elements of the agricultural land base and warrant a *prime agricultural area* designation subject to the refinement circumstances described below.

In general, OMAFRA's agricultural land base map is to be used to augment (i.e., add to) existing designated *prime agricultural areas* to achieve a continuous, productive land base for agriculture. The goals of consistent protection and continuity of the agricultural land base need to be achieved, recognizing that pockets of non-agricultural uses may be included in the broader agricultural land base.

During the municipal refinement process, refinements to *prime agricultural areas* mapped in OMAFRA's agricultural land base map are to be based on consistency with the *Agricultural System* mapping method, purpose and outcomes, and may be approved in the following circumstances:

- To adjust *prime agricultural areas* to identifiable boundaries (beyond the identifiable boundaries used by the Province to create the agricultural land base map).[15]

  ○ Identifiable boundaries may include roads, railways, large water bodies and *settlement area* boundaries, but do not include the following: topographic features (e.g., cliffs), buildings, small creeks or drainage ditches or provincial plan boundaries (e.g., to Niagara Escarpment Plan or Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan boundaries).

- To make minor technical adjustments (e.g., to account for distortion from map projections or discrepancies based on map scales).

- To account for *settlement area* boundaries that were approved in upper- and single-tier official plans in effect as of July 1, 2017 and any additional refinements to *settlement area* boundaries once precise locations have been determined through an official plan process.[16]

- To recognize more precise local information, specifically:

  ○ Lands such as First Nation reserve lands and federally regulated portions of aerodromes.

  ○ Future updates to the provincial LEAR if significant changes are made to the official OMAFRA Canada Land Inventory mapping.

  ○ Existing upper- or single-tier municipal LEARs[17] and accompanying mapping if they are consistent with and do not conflict with the *Agricultural System* mapping method, purpose and outcomes.[18] The provincial LEAR may take precedence where appropriate to achieve continuity across municipal and provincial plan boundaries and to achieve other *Agricultural System* purposes and outcomes.

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[15] 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 area* policies apply. This helps to protect large, continuous areas and avoid scattered site specific exceptions for non-agricultural uses.

[16] Agricultural land base mapping does not apply in *settlement areas*.

[17] Prepared before the date these implementation procedures came into effect.

[18] Municipal LEARs that automatically assign a score of zero to areas with natural cover, or significantly reduce overall scores due to proximity to *settlement areas*, are examples of LEAR approaches that conflict with the *Agricultural System* mapping method, purpose and outcomes. Where such inconsistencies occur, municipal LEARs may not be used to justify refinements. In contrast, municipal LEARs that use accurate local data on farm drainage and infrastructure, for example, and use agricultural infrastructure as a LEAR factor, would be different from the provincial LEAR but not in conflict with it. Such municipal LEARs could inform refinements.

- ○ Designated *employment areas* (see Section 3.3.2.9).

- ○ Contiguous areas greater than 250 ha of existing, permitted non-agricultural and non-residential uses[19] that are unlikely to be rehabilitated to agriculture and are not characteristic of *prime agricultural areas*. Non-agricultural uses may include commercial, institutional, cemeteries, golf courses, industrial parks, *mineral aggregate resources* areas below the water table, built-up areas along highways, developed shoreline areas (as per A Place to Grow policy 4.2.4.5), *infrastructure* (named in A Place to Grow Schedules 5 and 6) that has been developed, large impervious surfaces, and designated *employment areas*.

- To recognize *key natural heritage features* in which *agricultural uses* are not on-going (as discussed in Section 3.3.2.4).

- To add areas in order to create a continuous agricultural land base across municipal boundaries (i.e., edge matching of lands in agricultural production).

- As a best practice, to add *prime agricultural areas* resulting from situations where land is de-designated from *settlement areas*.

Municipalities and the Province will work together to avoid refinements to *prime agricultural areas* in the agricultural land base map in the following circumstances:

- Where refinements do not align with the mapping method, purpose and outcomes.

- Where refinements would present significant discrepancies[20] 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 and where the refinement would not conflict with any other policy of the same plan.

- Where refinements would result in a reduction in *prime agricultural areas* compared to previous official plans in the same jurisdiction, excluding land for *settlement area* boundary expansions.

- Where refinements would exchange higher quality agricultural lands for lower quality lands.

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

- To exclude the *Natural Heritage System* (which is required to be an overlay) or *key natural heritage features* in which agricultural uses are ongoing.

- To reflect supporting information in agricultural studies where they were completed based on earlier provincial policies that do not adequately address current provincial policies.

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[19] As per PPS policy 2.3.6.1 b), removal of *prime agricultural areas* for residential uses is not permitted.
[20] Refinements that conflict with the *Agricultural System* purpose and outcomes and agricultural land base mapping principles and methods would be considered a significant discrepancy.

### 3.3.2.2        Adding Candidate Areas to Prime Agricultural Areas

The process for considering candidate areas for the agricultural land base is flexible. Municipalities may wish to undertake further analysis and consultation on candidate areas during the municipal refinement process to classify 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.

In the provincial agricultural land base map, areas identified as candidate areas for the agricultural land base are recommended to be added to the designated *prime agricultural area* if they meet the definition of *prime agricultural areas* ("...areas of *prime agricultural lands* and associated Class 4 through 7 lands, and additional areas where there is a local concentration of farms that exhibit characteristics of ongoing agriculture") even if these lands did not receive a high LEAR score.

### 3.3.2.3        Adding Candidate Areas to Rural Lands Within the Agricultural Land Base

By definition, the agricultural land base includes *rural lands*. The *rural lands* policies in the PPS, A Place to Grow and Greenbelt Plan apply and allow for a wider range of uses than in *prime agricultural areas*. This includes cemeteries, fairgrounds, campgrounds and recreation sites. *Rural lands* provide opportunities to locate rural, non-agricultural uses where appropriate, outside of *prime agricultural areas*.

> **Rural lands** are lands which are located outside of *settlement areas* and which are outside of *prime agricultural areas*.
>
> PPS, A Place to Grow and Greenbelt Plan
>
> For the purpose of the *Agricultural System*,
>
> **Rural lands within the agricultural land base** are *rural lands* that, together with *prime agricultural areas*, help to create a continuous, productive land base for agriculture. *Rural lands* may also link *prime agricultural areas* or support elements of the *agri-food network*.

As discussed, some candidate areas for the agricultural land base may qualify as *prime agricultural areas*. Other areas do not meet the *prime agricultural area* definition but help to create a continuous, productive land base for agriculture as per the *Agricultural System* definition. This also accords with A Place to Grow policy 4.2.6.4 which requires the geographic continuity of the agricultural land base and the functional and economic connections to the *agri-food network* to be maintained and enhanced. *Rural lands* within the agricultural land base may serve these functions, linking *prime agricultural areas* and/or supporting elements of the *agri-food network*. Identification of *rural lands* within the agricultural land base is left to municipal discretion, as long as the *Agricultural System* purpose and outcomes are met.

As a best practice, official plan policy for *rural lands* would specify that all areas in agricultural production (e.g., as shown in AAFC's crop inventory maps) and areas that support elements of the *agri-food network* (as per [Agricultural System Portal](#) mapping) would be defined as being part of the *Agricultural System*.

The Niagara Escarpment Plan Area comprises seven land use designations with individual policies and objectives governing land use. One such designation is the Escarpment Rural Area. The Escarpment Rural Area is not to be confused with the more general *rural lands* term used throughout this document. The meaning and context of *rural lands* within the PPS, Greenbelt Plan and A Place to Grow is generally lands which are located outside of *settlement areas* and *prime agricultural areas*. In contrast, the Escarpment Rural Areas designation may contain *prime agricultural areas*.

**Policy implications for rural lands in the agricultural land base:**

- Municipalities are required to maintain and enhance the geographic continuity of the agricultural land base (that may include some *rural lands*) and functional and economic connections to the *agri-food network* (A Place to Grow policy 4.2.6.4).

- Municipalities are encouraged to plan for the success of the agri-food sector, in part by recognizing and supporting the *agri-food network* (A Place to Grow policy 4.2.6.7), some of which may be located on *rural lands*.

- Impacts to the *Agricultural System* from some non-agricultural uses need to be avoided, or if avoidance is not possible, minimized and mitigated. This may include *rural lands* within the agricultural land base.

See policy references in Appendix 1

### 3.3.2.4      Agricultural Land Base Refinements Related to Natural Heritage Features and Areas

When developing land use planning policies for natural heritage within *prime agricultural areas*, municipalities need to ensure that *agricultural uses* and activities are permitted in appropriate locations (Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, 2010). It is important to differentiate (i.e., use different symbology) systems from features (e.g., *Natural Heritage System*, *key natural heritage features*, and *key hydrologic features*) because provincial policies differ for each.

Section 1.5.1 of these implementation procedures describes natural heritage policies in detail. While policies require the *Natural Heritage System* to be mapped as an overlay outside of *settlement areas*, mapping refinements may be made to recognize *key natural heritage features* in which agricultural uses are not on-going. However, since *key natural heritage features* (and *key hydrologic features*) and *prime agricultural areas* often overlap, municipalities should consider different mapping options.

**Mapping Options to Address the Overlap Between** *Prime Agricultural Areas and Key Natural Heritage Features* **within the** *Natural Heritage System and Within Key Hydrologic Features*

For clarity and consistency across the *GGH*, it is recommended that as a best practice, one of four options be used by municipalities for official plan mapping where *prime agricultural areas* overlap with *key natural heritage features* and *key hydrologic features*. In all four options, the *Natural Heritage System in the Growth Plan* / Greenbelt Plan Natural Heritage System would be an overlay. As well, permissions for new *agricultural uses*, *agriculture-related uses* and *on-farm diversified uses* where features and *prime agricultural areas* overlap would be restricted by protective policies (i.e., no *development* or *site alteration*).

1. **Overlay:** *Prime agricultural areas*, *key natural heritage features* and *key hydrologic features* would be shown on the same land use schedule, with overlay symbology (e.g., hatching) used for *key natural heritage features* and *key hydrologic features*, such that *prime agricultural areas* are visible beneath the overlays. The policies imposed by an overlay would be in addition to, and not in lieu of, the permissions or restrictions associated with the underlying designation.

2. **Dual designation:** Two different designations for the same geographic area would be shown on two separate land use schedules. *Prime agricultural areas* could be shown on one land use schedule (potentially on the main land use schedule), and *key natural heritage features* and *key hydrologic features* mapped on another land use schedule.

3. **Hybrid designation:** A hybrid designation (e.g., 'Natural Features in Prime Agricultural Areas') would only be used in areas of overlap between *prime agricultural areas* and *key natural heritage features* and *key hydrologic features*. Permitted uses in the hybrid designation would be distinct and clearly identified, without requiring two sets of policies to be considered.

4. **Single designation:** Separate, distinct *key natural heritage feature* and *key hydrologic feature* designations would be used. Policies could explain how *prime agricultural areas* within features are to be addressed.

If local natural heritage systems are identified outside of the provincial *Natural Heritage System for the Growth Plan* / Greenbelt Plan Natural Heritage System, they could likewise be shown as an overlay in official plan maps, or other approaches as appropriate, consistent with the [Natural Heritage Reference Manual](#) (Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, 2010). Where *natural heritage features and areas* and *key hydrologic features* outside the *Natural Heritage System* overlap with *prime agricultural areas*, it would also be useful to designate them in a way that shows where they overlap.

### 3.3.2.5 Areas Within the Water Resource System

Unlike the provincially led process for identifying the *Agricultural* and *Natural Heritage Systems*, under the provincial plans, the *GGH* land use plans and the PPS require municipalities to identify *water resource systems* to provide for the long-term protection of *key hydrologic features,*[21] *key hydrologic areas* and their functions. Like *Natural Heritage Systems in the Growth Plan* / Greenbelt Plan Natural Heritage System and *key natural heritage features*, it is recommended that *key hydrologic features* and areas be identified in a manner that ensures their protection while allowing *agricultural uses* to continue. The *water resource system* will be informed by *watershed planning* or equivalent.

The agri-food sector relies on water for such uses as irrigation and value-added processing. Agriculture and the agri-food sector depend on and influence water quality and quantity. Agricultural and *rural lands* provide important vegetative cover that helps maintain our *water resource system*, as well as playing a role in groundwater recharge and climate change mitigation and adaptation. Farmers and the agri-food sector have an important role in managing and conserving water and protecting the features, areas and functions within the *water resource system*.

### 3.3.2.6 Areas Within the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan Area

As discussed in Section 1.5.2, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan recognizes the *GGH Agricultural System* and acknowledges that *prime agricultural areas* may be found in Natural Core Areas,  Natural Linkage Areas and Countryside Area designations. The Plan states that it is important to identify *prime agricultural areas* in the plan area. This is needed to implement *prime agricultural area* policies in the plan.

In the Oak Ridges Moraine, the mapping refinement process is intended to be collaborative between the upper- or single-tier municipality and OMAFRA, similar to elsewhere in the *GGH*. Municipalities are encouraged to undertake refinements inside and outside the Oak Ridges Moraine at the same time to achieve continuity and consistency.

The recommended approach for municipal official plans is to show Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan designations on one official plan land use schedule and *prime agricultural areas* on another schedule following municipal refinement.

Where the agricultural land base is mapped by the Province in the area of the Rouge National Urban Park, to the extent that other management plans take precedence, planning authorities are encouraged to consider the long-term protection and promotion of *agricultural uses* and *prime agricultural areas*.

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[21] Policy 3.2.5 of the Greenbelt Plan contains special provisions pertaining to permitted uses in the Niagara Peninsula Tender Fruit and Grape Area in proximity to *permanent* and *intermittent streams*.

### 3.3.2.7    Areas Within the Niagara Escarpment Plan Area

The agricultural land base extends across the land area covered by all four provincial plans, but only includes the portion of the Niagara Escarpment Plan that is located within the *GGH*. Section 1.5.3 describes how the Niagara Escarpment Plan addresses the *Agricultural System*.

As a whole, Escarpment Natural Areas do not qualify as *prime agricultural areas* due to their large area, extensive natural cover and topography. While pockets of agriculture continue on those lands, new *agriculture-related* and *on-farm diversified uses* are generally not permitted in Escarpment Natural Areas. As noted in Section 2.1.3, Escarpment Natural Areas have been removed from the agricultural land base map.

*Prime agricultural areas* are, however, found in other Niagara Escarpment Plan designations, most commonly in Escarpment Rural Areas. The Niagara Escarpment Plan contains agriculture-supportive policies for these areas.

To implement its policies and the development control permit system, the Niagara Escarpment Commission needs to know where *prime agricultural area* policies apply. Municipal official plan *prime agricultural area* mapping, consistent with the Province's agricultural land base mapping and these implementation procedures, is required that shows that the agricultural land base extends into and beyond the Niagara Escarpment Plan Area across the *GGH*. The mapping refinement process is intended to be collaborative between upper- or single-tier municipality, OMAFRA and the Niagara Escarpment Commission. Municipalities are encouraged to undertake refinements inside and outside the Niagara Escarpment Plan area at the same time to achieve continuity and consistency objectives.

### 3.3.2.8    Existing and Future Site Specific Designations

As noted, municipalities may refine the agricultural land base map where there are large areas (i.e., 250 hectares or larger) of existing, permitted non-agricultural land uses that are unlikely to be rehabilitated to agriculture, or where provincial and municipal planning jurisdiction is restricted. These areas may be shown in a different designation.

Other existing municipally designated non-agricultural uses within the *prime agricultural area* (e.g., institutional, recreational or commercial, but not designations such as *rural lands* or open space) may keep their non-agricultural designations, with official plan policies that recognize that the non-agricultural uses are part of the *prime agricultural area*. Should the non-agricultural uses be proposed to change or be expanded, *prime agricultural area* policies would apply.

Alternatively (and preferably), existing non-agricultural uses within the *prime agricultural area* would be designated *prime agricultural area*, with site specific policies in the official plan indicating that the non-agricultural use is allowed. Since PPS policy 2.3.5 only allows removal of land from *prime agricultural areas* for expansions of *settlement areas*, this is the designation approach to be used in future planning decisions. Where a limited non-agricultural use has been justified in a *prime agricultural area* as a site specific exception (e.g., in accordance with PPS policy 2.3.6), that land is to remain part of the *prime agricultural area*. This is explained in OMAFRA's *Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Areas*.

The approval process for most non-agricultural uses requires the rigorous assessment of need, evaluation of alternative locations and mitigation of impacts on agricultural operations and lands (PPS policy 2.3.6). The provincial plans build on the PPS. 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*) subject to mitigation of impacts on the *Agricultural System*. Like the PPS, A Place to Grow does not permit non-agricultural uses except under limited conditions and requires mitigation of impacts on agricultural operations and lands. The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Niagara Escarpment Plan also contain policies requiring protection of *prime agricultural areas* and avoidance of non-agricultural uses.

New site-specific removals of land from *prime agricultural areas* are not anticipated after the agricultural land base has been refined, with the exception of *settlement area* boundary expansions, subject to an *AIA* and other studies.

### 3.3.2.9    Employment Areas

Designated *employment areas*, whether urban or rural, often accommodate agri-food businesses that are part of the *agri-food network* and *Agricultural System*. Given that A Place to Grow requires *employment areas* to be designated, *employment areas* may be removed from the *prime agricultural area*.

As a best practice, existing approved *employment areas* in *prime agricultural areas* that are not yet developed could be addressed as discussed under Existing and Future Site Specific Designations (Section 3.3.2.8). When they are developed, impacts to the *Agricultural System* should be assessed and avoided, or if avoidance is not possible, minimized and mitigated. Where mitigation is required, measures should be incorporated within the area being developed, as appropriate (A Place to Grow policy 4.2.6.3; Greenbelt Plan policy 3.1.3.5).

A Place to Grow (policy 2.2.9.5) continues to permit existing *employment areas* outside of *settlement areas* on *rural lands* that were designated in an official plan that was approved and in effect as of June 16, 2006. While A Place to Grow generally directs growth to *settlement areas*, expansions to these *employment areas* on *rural lands* may only be permitted subject to conditions.

# 3.3.3   Official Plan Designations

### 3.3.3.1   Nomenclature

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

> **Recommended Agricultural and Rural Nomenclature Within the Agricultural Land Base:**
> - *specialty crop areas*
> - *prime agricultural areas*
> - *rural lands*

### 3.3.3.2   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 and provincial mapping), the entire area outside of *settlement areas* could be designated *prime agricultural area*. Municipalities that currently take this approach could continue to do so (e.g., Brant County and Haldimand County). In this case, all land outside of *settlement areas* would be within the agricultural land base.

2. In other municipalities, the majority of land outside of *settlement areas* may help to create a continuous, productive land base for agriculture, some of which is identified as *prime agricultural area* and some of which are *rural lands*, based on their respective definitions and provincial mapping. The official plan for these areas could include both *prime agricultural area* and *rural lands* designations. As a best practice, an official plan policy would explain that *rural lands* are part of the agricultural land base.

3. Still other municipalities may have a more mixed landscape comprised of *prime agricultural areas* and *rural lands*, only some of which help to create a continuous, productive land base for agriculture (e.g., Peterborough County, City of Kawartha Lakes and Simcoe County). These municipalities could include both *prime agricultural area* and *rural lands* designations in their official plans. As a best practice, an official plan policy would explain that *rural lands* in agriculture or supporting elements of the *agri-food network* are part of the agricultural land base.

A best practice would be for municipalities to refer to *rural lands* within the agricultural land base in official plan policy.

# 3.3.4 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 their *official plan* reviews.

To achieve conformity with the applicable provincial land use plans and consistency with the PPS, agricultural land base mapping refinements and official plan policies need to work together. Official plan policies need to address the following (consult provincial plans for a comprehensive list):

- Protection of *prime agricultural areas*, including *specialty crop areas*, for long-term use in agriculture. Firm *prime agricultural area* boundaries provide certainty for farmers and the future of farmland in a region where development pressures are intense and expected to rise.

- The agricultural land base, including the need to maintain and improve its continuity and acknowledge the important role of *rural lands* in the *Agricultural System*. This is partially achieved by identifying the agricultural land base, but also through policies on avoidance of non-agricultural uses in *prime agricultural areas*. By avoiding, or 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 *AIA*s are required and what needs to be considered, consistent with provincial policy and guidance on *AIA*s.

- Where *settlement area* boundary expansions are being considered, *prime agricultural areas should be avoided where possible*[22]. *Settlement area* boundary expansions *are* prohibited in *specialty crop areas*.

- Ensuring any adverse impacts on the *Agricultural System* (i.e., agricultural land base and *agri-food network* including agricultural operations) are avoided, or, if avoidance is not possible, minimized and mitigated.

- Strengthening the functional and economic connections between elements of the *Agricultural System* in the *GGH* and the broader agricultural system in 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 in the Growth Plan* / Greenbelt Plan Natural Heritage System mapping using the overlay approach over the agricultural land base.

- The *water resource systems* mapping 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*, and policy describing *rural lands* within the agricultural land base, aligned with these implementation procedures.

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[22] Prior to considering *settlement area* boundary expansions, refinements to the agricultural land base should be completed and site options evaluated, amongst other requirements.

- 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*. Other maps and lists of the *agri-food network* may also 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 and permitted uses are needed.

- Policies that recognize that limited existing, non-agricultural uses remain within the *prime agricultural area*. The policies should clarify that the limited non-agricultural uses are within the *prime agricultural area*, and that *agricultural uses* may continue. Conversion or expansion of the use beyond the current designated boundary is subject to the policies of PPS policy 2.3.6, possible minimum distance separation requirements, *agriculture-related* and *on-farm diversified uses* are permitted, and lot creation is restricted as per the *prime agricultural area* policies of the PPS and provincial plans.

As a best practice, municipal official plan policy could state that, where agricultural production or elements of the *agri-food network* are located on *rural lands*, these lands will be considered to be part of the *Agricultural System*.

### 3.3.5 Updates to the Provincial Agricultural Land Base Map

After municipal refinements have been made and included in approved upper- and single-tier official plan land use schedules, the Province will update the agricultural land base map for the *GGH*. This map will incorporate the detailed, approved agricultural land base mapping incorporated into municipal official plans across the *GGH*. In the future, periodic updates may be made to this map to address *settlement area* boundary expansions.

# 3.4 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 look for opportunities to make continuous improvements.

Municipalities can support a thriving agri-food sector by:

- considering impacts on the *Agricultural System* when municipal decisions are made on investments, growth and *infrastructure*, programs, policies, by-laws and services.

- undertaking economic development and planning to help strengthen and grow the sector.

## 3.4.1 Considering Agri-Food Impacts when Municipal Decisions are Made

A Place to Grow 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. A Place to Grow requires *infrastructure* to be well planned as it is essential to the viability of communities and critical to economic competitiveness, quality of life, and the delivery of public services.

Before decisions are made on future growth areas, road and bridge work, port development, placement of signage, trails, electricity transmission and distribution, communications/ telecommunications, transit, oil and gas pipelines, pipelines etc., the impact on the *Agricultural System* must be considered. Road and bridge designs are required to factor in use by area farmers, ensuring goods can be moved and large, slow-moving farm vehicles can move safely and efficiently. Municipal design guidelines for roads, bridges and traffic circles should address the needs of the agri-food sector, amongst other things.

Municipalities should consider identifying *infrastructure* improvements needed to support the agri-food sector. They could lead or support initiatives to increase access to natural gas, broadband and multi–modal transportation (e.g., rail or deep water port). Investments into rural Ontario *infrastructure* can boost agri-food production, processing and distribution, while expanding the commercial and industrial tax base and creating jobs.

Investments in municipal programs should also consider the agri-food sector (e.g., tourism promotion, marketing, community improvement plans).

In all instances, consultation with agricultural advisory committees and/or other local agri-food stakeholders should inform decisions. Regional agri-food strategies or Business Retention and Expansion studies may identify *infrastructure* priorities. OMAFRA's *Agricultural System* mapping portal can help identify the needs of the agri-food sector. When *infrastructure* projects or *settlement area* boundary 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 determine how to minimize and mitigate adverse impacts. Section 3.4.2 addresses economic development and planning tools that can be used to support the agri-food sector.

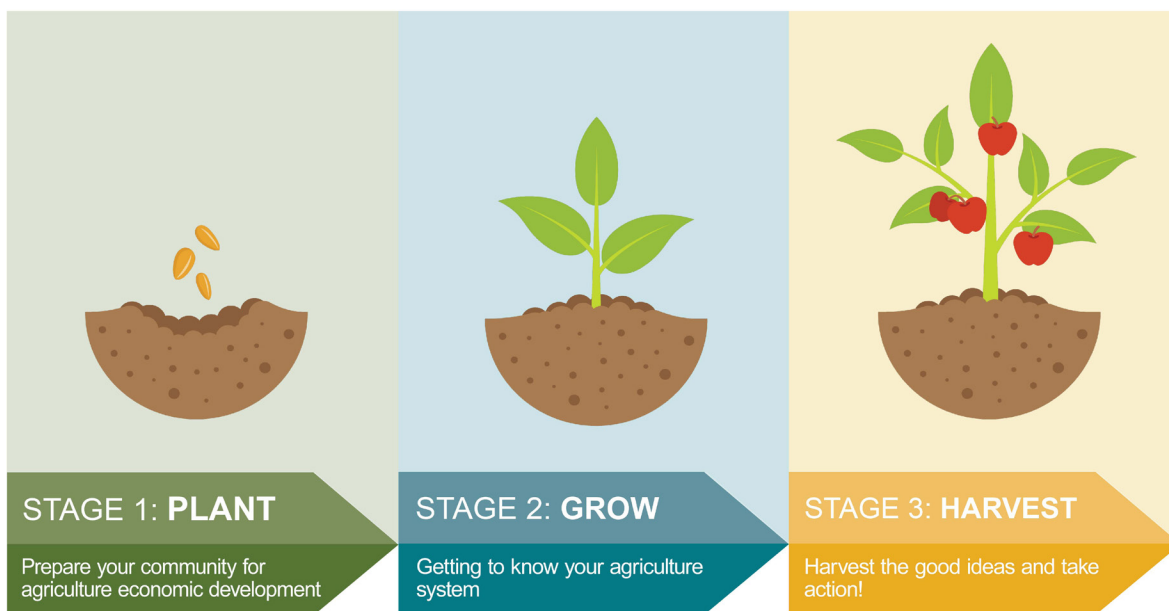## 3.4.2 Agriculture Economic Development

The Greenbelt Plan and A Place to Grow encourage municipalities to implement regional agri-food strategies and other approaches to sustain and enhance the *Agricultural System* and the long-term prosperity and viability of the sector, including the maintenance and improvement of improving the *agri-food network*.

The process for agriculture economic development has three steps that support communities in building an economic strategy that responds to the unique needs of their local agri-food sector (Figure 6). Since communities have different levels of capacity, they can enter at different stages. Some communities may need to focus on laying the foundation for future economic development efforts. Others may be ready to focus on implementation. In all instances, activities should help to increase appreciation and understanding of the *Agricultural System*.

OMAFRA's *Agriculture Economic Development: A Resource Guide for Communities* will help economic development and land use planning practitioners, municipal councils and community leaders foster the long-term economic prosperity and viability of the agri-food sector when implementing the *Agricultural System*.

The examples provided in the resource guide are adaptable to communities' specific capacities and goals. The guide's three stages of agriculture economic development are summarized below.



STAGE 1: **PLANT**
Prepare your community for agriculture economic development

STAGE 2: **GROW**
Getting to know your agriculture system

STAGE 3: **HARVEST**
Harvest the good ideas and take action!

**Figure 6. Three Stages of Agriculture Economic Development**

## STAGE 1: PLANT
### Prepare your community for agriculture economic development

The first step is to plant the seed:

- develop an understanding of community readiness
- build a baseline understanding of local agriculture
- identify and share opportunities for agriculture economic development
- organize an advisory committee or leadership team and
- provide direction to identified collaborators (roles and responsibilities).

## STAGE 2: GROW
### Getting to know your agriculture system

The next step is to build an inventory of what is going on in the *Agriculture System* in the community. From this baseline data, trends and strengths can be identified. Conversations are held about the *Agriculture System* with local collaborators. Opportunities are identified to provide the evidence needed to garner support for new initiatives:

- develop an inventory of activities taking place across the *Agriculture System*
- engage with the agricultural community (e.g., surveys, focus groups) and
- conduct data analysis, environmental scans and opportunity identification.

## STAGE 3: HARVEST
### Harvest the good ideas and take action!

After identifying community priorities, an action plan can be developed to achieve the community's goals. Across the agri-food value chain, action areas could include:

- stakeholder engagement
- communications and marketing
- business development
- workforce and leadership development
- investment attraction
- agriculture infrastructure and land use planning and
- research and innovation.

Each activity should be reviewed in the context of a community's readiness and capacity. Figure 7 from *Agriculture Economic Development: A Resource Guide for Communities* identifies programs, tools and resources to help guide communities with different capacities. Many initiatives can be scaled to capacity and delivered with support from OMAFRA's Agricultural and Rural Economic Development Advisors.

Capacity is based on the availability of dedicated staff, staff awareness of agricultural issues, support from the agricultural community and budget for agriculture economic development.

Low capacity communities may have no dedicated staff with little to no volunteer support. Current staff may have little familiarity with the agri-food sector, and little to no budget is available to support agriculture economic development activities.

Medium capacity communities may have half a full time equivalent staff member and/ or some volunteer support. They may have moderate experience and expertise in the agri-food sector, and a moderate budget for carrying out some activities.

High capacity communities may have one or more full time equivalent staff members and active volunteers to support economic development activities. Staff may have a wealth of expertise and experience in the agri-food sector. Significant budget is available to support agriculture economic development.

Capacity rankings are not absolute and can be adapted – the capacity required for any given activity depends on the scale and scope of a community's needs. Collaborating with neighbouring communities, sponsoring existing initiatives, and scoping an initiative's activities may help to build capacity. Anyone can be a community champion; volunteers will join in when they see momentum building, even when successes are small.

When implementing the *Agricultural System*, municipalities should aim to increase their community's capacity to deliver on agriculture economic development. *Agriculture Economic Development: A Resource Guide for Communities* provides guidance on how to do this.

**Community-Based Programs to Support Agricultural Economic Development**

| Agriculture Sector Support Activities | Low Capacity | Medium Capacity | High Capacity |
|---|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| Investment Attraction | | | ✓ |
| Export and Trade Development Services | | | ✓ |
| Agriculture / Local Food BR+E | | | ✓ |
| Regional Infrastructure (e.g., Food Processing Facilities, Grain Terminals etc.) | | | ✓ |
| Agriculture Community Improvement Plan | | | ✓ |
| Agriculture System Inventory - Value Chain Gap Analysis | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Implement Local Food Procurement Policies | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Agriculture Strategic Action Plan | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Implement/Update Agriculture Impact Study | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Develop & Promote Agri-Tourism and Local Food Initiatives | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Promote Local Agri-Business Innovations | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Regional Collaborations | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Food Charter | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Familiarization / VIP Ag Tours | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Agricultural Advisory Committee | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Stakeholder Engagement | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Agriculture Innovation, Research and Development | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Agri-Business Workshops: New Crop Opportunities, Value-Added Food, etc. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Community Leadership & Volunteer Development | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Agriculture Sector Community Profile | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

**Figure 7. Matching Activities with Community Capacity**

## 3.4.2.1    Community Examples

Many community-based strategies are already being implemented that help to sustain and enhance the *Agricultural System*.

- Agri-food sector specific strategic plans have been completed including Food Sector Specific Strategic Plans: Durham Region Agriculture Strategy  (updated 2019), Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Action Plan 2012 - 2021, Halton Region – Rural Agriculture Strategy and the Kawartha Lakes Agricultural Action Plan (updated 2019).

- *GGH* municipalities with dedicated agricultural-focused economic development staff include Durham Region, Halton Region, City of Kawartha Lakes, Region of Niagara, York Region and County of Northumberland.

- Within the *GGH*, upper- and single-tier municipalities with agricultural advisory committees include Durham, Haldimand, Halton, Hamilton, Kawartha Lakes, Niagara, Northumberland, Peel, Peterborough, and York.

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

- The Waterloo Region Food Charter promotes a healthy and sustainable food system where all residents have access to affordable, safe and nutritious food, and culturally acceptable food that has been produced in an environmentally sustainable way, and that supports its rural communities. This blends economic development with engaging local people in the food system.

- 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 Business Retention and Expansion 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, while achieving regulatory compliance.

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

- 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 area have enlisted an abattoir in York Region to meet the needs of a growing customer base and have brought on more farms to supply a growing demand for their branded lamb product.

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

As well as these examples, Section 2.2.1 highlights initiatives being implemented in communities to strengthen and support the agri-food sector. Additionally, *Agriculture Economic Development: A Resource Guide for Communities* provides extensive case studies of a broad spectrum of initiatives that are being implemented to foster a prosperous agri-food sector.

# 3.5      Performance Monitoring

The Province, in consultation with municipalities, other public bodies, stakeholders and First Nations and Métis communities, will monitor implementation of provincial plan policies and these implementation procedures. OMAFRA and MMAH's involvement in the refinement process will help to ensure consistent interpretation of these implementation procedures. The Province is also considering monitoring the following:

- rationale for changes to the agricultural land base map based on OMAFRA's refinement considerations.

- total number and nature of refinements.

- total area designated as *prime agricultural area*.

- *Agricultural System* policies adopted in official plans.

- progress to maintain and enhance the *agri-food network*.

- implementation of agriculture economic development and planning strategies to support and enhance the *Agricultural System*.

- collaboration with adjoining municipalities to undertake land use planning and economic development to support the *Agricultural System*.

The Province will undertake *GGH*-wide monitoring based on municipal reporting and other methods. It will assess use of the Agricultural System Portal and overall effectiveness of *Agricultural System* policies.

# 3.6    Beyond the Greater Golden Horseshoe

While these implementation procedures were designed for use in the *GGH*, they might be informative for areas outside the *GGH* where a similar approach is taken as a best practice to support the agri-food sector.  The approach complements *prime agricultural area*, *rural area*, long term economic prosperity and other PPS policies by recognizing the *agri-food network* on which the sector depends.

Many resources are available to support municipalities wishing to apply a systems approach outside the *GGH* such as:

- Agricultural System Implementation Procedures (this document)
- OMAFRA's methodology for undertaking agricultural land base mapping (described in Section 2 and summarized in Appendix 2)
- Agricultural System Portal (many mapping layers extend beyond the GGH)
- Mapping and data from a variety of sources (e.g., Ontario GeoHub, Ontario Government Open Data, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's annual crop inventory and  OMAFRA's AgMaps)
- Economic development tools
- OMAFRA statistics (originating from Statistics Canada, various government departments and farm marketing boards)

OMAFRA's Rural Planners and Agriculture and Rural Economic Development Advisors are available to assist with the integration of land use planning and economic development.

# 4 Appendices

## 1 Summary of Key References and Policies in the Four Plans

Note that this list is provided for convenience only and is not intended to be comprehensive. The actual plans should be referred to for the complete references and policies.

| Topic Area | References and Policy Numbers | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | A Place to Grow | Greenbelt Plan | Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan | Niagara Escarpment Plan |
| Agricultural System | 1.2 A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe<br><br>1.2.1 Guiding Principles<br><br>2.1 Context<br><br>2.2.8 Settlement Area Boundary Expansions 2.2.8.3 f) and h)<br><br>3.2. Infrastructure Corridors 3.2.5.1 c)<br><br>4.1 Context<br><br>4.2.6 Agricultural System<br><br>4.2.8 Mineral Aggregate Resources 4.2.8.3<br><br>5.2.2 Supplementary Direction 5.2.2.2 a) | 1.2.2 Protected Countryside Goals 1.2.2.1 f)<br><br>3.1 Agricultural System<br><br>3.4.2 General Settlement Area Policies 3.4.2.4<br><br>5.3 Municipal implementation of Protected Countryside Policies | Plan Introduction-The Vision for the Oak Ridges Moraine | Plan Introduction-Landscape Approach |

**Appendices**

| Topic Area | References and Policy Numbers | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | A Place to Grow | Greenbelt Plan | Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan | Niagara Escarpment Plan |
| Agri-food Network | 2.2.8 Settlement Area Boundary Expansions 2.2.8.3 h)<br><br>4.1 Context<br><br>4.2.6 Agricultural System 4.2.6.4 4.2.6.7 | 1.2.2 Protected Countryside Goals 1.2.2.1 b) 1.2.2.1 e)<br><br>3.1. Agricultural System 3.1.1 3.1.2.6 3.1.3. 6 3.1.4.8 3.1.5 3.1.6<br><br>5.3 Municipal implementation of Protected Countryside Policies | Plan Introduction- The Vision for the Oak Ridges Moraine | Plan Introduction – Landscape Approach |
| Permitted Uses (agricultural, agriculture-related, on-farm diversified uses) | 4.2.2 Natural Heritage System 4.2.2.3 b)<br><br>4.2.3 Key Hydrologic Features, Key Hydrologic Areas and Key Natural Heritage Features 4.2.3.1 f)<br><br>4.2.4 Lands Adjacent to Key Hydrologic Features and Key Natural Heritage Features 4.2.4.4 b)<br><br>4.2.6 Agricultural System | 1.2.2 Protected Countryside Goals 1.2.2.1 d)<br><br>3.1.2 Specialty Crop Area Policies 3.1.2.1<br><br>3.1.3 Prime Agricultural Area Policies 3.1.3.1<br><br>3.1.4 Rural Lands Policy 3.1.4.1 3.1.4.2<br><br>3.2.2 Natural Heritage System Policies 3.2.2.1 3.2.2.2 | 111 Natural Core Areas 11.(3)<br><br>12 Natural Linkage Areas 12. (3)<br><br>13 Country Side Areas 13(3) | Escarpment Natural Area - Permitted Uses – 1.3.3<br><br>Escarpment Protection Area- Permitted Uses - 1.4.3<br><br>Escarpment Rural Area- Permitted Uses-1.5.3<br><br>Escarpment Recreation Area -Permitted Uses – 1.8.3<br><br>Mineral Resource Extraction Area -Permitted Uses- 1.9.3<br><br>2.8 Agriculture |

| Topic Area | References and Policy Numbers | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | A Place to Grow | Greenbelt Plan | Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan | Niagara Escarpment Plan |
| Agricultural Impact Assessment and land use compatibility | 2.2.8 Settlement Area Boundary Expansions 2.2.8.3 j)<br><br>4.2.6 Agriculutral System 4.2.6.3<br><br>3.2.5 Infrastructure Corridors 3.2.5.1 c)<br><br>4.2.8 Mineral Aggregate Resources 4.2.8.3<br><br>Rehabilitation 4.2.8.5 a) 4.2.8.5 b) | 3.1 Agricultural System 3.1.2.2 3.1.2.5 3.1.3.3 3.1.3.5 3.1.4.4 3.1.4.7 3.1.5.2<br><br>3.4.3 Town/Village Policies 3.4.3.2<br><br>4.1.1 General Non-Agricultural Use Policies 4.1.1.3<br><br>4.2.1 General Infrastructure Policies 4.2.1.2 g)<br><br>4.3.2 Non-Renewable Resource Policies 4.3.2.4 4.3.2.7<br><br>4.5 Existing Uses 4.5.5 | 34 Compatible Uses<br><br>3 Mineral aggregate operations and wayside pits 35(1)(b)(i) 35(1.1) 35(7)<br><br>38 Major recreational uses 38(5)<br><br>41 Infrastructure 41(2.1) | Mineral Aggregate Resources 2.9.3 f) 2.9.11<br><br>Infrastructure 2.12.6 |

| Topic Area | References and Policy Numbers | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | A Place to Grow | Greenbelt Plan | Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan | Niagara Escarpment Plan |
| Natural Heritage System (as it relates to agriculture) | 4.2.2 Natural Heritage System 4.2.2.3 vi. b)<br><br>4.2.3 Key Hydrologic Features, Key Hydrologic Areas and Key Natural Heritage Features 4.2.3.1 f)<br><br>4.2.4 Lands Adjacent to Key Hydrologic Features and Key Natural Heritage Features 4.2.4.4 b) | Natural Heritage System Policies 3.2.2.1 3.2.2.2<br><br>3.2.5 Key Natural Heritage Features and Key Hydrologic Features Policies 3.2.5.7 3.2.5.8 | 22 Key Natural Heritage Features 22(2)(6) 22(5)<br><br>26 Key Hydrologic Features 26 (2)(5) 26(4.2)<br><br>29 Areas of High Aquifer Vulnerability 29(1.1) | |

# 2 OMAFRA's Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR) for the Greater Golden Horseshoe

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 may be 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 (see Figure). There are many commonalities between these LEAR studies, in part because they follow OMAFRA's recommended assessment procedure. However, municipal LEARs vary as they often 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 surveyed LEAR practitioners from across Ontario to learn from their experiences. The ministry 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 employ different data and field verification methods. Municipal LEARs may help to inform appropriate refinements to the agricultural land base mapping (Section 3.2.1).

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 OMAFRA's *Agricultural System Mapping Method* document).
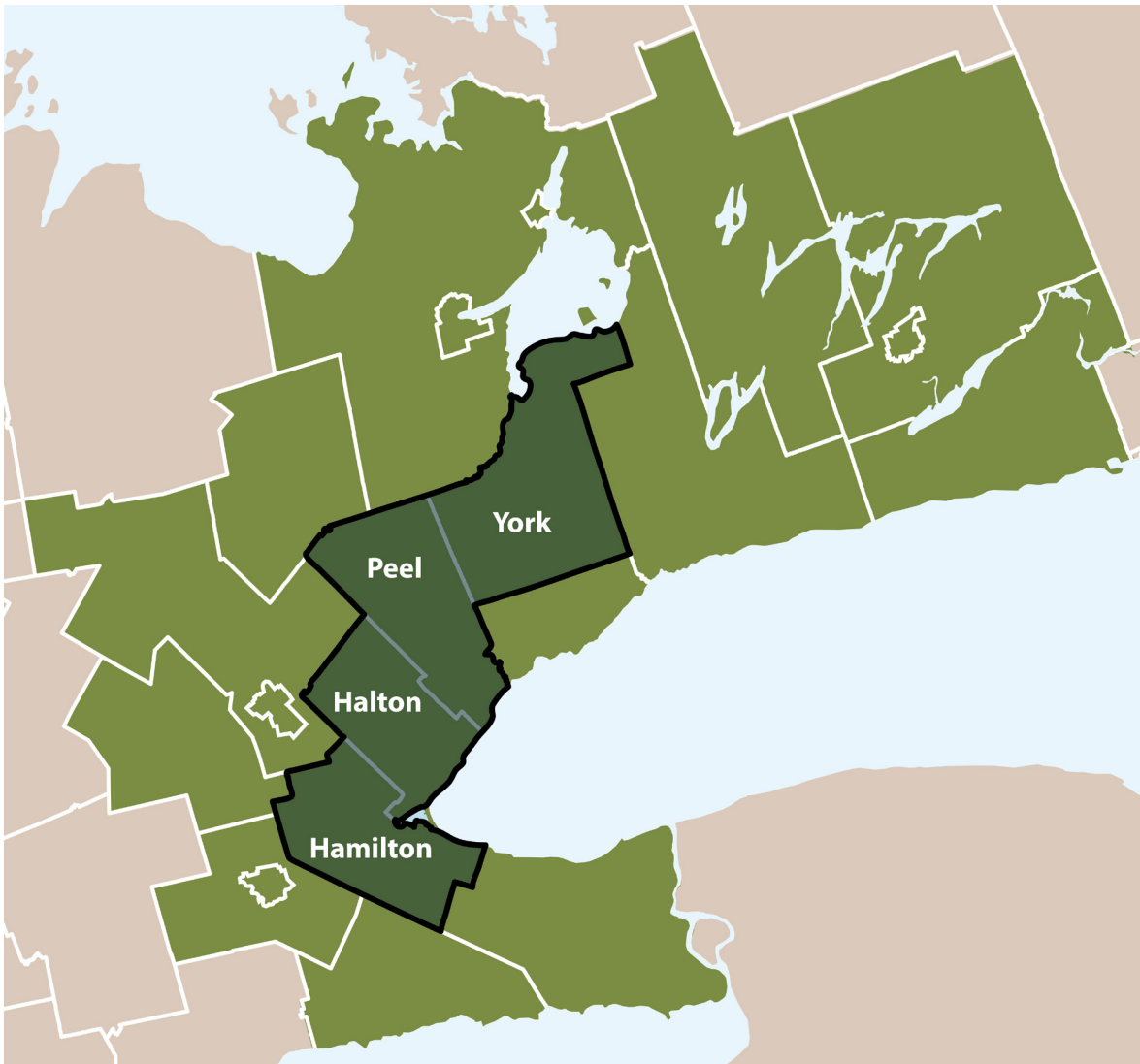
**Municipal LEARs in the *GGH***

For the *GGH* LEAR, OMAFRA assigned 60% of the LEAR score to LE factors 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 suitability of the land for agriculture. The two AR factors used were: the fragmentation of the land base and the area in agricultural production.[23] The *GGH* municipal LEARs also used these AR factors, but some used additional AR factors and/or different data sets for mapping.

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.

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[23]  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.

The LEAR mapping was then used to help identify *prime agricultural areas* (high LEAR scores) and candidate areas for the agricultural land base (medium LEAR scores in agricultural production).

**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 agriculture and natural heritage overlap.

Additional detail is provided in the *Agricultural System Mapping Method* (OMAFRA, 2018).

**Appendices**

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