

Hello, good morning everybody, thank you for having me, I am very excited to be here. My name is Dean Orr, I am a young farmer working on my family's farm just North of Toronto on the outskirts of the GTA.

Farming so close to the city, I've had a particular interest in urban growth and planning and what it means for the future of agriculture in Canada. The Canadian agricultural community has learned much about soils and soil health particularly in the last 50 years; in an effort to maintain our farms and soils to be used and enjoyed for generations to come. Much of our farmland however has been, and is still being, consumed at tremendous rates by unsustainable urban growth practices. The latest Census of Agriculture has shown Ontario's self-reported farm acreage to be decreasing at an average rate of 319 acres per day, or just under 1% per year. Complete ecosystem destruction via widespread, poor land use planning policy is likely the largest impactor of soil health in North America. It also becomes increasingly difficult for farmers to plan for long term soil health management when land speculation has driven up land values and reduced farmer land ownership.

It is the great irony of the lifespan of our farm, that we have been practicing good crop rotation, no-till and cover cropping for decades, vastly improving the soil health in our fields and limiting the environmental impact of our operation, only for that work to be destroyed within the next 50 years, unless something changes in how our society thinks about the worth of land, and how we go about planning for its use. While it is easy to blame developers for the tremendous amount of urban sprawl many communities in North America are facing, as they certainly have lobbied for urban boundary expansions and zoning changes etc., the more complex reality is however that they should share only part blame. The vast majority of their business is directed by, and merely doing what is allowed under law at the time.

Urban development over the last 70 years in Ontario has been characterized by sprawl; low density, car-dependent dwellings and shops, separated by considerable distance. This style of development has been largely responsible for the incredible consumption of Ontario farmland and was a stark departure from urban planning preceding the 20th century. Urban planning of our historic farm towns and larger city centres were traditionally done at a human scale- walking and cycling were the standard mode of transportation, as were trains and rail. A range of housing types, heights and affordability were centred on mixed-use neighbourhoods, with stores, shops and employment. These allowed for dense, vibrant, beautiful and economically strong urban areas.

With the introduction of the automobile, as well as the introduction of rigid zoning and building bylaws in the early, and mid-20th century, we started to sprawl, and this building style became typified in law. One only has to compare old neighbourhoods with new to see this stark contrast. The average population density of Vaughan, Ontario, built up over the last 70 years is 1,119 people/ km², compare this to the early 1900's era Toronto neighborhood of Riverdale which has a density of 7,149 people/ km². Riverdale is considered an extremely desirable place to live in Toronto for its community and walkability, and does not feel busy, as car traffic is minimized because of its closeness and public transit. A community like that requires 7x less natural space and farmland loss to exist compared to the more 'modern' developments of Vaughan.

We don't need to be consuming anywhere near as much land as we are to build our communities as nice places to live, and allow for growth. The solutions are not new, and could be applied tomorrow. Experts and advocates have been pushing for more sustainable, gentle-density growth practices for some time, but as is evident in the slow pace of change, and recent continuing,

forced sprawl policies in Ontario it is testament that many levels of government are not getting the message.

Some suggestions for better sustainable building policies are as follows;

1. Enforce hard urban boundaries, with strict restrictions on boundary expansion. This would encourage infilling and discourage sprawl. This would also act to reduce land speculation, helping to lower farmland values and ideally improve long term investment in soils.

2. Create public regional or municipal staff positions that plans for, at least, the minimum amount of farmland required to support a community.

3. End exclusionary zoning, or allow for the building of multi-unit buildings as of right, to allow for a greater diversity of housing built.

4. Remove parking minimums, making it easier and less expensive to build walkable, gentle density, transit oriented communities.

5. And finally, invest more in our transit systems, especially rail.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to me today, and for the work you have been doing towards a more sustainable agriculture system. Agriculture should be planned INTO instead of OUT OF our communities so that we can plan for food security and long term soil health.

Sincerely,
Dean Orr, B.Sc.
Farmer
King City, Ontario

Additional Notes (I'm not sure if you'll read these!):

Sprawl, it should be noted, also plays a role in the housing availability and affordability crisis, as it is expensive, slow to build, resource intensive (from a land and building material perspective), and houses much fewer people compared to other styles of development. The Ontario Government's Housing Affordability Task Force gave recommendations on future growth, of which the major component was to direct growth to infilling within urban boundaries, and building gentle density. This was aimed at speeding up housing supply and increasing affordability, while explicitly protecting natural land and farmland. The Ontario government has been slow and clumsy enacting these sustainable growth policies, and has in some instances seemed to work counter to them, opening up urban boundaries and protected areas, and decreasing minimum density requirements.

Our current outdated land use policies, aided by pressure from developers and speculators, must become more adaptable to our current knowledge on ecosystem health and community building. Our current laws and bylaws have created a pattern of development that is too restrictive and inflexible, and is taking a toll on rural and urban communities alike. For example, it is estimated that 50% of the area surrounding Ottawa is zoned for building single family homes only, which essentially dictates that sprawl is what will be built. It is expensive and onerous for developers to fight these zoning laws and

bylaws, and what ends up getting built is not necessarily what the public wants or needs, or what experts suggest, but what developers are used to, and what zoning had decided on 30 or 50 years ago, during the last regional or municipal official plan review.

Urban Sprawl is also expensive, as more infrastructure needs to be put in and serviced to maintain it. In a CBC report, it was found that low density suburban expansion cost the city of Ottawa more money than it was collecting in taxes- it is effectively being subsidized, to the amount of \$465/ person. High density developments on the other hand, earned the city \$606 per person, per year, in tax revenue. The city of London, Ontario also estimated that a sprawl growth scenario over the next 50 years would cost the city 180% more (\$2.7 billion) as compared to a more compact growth scenario. Expanding urban boundaries to allow for sprawl is costly, both monetarily and environmentally.

Hard urban boundaries do more than preserve farmland and enable soil health, they also allow stability in systems to allow for investment in near-urban agriculture systems. They allow our rural and urban communities to work together to support one another, instead of acting in opposition. It allows for farmers to plan long term, and put up grain storage for example, that they know will be around for a long time. It also allows for parts and equipment suppliers to maintain dealership networks in near-urban areas, as they know the high investment cost of doing so will be returned. Our closest dealerships to us in Nobleton are usually more than an hour of driving away. It also provides a stable employment possibility for urban areas, and can allow for building of a more robust local food system.

My Grandpa as a young man went to a ploughing match at Yonge and Sheppard in North York. We're not sure of the date, but we estimate around 1940. A of today, the closest Farm field to that intersection now is approximately 11.5km, the closest rural area is 15km, which are some of the fields that we farm.

My father in his career as a farmer has lost, we did our best to estimate, about 500 acres of farmland to the development of sprawl. This is land that he has directly rented, and there are even more farms that he helped do work on that have also been lost, about another couple of hundred acres. There are about 700 acres of farmland currently being farmed by us that either have development proposals in for review, or are in the path of the Ontario Government's new proposed highway, itself a main component of sprawl.

There are more harmonious and sustainable growth patterns to choose from, that involve gentle density and transit investments, and we must act to review and rectify our laws surrounding building growth.

Additional Notes.

-As of 2021 Ontario currently has 11.7 million acres of farmland, down from 12.3 million in 2016 and 12.6 million in 2011.

-Ontario's population is now roughly 15.5 million people.

-Ontario's Population in 1940 was approximately 3.5 million people.

-The previous liberal government set a minimum population density of 80 people per hectare, while the current Ontario government has decreased that requirement to 50 people per hectare.