



May 10, 2024

Hon. Paul Calandra
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
Provincial Land Use Plans Branch
13th Floor, 777 Bay St
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3
Email: growthplanning@ontario.ca

Dear Minister Calandra,

Re: ERO 019-8462 Review of proposed policies for a new provincial planning policy instrument

Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO) appreciates the opportunity to comment on *ERO 019-8462 Review of proposed policies for a new provincial planning policy instrument*. BFO represents the 19,000 beef farmers in Ontario by advocating in the areas of sustainability, animal health and care, environment, food safety, and domestic and export market development.

Ontario's beef sector contributes \$2.69 billion to Ontario's GDP on an annual basis and sustains more than 61,000 jobs through primary production, processing and retail. Ontario's beef farmers also provide important ecological goods and services, especially through the management of grasslands, that protect and enhance Ontario's environment. This includes sequestering carbon in the soil, providing habitat for wildlife and species at risk, oxygen production, water and nutrient cycling, and maintaining and improving soil health.

A key priority for BFO and our members is the preservation of Ontario's agricultural land base. We strongly believe the best way to protect Ontario's agricultural lands is through sound provincial land use policy that sees agricultural lands, including marginal lands used for livestock grazing and carbon sequestration, protected as the highest and best use of Ontario's arable land.

The provincial government's plan to address Ontario's housing crisis is ambitious and necessary, and we continue to support the province's efforts to address this issue. We also strongly believe achieving the government's housing goals must be balanced with the need to protect our agricultural land base, and we thank the government for updating sections of the PPS to support the preservation of Ontario's agricultural land base, such as:

- Not moving forward with policies permitting lot creations in prime agricultural areas;
- Requiring planning authorities to use an agricultural systems approach and to designate prime agricultural areas and specialty crop areas;
- Requiring municipalities to maintain minimum separation distances between livestock operations and houses;
- Through additional residential units, permitting more housing on farms to support farmers and their families without creating new lots, and;
- Requiring rural municipalities to direct development to rural settlement areas.

We were appreciative of Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs staff for taking the time to meet with agricultural industry groups on May 3, 2024 to provide an overview of relevant sections and changes in the PPS as it relates to agricultural lands. We have provided further comments and recommendations below to various sections of the proposed PPS.

BFO is pleased the Minimum Distance Separation (MDS) formula will be maintained. MDS serves as an important tool to prevent land use conflicts and to minimize nuisance complaints related to normal farming practices between farming operations and surrounding residential land uses. By ensuring a minimum distance between livestock operations and residential land uses, MDS also acts as a critical tool to prevent potential water quality issues and biosecurity concerns.

BFO has also long advocated against the prioritization of agricultural lands and language within provincial land use policies that direct development to agricultural lands that are viewed as “lower priority”. The Canada Land Inventory (CLI) system for classifying soil types is an effective tool for assessing the limitations of agricultural land for specific crops, but should not be the basis for defining some agricultural lands as less valuable compared to others. The definition of “Prime Agricultural Land” within the PPS does not include CLI classes 4-6 despite the capabilities for improvement through management practices and to produce perennial forage crops and permanent pasture. Such land may not be suitable for grain and oilseed crop production, but is very suited for livestock production, especially beef cattle. We strongly believe the definition of Prime Agricultural Land needs to be updated to include CLI classes 1-6 and language in the PPS that pits agricultural lands against one another for development purposes be removed.

BFO acknowledges and strongly supports the following statement outlined in the proposed PPS Vision statement: *Housing must be built in the right places so that Ontario’s vibrant agricultural sector and sensitive areas will continue to form part of the Province’s economic prosperity and overall identity. Growth and development will be focused within urban and rural settlements that will, in turn, support and protect the long-term viability of rural areas, local food production and the agri-food network.* This language reflects the importance of a balanced approach to land use planning, and that building more housing and maintaining our agricultural lands must go hand in hand.

2.3 Settlement Areas and Boundary Area Boundary Expansion

BFO strongly supports fixed permanent urban boundaries, creating complete communities, and densifying and intensifying land in existing urban and rural settlement areas. We believe this is critically important for building more homes and addressing Ontario’s housing crisis while limiting the loss of agricultural lands and supporting our agricultural communities. Any consideration for establishing new settlement areas or expanding boundaries must only come after the development or redevelopment of underutilized or vacant areas within existing urbanized areas has been completed. BFO recommends planning authorities meet significant minimum targets for intensification and redevelopment in built-up areas.

2.3.1.4. Planning authorities are encouraged to establish and implement minimum targets for intensification and redevelopment within built-up areas, based on local conditions.

There are extensive opportunities to intensify and redevelop within existing urbanized areas. As noted, BFO supports policies that pursue this direction and we believe intensifying and redeveloping urbanized areas will build more homes, support complete communities, and limit the loss of Ontario’s finite and limited agricultural land base. With that, BFO recommends that section 2.3.1.4 state “planning authorities are required to establish and implement minimum targets for intensification and redevelopment within built-up areas, based on local conditions.”

In regards to **section 2.3.2.1**, BFO supports establishing fixed urban boundaries, and, therefore, we remain concerned with the approach to provide a simplified and flexible process for municipalities to undertake a new settlement area or settlement area boundary expansion at any time with requirements for municipalities to consider certain criteria, including:

- whether applicable lands comprise specialty crop areas;
- the evaluation of alternative locations which avoid prime agricultural areas and, where avoidance is not possible, consider reasonable alternatives on lower priority agricultural lands in prime agricultural areas.
- Whether the new or expanded settlement area complies with the minimum distance separation formulae;
- Whether impacts on the agricultural system are avoided, or where avoidance is not possible, minimized and mitigated to the extent feasible as determined through an agricultural impact assessment or equivalent analysis, based on provincial guidance.

BFO previously communicated our concerns in the 2023 proposed PPS that stated municipalities “should consider” the above criteria, which we viewed as a policy that disregarded the importance of protecting agricultural lands and for policies like MDS. The updated language to “shall consider” from “should consider” has not alleviated our concerns nor does the updated language elicit any confidence that municipalities would ensure new settlement areas or boundary expansions are compliant with MDS or avoid impacts on agricultural lands. Again, we believe boundary expansions must not be permitted unless substantial minimum requirements for intensifying and redeveloping within existing urbanized areas have been met.

Further, the proposed changes to section 2.3.2.1. continues to fail to recognize the importance of the MDS policy. The MDS policy cannot simply be taken as a light suggestion for new settlement areas or boundary expansions.

Further to our comments regarding the prioritization of agricultural lands, we believe the language in section 2.3.2.1 stating “where avoidance is not possible, consider reasonable alternatives on lower priority agricultural lands in prime agricultural areas” should be removed.

2.6. Rural Lands in Municipalities

It is very important to remember that not all agricultural land in Ontario is zoned as agricultural land and there are many farms and agricultural lands that municipalities have zoned as rural lands. We cannot forget about these farms and their value when discussing the preservation of agricultural lands.

We would like to acknowledge the updated language within **section 2.6.1.c.** that removed “multi-lot residential development” as a permitted use on rural lands, and state our strong support for this. In our previous comments, we shared our deep concern with allowing multi-lot residential development to occur on rural lands and the likelihood that this would remove productive farmland and natural heritage features, increase conflict between non-farming residents and farming operations, increase demand for infrastructure services, and drastically change the overall character of rural landscapes.

Rural communities also need more housing, but that cannot come at the expense of agricultural lands and the fabric of our rural communities. There are opportunities within existing rural hamlets and towns to increase density and where adequate servicing exists or can be expanded upon to more

efficiently expand the rural tax base for municipalities. We support **section 2.5.2.**, which states that, “in rural areas, rural settlement areas shall be the focus of growth and development and their vitality and regeneration shall be promoted.” Further, we recommend density and intensification targets be analyzed and applied to rural settlement areas.

Lot creation on rural lands is already a controversial topic with numerous examples of residential lot creation occurring on agricultural land in areas zoned as rural lands or purchased for the purpose of removing the land from agricultural production altogether. Additionally, we strongly believe the government should examine setting a maximum size for lot creation on rural lands to ensure large pieces of productive agricultural land is not removed from production.

4.3.1 General Policies for Agriculture

We are very supportive of the updates to **section 4.3.1.1**, which states “planning authorities are required to use an agricultural system approach, based on provincial guidance, to maintain and enhance a geographically continuous agricultural land base and support and foster the long-term economic prosperity and productive capacity of the agrifood network.” We believe an agricultural system approach is a valuable planning tool that looks at the entire agriculture network. To best support municipalities with implementing this approach and to ensure consistent application, BFO recommends the province develop and implement guidance materials on using an agricultural system approach, including mapping, and Agricultural Impact Assessments.

4.3.1.3. Specialty crop areas shall be given the highest priority for protection, followed by Canada Land Inventory Class 1, 2, and 3 lands, and any associated Class 4 through 7 lands within the prime agricultural area, in this order of priority.

As stated above, BFO does not support policies that specify agricultural lands that are deemed as less worthy of protection. Agricultural soil types serve different purposes and have various capabilities, but are all important for maintaining a healthy and vibrant agricultural sector. We have long advocated that soil types classified as 4 through 6 be equally protected and included in the definition of Prime Agricultural Lands. Class 4-6 soils may not be suited for crops like corn or soybeans, but are extremely suited for grazing livestock on pasture and forage production, and for providing ecological goods and services, such as sequestering carbon in the soil and providing habitat for wildlife.

4.3.2. Permitted Uses

Within **Section 4.3.2.5.**, BFO continues to support the proposal to permit up to two additional residential units (ARU), in addition to the principal dwelling, in prime agricultural areas. We also support the inclusion of language that aims to provide clarity around how ARUs are implemented, including that ARUs are permitted in accordance with provincial guidance, and provided that ARUs: comply with the minimum distance separation formulae; are compatible with, and would not hinder, surrounding agricultural operations; have appropriate sewage and water services; address any public health and safety concerns; are of limited scale and are located within, attached, or in close proximity to the principal dwelling or farm building cluster; and minimize land taken out of agricultural production.

The development of provincial guidance will be important for establishing the details around the above criteria and ensuring consistent application of ARUs in prime agricultural areas. Specifically, the criteria that will provide information on public health and safety concerns and exactly what is meant by limited scale and located within, attached, or in close proximity to the principal dwelling or farm building cluster.

BFO also recommends that clarity be given to section 4.3.2.5 by adding the following language: “Additional residential units may only be severed in accordance with policy 4.3.3.1.c), only one new residential lot may be created in a prime agriculture area per farm consolidation in the case of the severance of a residence surplus to an agricultural operation and the new residential lot must include the surplus residential dwelling and any associated additional residential units.” BFO would also like to see a definition be provided for “farm consolidation” within the PPS.

4.3.3. Lot Creation and Lot Adjustments

BFO would like to thank the province for its engagement with the agricultural sector regarding proposed changes to lot creation in prime agricultural areas and for not moving forward with the proposal to permit lot creations in prime agricultural areas to protect the viability of the agricultural sector. BFO is supportive of **section 4.3.3.1.** to maintain the current lot creation policy as outlined in the 2020 Provincial Policy Statement.

4.3.6. Supporting Local Food and the Agri-Food Network

4.3.6.1. Planning authorities are encouraged to support local food, facilitate near-urban and urban agriculture, and foster a robust agri-food network.

BFO supports the inclusion of section 4.3.6.1. to encourage municipalities to support local food production and a robust agri-food network.

Conclusion

We appreciate the government’s commitment to land use policies that support the viability of Ontario’s agricultural sector. It must be remembered that we can and must balance opportunities for growth and building housing with the need to protect our agricultural lands.

On behalf of Ontario’s beef farmers, we thank you for the opportunity to comment on *ERO 019-8462 Review of proposed policies for a new provincial planning policy instrument*, and we look forward to further engagement on provincial land use policies that impact Ontario’s agricultural lands.

Sincerely,



Craig McLaughlin
President