

THE STRUGGLE TO SAVE CANADA'S FARMLAND

Introduction

Focus

This *News in Review* story focuses on the future of Canada's farmland as family farms across the country are coming under pressure from agribusinesses and urban development. You will learn about a group of Ontario farmers who thought the land they sold was going to be used to grow potatoes but instead was turned into a quarry.

On a cold, rainy Sunday in October, thousands of people braved the elements and gathered on a farm near Shelburne, Ontario. They were there for Foodstock, a one-day event featuring home-style food prepared by some of Ontario's most renowned chefs and entertainment by artists such as Jim Cuddy, Sarah Harmer, Hayden, and Ron Sexsmith. A number of restaurants and food suppliers from as far away as Toronto donated food for the occasion, and the city's Slow Food movement chartered a bus to the event. At Foodstock a mixed crowd of local farm families and city residents gathered to enjoy locally produced food and musical entertainment. But Foodstock was much more than just a social gathering. Its main purpose was to draw public attention to what its organizers believed to be a serious threat to southern Ontario's rich agricultural land, especially the farms located in Melancthon Township, where Foodstock was held.

For years local farmers in Melancthon—where a large part of Ontario's potato crop is grown—had received generous offers to sell their valuable land. Some of these people were close to retirement and were finding the demands of operating a small family farm at a profit very difficult. When a Canadian businessman named John Lowndes, representing Highland Companies, a U.S. firm, began acquiring farm properties in Melancthon Township in 2006, the farmers who were happy to

sell out were told that their land would continue to be used for growing potatoes. But within a short time, some of the farmers became suspicious that Highland had other plans for the land that did not involve potato production.

The fertile farmland of Melancthon Township sits over one of the most extensive limestone deposits in the province of Ontario. When quarried, this limestone yields a high-quality aggregate that can be used to build roads and homes in the expanding Greater Toronto Area. Although Highland did not inform local farmers of this at the time, the firm's intention was to build a huge, open-pit quarry—about one-third the size of downtown Toronto and deeper than Niagara Falls—that it would mine over the next century. The company promised that as the quarry pits were exhausted, they would be refilled with soil and the land returned to agricultural use.

Local farmers and residents were angry and believed that Highland had misled them about its plans for the quarry. They worried about the environmental effects of such a development and feared for the future of their way of life. As more people outside the area learned of this issue, a wave of opposition to the proposed quarry grew, leading to Foodstock. But at the event, organizers made it clear that this was just the beginning of their campaign to halt the quarry and preserve valuable farmland for future generations.

To Consider

1. What do you know about the importance of farming as an economic activity and a way of life in Canada today?
2. Why would people who do not even live in Melancthon Township be worried about the proposed quarry there?
3. Do you care whether or not the food you eat is grown in your province or territory? Explain your answer.

THE STRUGGLE TO SAVE CANADA'S FARMLAND

Video Review

Pre-viewing Questions

With a partner or in a small group discuss and respond to the questions below.

1. How much do you know about farming as a business and as a way of life in Canada today?

2. Have you ever visited a farm?

3. Do you ever wonder about where the food you eat comes from and how it was produced?

4. Why do you think running a successful family farm in Canada today would be a challenge?

Viewing Questions

As you watch the video, respond to the questions in the spaces provided.

1. Where is the proposed limestone quarry to be located?

2. What is the name given to the rich soil found in this area?

3. What proportion of Ontario's total potato crop is grown here?

4. What is the name of the U.S. company that has been buying farmland in the area?

5. Why is the proposed limestone quarry such a huge operation?

6. What name did anti-quarry organizers give to the event they organized in October 2011 to draw public attention to the issue?

7. What do you think David Waters means when he says that the anti-quarry campaign is the "Avatar" of Ontario?

8. Why is limestone such an important resource for the construction industry in southern Ontario?

9. What is the technical name for the high-quality aggregate produced from limestone and used as a building material?

10. Why does local farmer Lyle Parsons regret his decision to sell his farm in 2006?

11. What clues did Parsons notice that led him to believe the company buying land had plans for it that did not include potatoes?

12. How do the two executives from Highland Companies explain the fact that farmers were not informed about the company's plans to develop a quarry on farmland it bought from them?

13. What promises has the company made to local residents about the environmental safety of the proposed quarry development?

14. What step did the Ontario government take to examine the issue of the quarry development more closely?

Post-viewing Questions

Join with your partner or small group again and respond to the following questions.

1. Now that you have watched this video, revisit your responses to the Pre-viewing Questions. Add any information you learned from the video, or otherwise update your answers.
2. If you were a resident of Melancthon Township, Ontario, how might you feel about the proposed limestone quarry? For example, would you be worried about the loss of farmland, or be excited about the jobs the quarry would create? Explain the reasons for your opinion.

3. Do you think that events like Foodstock play an important role in mobilizing public opinion behind an issue such as the threat to Ontario's farmland and farming as a way of life? Why or why not?

THE STRUGGLE TO SAVE CANADA'S FARMLAND

Disappearing Farmland

Focus for Reading



Many factors (causes) have contributed to the disappearance of Canada's farmland. As well, the disappearance of the land has multiple consequences. Use the Multiple Causation and Multiple Consequence Webs from the *News in Review* website (http://newsinreview.cbclearning.ca/worksheets/cause_consequence/) to organize the information presented in this section. You will be identifying the causes and consequences of this issue. Work with a partner or in a small group to complete your charts.

Changes to Family Farming

A century ago, Canada was one of the world's foremost agricultural nations, producing far more food than could be consumed by its own people. Exports of agricultural products, especially grains such as wheat, were a major contributor to the nation's economic growth.

Farmers then were a large, important, and politically influential segment of the population, and political and business leaders needed to take their concerns seriously.

At that time, most of Canada's farms were independent, family-run operations, spread across the country, from relatively small holdings in the Maritimes and Eastern Canada, to huge, sprawling grain and cattle farms on the Prairies. Farming was more than just a means to earn a living; it was also a way of life with its own values, beliefs, and culture, and deeply engrained in the national psyche.

Today the situation is very different. Farming is an occupation pursued by a tiny and ever-shrinking percentage of Canada's population. Many farmers face constant economic uncertainty and find it increasingly difficult to turn a profit. Although exports of agricultural products are still important, other natural resources such as mineral, forest, and petroleum products have surpassed them in economic terms.

Canada imports far more food than

it did a hundred years ago, and a growing trend toward the consolidation of farmland into big "agribusiness" operations is slowly erasing the family farm as an institution in Canada. Farmers today have far less influence in national and provincial politics than they did a century ago, and younger people are leaving the land for more lucrative occupations and greater opportunities in Canada's growing cities.

Canada is a vast country, but only about six per cent of its total land mass is suitable for farming. And of that, only 0.5 per cent is designated as Class 1 land—the most fertile and productive. Most of this very good farmland happens to be located near the country's growing cities, such as Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. As these urban centres spread out into the rural hinterland, once-productive farmland is purchased and turned into housing developments, industrial zones, and shopping malls. From 1972 to 2001, Canada lost a total of 14 000 km² of agricultural land to urban uses—and the trend has accelerated since then.

Ontario is the province endowed with most of Canada's Class 1 land, but between 2001 and 2006, 240 000 hectares (ha) disappeared forever. It is estimated that the province loses one km² of farmland to development every

day. In other provinces, the story is much the same, with Quebec losing 3.4 million ha over the past two decades, and Nova Scotia seeing 80 per cent of its total farmland eliminated between 1921 and 2006.

As Canada's farmland disappears, food imports become more important to the national economy. For example, in 1964, only four per cent of red meat was imported, whereas by 2001 one-quarter of it was. In 1967, Canada's centennial year, two-thirds of our fruit was imported, while now almost all of it is. Vegetable imports have grown from 20 per cent to almost half since the 1960s. At the same time, although Canada continues to be a major exporter of agricultural products, its position has dropped from third in the world to number seven, as countries such as China, Brazil, and Argentina have advanced on us.

With more than 90 per cent of Canada's farmers over the age of 35, and fewer young people willing to replace them, the family farm may soon be a vanishing institution in the Canadian society of the 21st century. Elderly farmers close to retirement are attracted by offers to sell their property from real estate developers or big agribusiness firms, especially if these farms are located near growing urban centres and can command a good market value.

However, there are opportunities for small farms specializing in niche-market products that appeal to consumers interested in eating healthy, organically grown foods. Farmers' markets are becoming increasingly popular in a number of Canadian cities—Toronto's flourishing St. Lawrence Market and Ottawa's Byward Market being but two well-known examples among many.

To be sure, farming is a difficult and

demanding business that requires high start-up costs, long hours of work, and an almost 50-per-cent chance of failure. Most Canadian farm families find it necessary to supplement their income with second jobs off the farm. But for those willing to take the risks and endure the hardships associated with it, farming remains an appealing way of life for many Canadians seeking an escape from the stresses and pressures of urban living and the rewards of seeing the fruits of one's labours growing before their eyes.

Saving Farmland

Two good examples of innovative government policies designed to halt the encroachment of urban sprawl on prime farmland are British Columbia's Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), and Ontario's Greenbelt. Under the ALR, 47 million hectares of the most desirable farmland of British Columbia—or five per cent of the province's total land area—are legally protected from development. The B.C. government introduced the ALR in the early 1970s to halt or at least slow down the trend of disappearing farmland, appointing an independent agency to decide which land should be protected and how the interests of farmers, municipal governments, and developers could be reconciled.

The provincial government of Ontario passed the Greenbelt Act in 2005. Its goal was to promote agricultural and environmental protection, culture, recreation and tourism, a strong rural economy, and a sustainable approach to infrastructure and natural resources. The Greenbelt is one of the largest areas of officially protected land in the world, comprising a 728 000 ha swath of land wrapping itself around the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and stretching as far south as Niagara Falls. It is 325 km

long and 80 km wide at its broadest point, making it larger than the entire province of Prince Edward Island. The Greenbelt contains some of the most fertile soil in the province, along with sensitive environmental areas such as Rouge Park, the Oak Ridges Moraine, and the Niagara Escarpment.

The Greenbelt was designed not only to protect valuable farmland from development but also to ensure that some of the province's most attractive natural features close to large cities were preserved for the use and enjoyment of its residents and visitors. It was hoped that farmers whose land was included in the Greenbelt would grow local food that would be available to nearby urban dwellers, in the process boosting both the agricultural economy and a more healthy style of eating. A non-profit organization known as the

Friends of the Greenbelt was created, with an initial government investment of \$25-million, to promote the Greenbelt among the population.

Many international experts on urban and rural planning view the Greenbelt as one of the most forward-thinking approaches to farmland protection in the world. But the program does have its critics. On the one hand, groups such as Sustain Ontario believe that the exemptions permitted under the legislation are too broad, leaving it possible for farmers to sell their land to developers even if it is located inside the Greenbelt. Some farmers also resent the fact that they were not consulted before the Greenbelt legislation was passed, and that they now face many bureaucratic roadblocks should they wish to sell their farms.

Follow-up

With a partner or in a small group compare the information you recorded on the main causes and consequences of the issue of disappearing farmland in your worksheets.

1. List the causes you would consider to be long-term and those that you would consider short-term and state reasons for your decision.
2. List the consequences you would consider to be intended and those that you would consider to be unintended and state reasons for your decision.
3. How successful do you think that farmland protection policies such as British Columbia's ALR and Ontario's Greenbelt have been in reversing the trend of the disappearance of farmland?
4. Do you think that the institution of the family farm can survive into the 21st century? Why or why not?

THE STRUGGLE TO SAVE CANADA'S FARMLAND

"Taters versus Craters" in Melancthon Township

Focus for Reading

As you read this section, use a chart like the one below to summarize the main arguments in favour of and against the proposed limestone quarry in Melancthon Township, Ontario.

In Favour	Against
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed quarry will bring much-needed jobs to the area. • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quarry will remove prime farmland from production. • •

On October 16, 2011, a group of local residents and visitors gathered on a farm near Shelburne, Ontario. Despite the cold, windy weather that day, thousands of enthusiastic participants had come to celebrate what the organizers of the event called Foodstock, a lively protest against plans to develop a limestone quarry in the area's fertile farmland. One hundred chefs from across the country, including celebrity cooks like Jamie Kennedy and Michael Stadlander prepared delicacies made from local ingredients. Well-known Canadian musicians like Jim Cuddy, Sarah Harmer, Hayden, Cuff the Duke, and Ron Sexsmith entertained the crowd, who had brought their own plates, cups, cutlery and napkins to the event.

Although those who attended Foodstock certainly enjoyed the delicious food and the entertainment, their motivation was very serious. They were there to demonstrate their support for local farmers who are resisting efforts by Highland Companies, a U.S.-based conglomerate, to sell their land. And they were also strongly opposed to the company's plans to use the land it purchased as the site for a huge limestone mega-quarry.

The honeywood loam of Melancthon Township, about 100 km northwest of Toronto, is some of the richest Class 1

land in Canada. Roughly one-quarter of all the potatoes grown in Ontario come from the area. But beneath this fertile soil lies a bed of limestone from which amabel dolostone, a high-quality aggregate can be extracted. This substance is in great demand as a building material for buildings and roads in the rapidly expanding Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

The controversy now engulfing the once-sleepy rural communities in Melancthon Township basically boils down to this question: what should come first, preserving an agricultural way of life that helps feed urban dwellers or embracing a new project that could bring much-needed development and jobs to the area and deliver building materials to the cities? In essence, in the words of one of the Foodstock participants, it is a choice between "taters" or "craters."

In 2006, John Lowndes, a Canadian businessman representing Highland Companies, began purchasing land in the area, offering farmers as much as \$20 000 per hectare. He has been able to acquire some 6 000 hectares of fertile land, including two of the largest local potato farms. While sketchy about the details of the company's intentions, he gave his clients reason to believe that the land they sold would remain under cultivation for potatoes.

But in the months following the sale of his land, a farmer named Lyle Parsons began having second thoughts about his decision. He observed people drilling for soil samples and clearing trees, and then a team of archaeologists combing it for any possible prehistoric artifacts. This is when the alarm bells went off, because such steps are not required if potatoes are being grown, but only when the land is to be converted to other purposes.

Parsons now believes he was misled when Lowndes led him to think that his land would continue to be used for farming. What started as a rumour in the area has now become a fact: Highland Companies had a plan from the beginning to establish a limestone quarry on the land it was acquiring in Melancthon Township. This firm has a number of ideas for development in the area, including harnessing wind power and reviving a rail link between Toronto and Owen Sound that would run through the land. But the number-one priority is a huge limestone quarry, which, if approved, would run around the clock and create over 300 jobs in the community.

In an exclusive interview with the CBC in October 2011, Joseph Izhakoff, an official with Highland Companies, publicly acknowledged for the first time that his firm had intended to develop a

quarry in Melancthon Township all along. He denied having misled local residents at the time they sold their land to Highland and argued that the proposed project, if managed carefully, would result in great economic benefits for the area.

At a loss to account for the strongly negative public reaction to his company's proposals, he went to great lengths to reassure the community that the quarry would be environmentally safe. He promised that it would be introduced in stages over the course of 50 to 100 years, in 120 ha stages. Once a section had been mined, the resulting crater would be refilled with soil and the land returned to agricultural use. The vast quantities of water pumped out of the pits, which lie below the region's high water table, amounting to an estimated 600 million litres per day, would be purified and returned to the area's aquifers.

In early September 2011, on the eve of a provincial election, Environment Minister John Wilkinson announced that a full environmental assessment of the potential impact of the quarry on the local area would have to be held before Highland Companies would receive permission to begin digging. Such a review could take many months, if not years to complete, putting the company's plans for the quarry on hold, at least for the time being.

Analysis

1. With a partner or in a small group, compare the information in your summary chart. Help each other complete any missing information.
2. With a partner or in a small group, review the arguments you have summarized in favour of and against the quarry in Melancthon Township. Which side do you find more persuasive? Why?
3. Do you think that Highland Companies was completely honest in its dealings with farmers who sold their land to the firm before it made its plans for the quarry public? Does it matter if they were? Why or why not?
4. Do you think that events such as Foodstock are an effective means of mobilizing public opinion around a controversial issue? Why or why not?

THE STRUGGLE TO SAVE CANADA'S FARMLAND

Two Views from the Nation

Focus for Reading

As you read this section, summarize the information presented in it using the following chart.

A New Business Model	Farmers' Markets
Problem	Problem
Solution	Solution

A New Business Model on the Prairies

Saskatchewan-born Greg Menzies had spent most of his adult life running his own technology company in Vancouver. But in 2005 his uncle asked him to return to his native province and take over the management of the family farm, located near Regina. Looking for a change, he accepted the offer and asked his uncle to see the farm's financial records. After carefully scrutinizing them, he came to the conclusion that the farm's entire mode of operation was in total contradiction to everything he had learned in business school. The farm was growing crops and then looking for potential buyers, while Menzies believed that it was necessary to identify the customers first, and then develop a strategy to meet their needs.

In pursuit of his goal of making Wigmore Farms more profitable, Menzies travelled the globe, attending international food shows in places like Paris and Dubai. There he learned that for most of the poor countries of the

world, there was a great need for cheap sources of protein in the form of what are known as "pulse crops," including beans, lentils, and chick peas. For people too poor to purchase meat or fish, such staples could mean the difference between starvation and a meager but healthy diet.

In response to this, Menzies switched the 3 200-ha farm's production from traditional crops like wheat and flax to a many-sided operation that grows 18 000 tonnes of pulse crops, which it markets successfully in North Africa and South Asia. In addition, it runs a cleaning and packaging facility and a division selling fertilizers and chemicals. From the farm's original two employees, the staff has grown to over 90.

Menzies has even more ambitious plans for development. He eventually envisages a 80 000-ha operation, leasing farmland in 3 200-ha modules to local farmers. Menzies' biggest challenge is finding the funds to finance his ever-growing activities, and he believes that many government policies stand in the way of

projects like his. But he is convinced that businesses like his mean more than just profit. “It’s about feeding and finding food for the world” (*The Globe and Mail*, November 23, 2010).

The Growing Demand for Farmers’ Markets

Across Canada, farmers’ markets are becoming ever more popular, as consumers are looking for local, organically grown alternatives to mass-produced, imported fruits and vegetables. During the warm summer months, such markets attract large crowds of shoppers, especially in the province of Ontario, where about 150 of the country’s 500 farmers’ markets are located, accounting for almost two-thirds of total sales.

The rich farmland on the outskirts of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is also home to a number of pick-your-own operations, where city dwellers can travel by car to gather apples, tomatoes, strawberries, and other products during the summer months. Some people also patronize community-supported agricultural operations, where they pay a certain amount per week in return for a selection of locally grown foods delivered by local farmers.

However, while demand for farmers’

markets and the products they supply is on the increase, many farmers are finding it difficult to fulfill the need. In the Prairie Provinces, traditionally Canada’s agricultural breadbasket, most farms are now large agribusinesses operations, producing one or at most a few grain crops or livestock, and are neither equipped to nor interested in supplying products to farmers’ markets.

For small family farms wanting to sell their products to farmers’ markets, the demands of time, energy, and finances can be great. Kim Shukla, the co-owner of Stoneland Orchard in Manitoba, explains that she and her husband, Richard Whitehead, have to choose the markets they sell to very carefully to make sure that they are a profitable investment of their time. She says that they need to sell between \$2 000 and \$10 000 worth of produce a day to break even after staff and travel expenses are paid. But Bert Andrews, the owner of Andrews Scenic Acres, a pick-your-own berry farm west of Toronto, dispatches trucks to 11 farmers’ markets across the GTA every weekend. Exposure to his produce at such events also helps bring customers to his farm, where they can enjoy the experience of picking their own berries.

Follow-up

1. With a partner or in a small group, compare the information summarized in your chart. Help others complete any missing information.
2. With your partner or in groups, discuss the problem identified in each section and the proposed solution to it. How viable do you think the solution is?
3. If you were operating a Canadian farm today, what marketing strategies might you adopt to make it profitable?
4. Have you ever been to a farmers’ market or a pick-your-own farm operation? If yes, did you enjoy the experience? If no, would you like to? How would it be different from shopping for food at a supermarket?

THE STRUGGLE TO SAVE CANADA'S FARMLAND

Activity: Wasted Food

Wasted food in Canada is a serious problem. It is estimated that Canadians throw away approximately 40 per cent of the food they do not consume every year. Much of this is completely edible. This amounts to an estimated \$27-billion in waste annually.

The Bluewater Recycling Association is a Canadian organization affiliated with a British group called "Love Food, Hate Waste." It offers many suggestions on how the problem of food waste can be addressed—in homes, schools, and grocery stores. Second Harvest is a Canadian organization that promotes alternatives to food waste as a means of feeding the hungry.

Your Task

A. Conduct Research

1. Select a partner.
2. Visit the websites of the Bluewater Recycling Association (www.bra.org/lovefoodhatewaste.html) and Second Harvest (www.secondharvest.ca).
3. Review the sites and record 10 pieces of information that you can use to explain how the issue of food waste impacts you, your family, and the global community.
4. Brainstorm five ways you think food waste could be reduced or even eliminated.
5. Prepare a short report that summarizes your answers to questions 3 and 4 to share with your class.

B. Take Action

With your teacher's permission, prepare a plan to implement one of the ideas you came up with in question 4 above.

Suitable activities could include:

- Working with the staff at your school cafeteria or the manager of your local supermarket or restaurant to reduce waste.
- Finding out if the local food bank or shelter is willing to receive donations of "extra" food that is being discarded from your school or local grocery store.
- Plan and organize projects that you could do in your class to raise awareness of this issue (e.g., "lunch money days," food drives).