

Urban Agriculture



Food production is an integral part of cities the world over. Urban agriculture can provide a secure source of low cost food that is more nutritious, tastes better and is less environmentally degrading due to its lack of associated transportation, processing, preservation and packaging. Moreover, community gardens provide aesthetically pleasing spaces for social engagement, low intensity exercise, and relaxation. Urban Agriculture can be encouraged by a policy focused on four types of spaces:

- Corridors - Natural and utility corridors provide great spaces for food production.
- Rooftops - Rooftop gardens can produce food in even the densest urban environment.
- Open Space - Community gardens are a wonderful addition to parks and open space.
- Lots - Even the smallest city lots can produce an astonishing abundance and variety of food.

Be sure to visit the Vaughan Tomorrow website, a portal for information on all Official Plan project events, and important dates at www.vaughtomorrow.ca

Strengthening the Protection of Agricultural Lands

The following policy tools could help preserve agricultural land and support a viable, flourishing agricultural industry within the City of Vaughan

Growing the Greenbelt The Greenbelt currently provides an effective protection against the encroachment of urban uses on Prime Agricultural Lands. Extending it to cover other CLI Class 1, 2 and 3 lands left outside the Greenbelt is a logical way to offer those lands the same measure of protection as those within.

Land Use Designations The creation of land use designations pertaining specifically to Prime Agricultural Areas based on new Provincial policy directions is a critical first step in protecting the agricultural industry in the City of Vaughan.

Intensification Every effort should be made to direct growth to within the built boundary and designated Greenfield areas, and away from prime agricultural land.

Near-urban Agriculture Toolkit Near-urban agriculture still faces significant challenges, and can be supported by embracing the new and innovative policy suggestions coming forth from the GTA Agricultural Action Committee and others providing planners with a toolkit of options. These include:

- Incorporating Minimum Distance Separation regulations
- Encouraging on-farm renewable energy generation
- The creation of small farm enterprise zones
- Permitting a mixed use countryside

Vaughan Tomorrow

Vaughan's agricultural land is one of its greatest assets. In the coming years, Vaughan must balance the need to accommodate a growing population and employment base with the need to preserve this valuable, non-renewable resource.



The City of Vaughan contains some of the most diverse and productive agricultural lands in Canada. Despite having a smaller amount of agricultural lands than neighbouring King or Markham, in 1996 Vaughan had the second most economically productive land in the GTA. This is the result of the fortunate coincidence of a number of natural, geographical, and historical factors.

Approximately 8,800 ha of Vaughan's land have a high capability for agriculture. Of this total, 3500ha are rated as Class 1 under the Canada Land Inventory (CLI), the Inventory's highest rating for agricultural land. Vaughan produces a significant amount of high value commodities: greenhouse products, dairy, horse and pony operations, vegetables, and fruit constitute the top five agricultural products in the city by gross farm receipts.

The contiguous layout of Vaughan's agricultural lands and their proximity to the City of Toronto renders this land much more valuable. In an era of increasingly expensive transportation and rising demand for local, sustainable food, this location is an ever more important asset. Contiguous agricultural land, meanwhile, is more easily converted to different agricultural uses, more likely to avoid noise and odour complaints, and is generally more economically viable than land isolated by other uses.

Highly developed transportation and farm infrastructure are two other factors which make Vaughan's agricultural industry more productive. Access to agricultural markets is ensured by Vaughan's position at the intersections of highways 400, 407 and 427. Farm buildings in the City are well established and are a good indicator of the general state of farm infrastructure in the City. These buildings form an important part of both the economic and cultural landscape of Vaughan today.



Employment in the Agriculture Industry

In 2001 there were 400 jobs in agriculture and mining sectors in the City of Vaughan. This number represents 0.4% of employment in the City of Vaughan. While that number may not seem exceptionally large, it is significant when compared to the GTA Region as a whole, in which the agriculture and mining sectors account for 0.05% of employment. Further, this number does not reflect jobs in food processing or other agriculture related industries. Agriculture is therefore almost

certainly responsible for the creation in Vaughan of more jobs than the 400 recorded for the agriculture and mining sectors. In fact, a recent study by Statistics Canada on revenue multipliers found that agriculture had the highest revenue multiplier of any industry in Canada: every dollar of additional agricultural output generates another 97 cents of gross revenue throughout the economy.

Classifying Agricultural Land

The primary measure of land for agriculture in Canada is known as the Canada Land Inventory (CLI). The Canada land inventory groups soils into seven classes according to their potential for growing crops. Class 1 lands are considered the best lands and have no significant limitations to growing crops. Class 7 lands, meanwhile, have no capacity for agriculture. In Ontario, Prime Agricultural Lands are comprised of specialty crop areas and CLI class 1, 2, and 3 soils. Prime Agricultural Areas, meanwhile, are broader and include CLI class 4-7 soils and areas with a local concentration of farms exhibiting ongoing agriculture.



Agricultural land loss

Agricultural land in Vaughan today remains under constant pressure from urban development spurred by population and employment growth. Due to its proximity to the City of Toronto, rates of farm closure and agricultural land loss have been notably higher in Vaughan than in most other municipalities in the GTA. In 1976, the City of Vaughan had a total agricultural land area of 17,344 ha. By 1996, thirty years later, this number had declined by 46% to 9,340 ha – the second highest rate of agricultural land conversion for any municipality in the GTA. Although these rates have since declined, agricultural land loss continues. The net result is that Vaughan now has less than 20% of the agricultural land that it had 40 years ago. If these rates remain the same, Vaughan will have virtually no agricultural land left within 25 years. However, there now exists a policy framework to help protect agricultural land within the GTA.



Land Use Policy & Agriculture

Partially in recognition of the immense value of agricultural land in Central and Southern Ontario, in the past several years the Government of Ontario has created a new provincial land use policy framework. This framework consists of the Planning Act (2005) the Provincial Policy Statement (2005), the Greenbelt Act (2005), the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (2001), the Niagara Escarpment Plan (2005), the Greenbelt Plan (2005), the Places to Grow Act (2005) and the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (2006). Along with the now-under-review York Region and City of Vaughan Official Plans, these pieces of legislation seek to protect Prime Agricultural Land in two ways. The first is to discourage the conversion of Prime Agricultural Lands to other uses, such as employment, commercial or residential. The second, related method, is to prevent the expansion of settlement areas into prime agricultural areas. Under this new land use policy framework, the strongest protection for food producing lands is provided by the Greenbelt – including the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan and the Niagara Escarpment Plan.

In Vaughan, 5307ha are protected by the Greenbelt. However, the Greenbelt does not cover all of Vaughan's Prime Agricultural Lands. In fact, 62% of Vaughan's Class 1-4 land is not covered by the Greenbelt. These prime agricultural lands are left to the protection the York Region and Vaughan Official Plans. However, between January 2000 and year-end 2007 approximately 23% of land in Vaughan originally designated for agriculture was re-designated for other purposes. If Vaughan is to ensure a productive agricultural future for its countryside, the protection of agricultural lands must be strengthened.

