
AGRICULTURE BARRIERS TO GROWING IN ONTARIO

Overview

Agriculture is one of Renfrew County's key economic pillars with 1,000 farms farming almost 300,000 acres of farmland (average farm size of 297 acres) and generating \$128M in annual cash receipts, with the top 3 commodities being grains and oilseeds, dairy and cattle. 20% of farms sell directly to consumers, including 133 farms who selling directly from their farm, at stands or pick-your-own. In 2021, the local agri-food sector in Renfrew County employed 4,965 people through 1,018 agri-food business establishments.

Background

The agriculture sector in Renfrew County, and across Eastern Ontario, is facing a number of barriers that are impacting food distribution, animal welfare and agriculture sustainability in our communities. These include:

- **Live Animal Transport to Processors**

Livestock and feed transport is hindered by inconsistent provincial rules despite federal regulation with misaligned standards resulting in increased costs and inefficiencies.

Under the current requirements, a producer cannot have cattle killed at a provincial abattoir in another province and bring the carcass back for further processing, sale or distribution in Ontario. Provincially inspected meat processing plants cannot ship meat outside their province unless federally inspected, creating a structural barrier for small processors and farmers. Farmers in Renfrew County, Eastern and Northern Ontario often face hundreds of kilometers of extra travel because they cannot use nearby abattoirs in Quebec or Manitoba.

Additionally, inconsistencies in inspections are contributing to an increase in carcass condemnations at provincially and federally licensed abattoirs. Condemnations result in direct financial losses to producers without compensation and reduce processing capacity in already strained small abattoirs. While condemnation can stem from a wide range of factors, inconsistencies in how decisions are applied across facilities, and limited transparency around condemnation data, make it difficult for producers to identify and address the root causes.

The regulatory complexity between provincial and federal systems result in higher transportation costs and reduced farm profitability, increased animal stress due to longer travel times, and reduced resilience of Ontario's livestock and local food systems.

- **Working/Herding Dogs on Farms (PAWS Act)**

The PAWS Act does not clearly distinguish between companion animals and Livestock Guarding Dogs (LDGs) and other working/herding dogs as integral to the health and safety of livestock in areas with high predator pressure. This means farms are subject to municipal dog bylaws that restrict the number of dogs allowed on a premise and cost producers up to thousands of dollars annually for licenses and kennel requirements.

The financial cost of predation not only affects farmers, in terms of preventative measures, such as fencing and Livestock Guardian Dogs (LDGs); it also costs Ontario taxpayers, with OMAFAA paying farmers over \$1.5M in 2024 for losses of livestock caused by wildlife. This cost does not include the cost borne by municipalities and OMAFAA in sending investigators out to farms and administering the program. Nor does this cover the costs of veterinarians to help animals maimed by predators to recover, the production of animals who are stressed from predation and the mental health toll predation takes on the farmer.

As an example in sheep farming, OFA notes that predation risk is lower in counties where a larger share of municipalities define “working dogs”. A 10% increase in share of municipalities that define “Livestock Guardian Dog” or “Herding Dog” in their animal bylaws is associated with roughly a 21% decrease in both claims and compensation under the Ontario Wildlife Damage Compensation Program (OWDCP).

- **Deadstock Capacity**

The *Increasing Deadstock Capacity Initiative* (2023) provided cost-share funding support for deadstock management to address immediate and short-term deadstock capacity needs at businesses, including new or existing deadstock service providers, and municipalities in Ontario through increasing capacity and improving sustainability. In November 2024, the program was expanded to allow primary livestock producers to apply. The intake has since closed with the funding being fully allocated.

We are aware that some existing deadstock service providers to Renfrew County were successful in securing funding through the initiative allowing them to expand their service area radius.

However, the deadstock removal and claims system does not consistently meet producer needs, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Delays and complexities in claims processing and cost recovery and limited options to increase on-farm storage pose risks to biosecurity, the environment and animal welfare and increased operational and financial burdens on producers.

Request for Support

- **Live Animal Transport to Processors:**

- Provide voluntary funding to help provincial plants upgrade to federal standards, recognizing this will require more federal inspectors.

- An allowance for producers from out of province to access custom slaughter services in Ontario, provided that same allowance is given to Ontario producers seeking slaughter services outside of Ontario's borders. This is particularly relevant for abattoirs near provincial borders.
- Align:
 - prescribed maximum gross and axle weights and dimensional limits across all provinces and territories.
 - vehicle equipment registration requirements and permit durations across all provinces and territories.
 - interpretation and implementation of prorated vehicle registration.
 - spring road bans and restrictions.
- Improve inspection standards for carcass condemnation and apply uniformly across processing plants.
- Provide timely and clear data on the reasons and rates of condemnation by species and facilities, and a formal process for producers to appeal or question condemnation decisions.
- Improve communications around best practices for preventing condemnations, including appropriate withdrawal times, handling protocols and health management.
- **Working/Herding Dogs on Farms (PAWS Act)**
 - Amend language in the PAWS Act to clearly distinguish the difference between companion animals and Livestock Guardian Dogs (LDGs) and Herding/Working Dogs on farms.
 - Expand welfare regulations for dogs to include a provision to allow the number of working dogs on a farm required to keep the flock safe from predators and safely move the flock without the requirement of a kennel license and the expense of building a kennel.
 - Conduct a formal review of the PAWS Act, which came into affect on January 1, 2020, to assess its functionality, and ensure it aligns with its intended purpose.
- **Deadstock Capacity:**
 - Continue to fund and deliver programs or initiatives, such as the *Increasing Deadstock Capacity Initiative*, which benefit agricultural producers regarding deadstock services and/or collection.