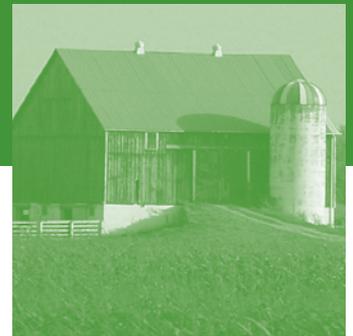


# Sustainable Halton



## Agricultural Countryside Vision

May 2007



PLANSCAPE

BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH PLANNING

# Sustainable Halton

This is a draft final background report for the Sustainable Halton planning process. As the project continues and as we receive public feedback, there may be slight adjustments made to the content of this report.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Halton's rural area comprises two distinct parts. One area, generally referred to as **Protected Countryside**, is covered by **Greenbelt Plan** and includes lands within and beyond the Niagara Escarpment Plan Area. The other rural portion is for the most part below the escarpment, and is recognized in the current Official Plan as Halton's prime agricultural area.

The future of the Greenbelt area is fixed by various pieces of Provincial legislation including the Greenbelt Plan and the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act. The Agricultural Rural Area below the escarpment, referred to in this report as the **Primary Study Area** (PSA), is subject to the policies of the Halton Official Plan and its long term future must be determined as part of the Sustainable Halton process. Evaluation of rural development options for the 16,800 ha in the PSA must be done in the context of the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS), Halton's long established policies recognizing agriculture as a vital component of the Region, and the challenges presented by the Province's Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

### Background

Sustainable Development is a guiding principle of Halton's Official Plan, supported by a commitment to "landform permanence" as a fundamental value in land-use planning. As such, the Official Plan indicates that farms are to be preserved in large measure so that they will always be part of Halton's landscape. This reflects Halton's tradition of protecting agricultural land, and the notion of agriculture being a critical component of sustainable development.

Provincial policies also confirm a strong commitment to the preservation of agricultural land. Section 2.3 of the PPS requires "*the protection of prime agricultural areas*", which are defined as "*areas where prime agricultural lands predominate*". Prime agricultural lands predominate in the PSA and the area exhibits the characteristics required to qualify as a Prime Agricultural Area under the PPS. Land in the Greenbelt is more variable with a much higher incidence of lower class land.

Two provincial initiatives have put pressure on the PSA. Enactment of the Greenbelt Plan in 2005 established a significant portion of Halton as permanent countryside. The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe implemented in 2006, requires Halton to accommodate a certain level of growth to the year 2031. Although some of this growth must be accommodated through intensification, a portion of it will have to be accommodated in the PSA. With the creation of the Greenbelt, it is the only area available to accommodate the growth.

In addition to urban growth, other land uses are competing for space in the PSA. As part of the Sustainable Halton process, consideration is being given to expansion of the Region's Natural Heritage System (NHS). While some components of the NHS can co-exist with agriculture, expansion of the system may reduce the amount of land available for agriculture over time. The PPS requires the protection of aggregate resources for long term use. Even though agricultural production can continue on lands designated for

potential future extraction, the protection of mineral aggregate resource areas will create uncertainty about the long term agricultural value of this area.

Given all of the above, two questions arise that must be answered through the Sustainable Halton process:

- Is it desirable for agriculture to have a permanent presence in the PSA?
- Is it possible for agriculture to have a permanent presence in the PSA?

The answer to the first question is yes. The majority of the land in the PSA has Class 1 soil capability for agriculture, a quality that applies to less than 0.5% of the Canadian land mass. The land itself is a non renewable resource and its value is enhanced by good climatic conditions and availability of water. There is an existing agricultural sector which in terms of value of gross farm receipts, is highly productive. The quality of the resource allows flexibility in production and access to a large and sophisticated market creates opportunities for producers.

Agriculture is an integral part of the economic, cultural and historic fabric of the Region. There is a growing public interest in maintaining local food production and agriculture is considered an important component of a sustainable community. Agricultural areas provide relief from urban form and farmers act as stewards of the rural landscape. If managed properly, agriculture can contribute to environmental sustainability and quality of life. While land in the Greenbelt can respond to some of these needs, the prime land in the PSA is best suited to do so.

The answer to the second question revolves around the word “permanent”. If the purpose of the Sustainable Halton exercise is just to address the period from 2021 to 2031, the answer is yes, it is possible to maintain an agricultural presence in the PSA. Concurrent studies confirm that not all of the land in the PSA is required to accommodate growth or other resource interests to 2031. A significant area remains that given the requirements of Section 2.3 of the PPS, must remain designated for agriculture. While the uncertainty associated with the future of the area may adversely affect the strength of the agricultural operations that exist, there will continue to be land for agriculture in the PSA.

However if the goal of Sustainable Halton is to create an ongoing permanent agricultural presence, this is a more difficult challenge. There are numerous conditions that must exist to maintain a permanent, agricultural presence in the PSA. A viable agricultural sector is one which is located on productive land with suitable climatic conditions, is of sufficient size to allow flexibility in production; is supported by an infrastructure of farm related services; occupies contiguous parcels of land to provide separation from conflicting and incompatible uses and operates in a supportive environment. The area must be protected from urban encroachment by strong and permanent urban boundaries. The most productive type of agricultural community is one where there is certainty that land will remain in production and the circumstances will exist to support agriculture.

The PSA has many of the characteristics required to sustain a permanent agricultural area. The quality of the resource is outstanding, there is a large contiguous area of production and Halton has been very supportive of the agricultural sector. Actions such as the creation of an Agricultural Advisory Committee to ensure agricultural interests are

represented in Regional decision making; implementation of the Simply Local program to promote regional farms and implementation of the GTA Agricultural Action Plan to promote agriculture in the GTA are representatives of this support.

The element that is missing and creates vulnerability in the sector is certainty. With each update of the Official Plan, there is the possibility of more agricultural land being converted for urban expansion. The expectation that this will continue fuels speculation that drives land prices beyond productive value. Younger farmers do not see a future in the area and are unwilling or unable to invest. Land being held for speculation is often not maintained at peak productivity and farm infrastructure is neglected. This detracts from the overall integrity of an agricultural area, discourages farm service providers and makes the businesses of farming more difficult. The impact of this uncertainty in the PSA is reflected in the aging profile of the farmers and the prevalence of rental land. If there is to be a permanent agricultural sector in the PSA, this uncertainty must be addressed.

## **Conclusions**

The answer to the question “Is it desirable for agriculture to have a permanent presence in the PSA?” is yes. An appropriate vision for the countryside in Halton is one that supports firm urban boundaries, a comprehensive natural heritage system and a permanent, prosperous agricultural presence in the PSA. The contribution of agriculture to both the economy and the quality of life in the Region is valued. The non renewable nature of the agricultural resource in the PSA is such that there is an obligation to preserve it for current and future generations.

The answer to the second question, “Is it possible for agriculture to have a permanent presence in the PSA?” is also yes but only if a strong commitment based on a realistic assessment of the challenges, is made. It will require the definition of a “mature state” for the Region where boundaries between land uses are firm. It must be supported by realistic programs to address the challenges that will arise. Land use policies alone will not achieve this. Other tools will have to be employed, the cost of which must be understood and accepted. Creation of a permanent viable agricultural sector in the PSA will require strong political will, commitment by the agricultural community and public support.

If the Region decides to build on its existing policies of agricultural protection and endorse the policy of a permanent agricultural presence in the PSA, additional work must be done to establish how large an area should be established, where it will be established, what tools are needed to ensure permanency and what the costs and implications of creating this area will be.

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This report is one of a series documenting the context and background for the Sustainable Halton exercise. Through this process policies will be generated that will set the context for the Region's long term future. The current Regional Official Plan sets the policies to 2021. The Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe (the Growth Plan) requires that Halton address what should happen during the 10 years between 2021 and 2031. In doing this, the Region wants to move beyond these limits and create a vision for the mature state Halton. This vision will then become the foundation for the future and the context for future policies.

Halton has always valued its countryside and retaining a healthy rural area will be an important component of the mature state. With the creation of the Greenbelt, a significant part of the Region will be preserved as Protected Countryside. The question then becomes, what is the future for the rural area outside of the Greenbelt; how does it fit with the Greenbelt and what portion of it will remain as Countryside? The term "Countryside" encompasses a full range of rural uses. Are all of these uses appropriate and if not, what uses should continue?

These questions must be assessed in tandem with the comprehensive Sustainable Halton planning exercise. In planning for the future, an appropriate balance must be struck between competing land uses to maintain and enhance the lifestyle of the Region's residents.

In achieving this balance, the future role of agriculture must be addressed. Throughout the Region's history, agriculture has been a critical component of the fabric of Halton and an inherent part of its policy of landform permanence. Regional policy has consistently supported the presence of a strong and extensive agricultural presence. The rural area below the brow of the Escarpment is designated as a prime agricultural area in the current Official Plan. The Sustainable Halton process must address whether to build on this tradition by creating a permanent agricultural presence supported by circumstances that allow the sector to flourish or whether given the requirements of the Growth Plan, an alternative direction must be considered.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVE AND NATURE OF REVIEW**

The objective of this report is to assess the feasibility of retaining a permanent agricultural presence outside of the Greenbelt and to provide insight into how this goal could be achieved within a regional countryside vision. Has the creation of the Greenbelt done this or is more required? If more is required, how much more? Is it possible to establish a permanent agricultural area outside of the Greenbelt given the requirements of the Growth Plan? Why should agriculture be a permanent presence, where should it be focused and how can permanence be achieved?

In identifying options, consideration must be given to: existing Regional and Provincial policies; the current state of agriculture in the Region; the existing mix of rural uses; the appropriate balance of uses; the definition of viable agricultural area/sector; the feasibility of retaining viable agricultural areas outside of the Greenbelt; the conditions and policies required to support a viable agricultural sector; the type of agriculture that

might be appropriate in the future; and potential future rural uses that could appropriately occur in the countryside.

The analysis in this report is focuses on the area designated as the “Agricultural Rural Area” outside of the Greenbelt in the current Halton Official Plan. The actual study area is shown on **Map 1** and is referred to through out this report as the **Primary Study Area or PSA**. The Agricultural Rural lands in the PSA consists of approximately 12,066 hectares, if Greenlands and parkway belt areas are included, the PSA has an area of approximately 16,800 hectares.

The balance of the rural area in Halton is part of the Protected Countryside and subject to the protection of various pieces of legislation including the Greenbelt Plan 2005, and the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act. While the role these areas will play in the future of agricultural and the rural community will be considered, it will be done so in the context of considering the options available for the long term future of the PSA.

Throughout this report this area is referred to as the Greenbelt.

The report is structured to cover the following topics:

- a summary of background reports and policies that have and will continue to guide agricultural policies;
- a definition of agriculture and its existing and potential role in terms of the value of the resource, food security, recreation/education, supply of local/fresh food, relief from urban form and competition with other rural, non-agricultural uses;
- the current state of the Regional resource both singularly and in the context of the GTA, Hamilton, Niagara and Wellington;
- existing and potential rural uses and their role in the countryside;
- the types of agriculture and associated uses that are emerging in urbanizing areas and their potential future role;
- implications of the Greenbelt for agricultural and other countryside uses;
- the critical mass of agricultural land and infrastructure required to sustain viable agricultural sectors in Halton and in the larger geographic context;
- options for the long-term future of agriculture in the “PSA” relative to other countryside uses such as golf courses, churches, rural settlement areas and aggregate resource areas;
- the challenges associated with creating a permanent agricultural area in the PSA; and
- policy approaches to protect agricultural land (e.g. agricultural preserve) and other measures to encourage the industry to be sustainable with comments on potential intervention methods and whether intervention is required to permanently retain agriculture.

### 3.0 BACKGROUND POLICIES AND REPORTS

The analysis of the future of the PSA must be done within the context of existing policies and the work upon which they are based. Decisions must be based on a vision for the countryside that is part of the overall vision for the Region.

Key amongst the policies that will guide the vision for the countryside are the Provincial Policy Statement, 2005 (PPS), the Greenbelt Plan, 2005, the Niagara Escarpment Plan, 2006, the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2006 and the Official Plan for the Halton Regional Planning Area 2006. The goals of all of these various policies will only be met if there is co-operation and co-ordination between all of the various initiatives.

#### 3.1 Provincial and Regional Policies

The Provincial policies confirm a strong commitment to the preservation of agricultural land but also recognize growth must be accommodated. Section 2.3.1 of the PPS states:

*Prime agricultural areas shall be protected for long term use by agriculture.*

*Prime agricultural areas are areas where prime agricultural land predominates, Specialty crop areas shall be given the highest priority for protection, followed by Classes 1, 2 and 3, in this order of priority.<sup>1</sup>*

Section 2.3.5 of the PPS states:

*Planning authorities may only exclude land from prime agricultural areas for:*

- a) expansion of or identification of settlement areas in accordance with policy 1.1.3.9;*
- b) extraction of (...) mineral aggregate resources;*
- c) limited non residential uses (under very specific conditions where there is no reasonable alternative on lower priority lands)<sup>2</sup>*

In setting aside the lands on the Oak Ridges Moraine and Niagara Escarpment and creating the Greenbelt as a permanent rural area, it could be assumed that the Province was acting to preserve agricultural land. While in part this may be true, the reality is that much of the land captured under the Provincial plans in Halton is not predominately prime farm land. **Map 2** is the Canada Land Inventory (CLI) mapping for Halton. The CLI ranks agricultural land in seven classes from best to worst with 1 being the best and 7 being the worst. Prime land, which is the land to be protected under provincial policy, is Class 1, 2 or 3. The CLI mapping does not identify specialty crop land. This is done through a separate evaluation.

A review of this map confirms that with the exception of the area north of Burlington and some pockets of land in Milton and Halton Hills, a significant portion of the prime land in Halton is in the PSA. While there are certainly viable and important agricultural lands in the Greenbelt they are not the best agricultural lands in Halton.

In creating the Greenbelt, the Province undertook a Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR) process designed to rank agricultural land. This process applies a number of

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<sup>1</sup> Provincial Policy Statement 2005, Section 2.3.1, pg 17.

<sup>2</sup> Provincial Policy Statement 2005, Section 2.3.5, pg 18.

criteria to an area and on the basis of the analysis scores blocks of land on a scale from 1 to 10. Ten is the highest score, one is the lowest. In the evaluation report it was stated that:

*“Generally lands that scored 6.0 or above should be considered part of a ‘Prime Agricultural Areas’ unless they are located in isolated pockets”<sup>3</sup>*

The scores for Halton are shown on **Map 3**. As this map illustrates, the PSA qualifies as a “prime agricultural area” which is characterized by the Province as “large connected areas for agriculture with an area of 250 hectares or more”<sup>4</sup>.

The Province did include the prime areas north of Burlington and some of the prime areas in Halton Hills and Milton that abutted the Niagara Escarpment in the Greenbelt. However, the decision on the future of the best agricultural land in Halton has been left largely to the Region. Working within the framework set by provincial policy, and balancing the demands of competing uses, Sustainable Halton must address the future of the agricultural sector in the PSA, how these lands interact with lands in the Greenbelt, what the nature of agriculture in Halton is at present, what it should be in the future, given all of the other pressures and the need to accommodate growth in the Region and the policies required to achieve this.

Halton has a long and established commitment to the support of its agricultural sector. In fact, although the continuing strength of the agricultural industry in Halton can be attributed largely to the nature of the resource and farm management skills, it is also partly due to the very strong support Halton Region has provided to the sector. There has been consistent political commitment to strong policies to maintain an agricultural land base, economic development programs to support it and cooperation with the local farming community to respond to identified needs. In the Official Plan review conducted in the early 1990’s, the Region identified sustainable development as a major principal to guide development in the Region. Agriculture was acknowledged as a critical component of a sustainable community.

Land form permanence has always been a pillar of Halton’s planning principals. Preserving “landform permanence” is deemed to be “Halton’s fundamental value in land use planning”.<sup>5</sup> There is a consistent vision that “farmland and woodlots are important because they are irreplaceable resources with intrinsic economic and ecological values”<sup>6</sup>, an essential element of the permanent land forms.

These principles of landform permanence, approved in the Official Plan in 1994, have been carried forward in subsequent Official Plan amendments including the recently adopted ROPA 25.

However, despite the quality of the land, the continuing presence of agriculture in the area and the commitment of the Region to agricultural land preservation, the future of this industry is vulnerable. The pressure on the agricultural lands in the PSA has been increased by implementation of the Provincial Growth Plan. This plan requires that

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs, Greenbelt Study area Agricultural Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR), Survey Lot and Concession Fabric, August 2006, pg 27.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pg 27.

<sup>5</sup> Report B4 Land Stewardship and Healthy Communities, A Vision for the 90’s and Beyond January 1991, Witness Statement of Ho-Kwan Wong, pg11.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pg 11.

Halton accommodate a certain level of growth to the year 2031. Although the plan dictates that a certain percentage of that growth must be accommodated within existing urban boundaries, a portion of it and the related employment lands will be located outside of these boundaries. With the creation of the Greenbelt, the only area available to accommodate the growth is the PSA. Through the Sustainable Halton process, the Region must now decide how this issue should be addressed and what the future for agriculture will be in the PSA.

### **3.2 Background Reports**

In addition to the policy framework under which decisions must be made there are background reports that provide a basis upon which policies have, and should be developed.

#### **Growing Halton's Agricultural Cluster and Farmland Base, February 2002<sup>7</sup>**

In 2002, this study was completed addressing the potential to grow Halton's agricultural cluster and farmland base. The report concluded that:

*Halton has some excellent soil and climatic conditions that are well suited to a range of crop and livestock options. It has a supply of fresh water sufficient to sustain the industry. Its land is situated in the midst of a well-developed industrial cluster, which includes essential agricultural services, research and development, supportive governments, industry associations and chapters and a pool of skilled labour.<sup>8</sup>*

The report concluded that agricultural clusters did exist in Halton, although they were defined by a regional, not a political boundary. The clusters that were identified included crop and livestock clusters with the horse industry representing a significant sub cluster. In identifying opportunities for agriculture in Halton, the report noted the quality of land and infrastructure, the availability of water, proximity to market and shifting market demands as advantages that the Halton agricultural industry could build on.

The report went on to encourage flexibility in the approach to agriculture to allow the growth of less traditional agricultural practices including the production of organic product, fresh fruits and vegetable with direct linkages to market and nutraceuticals and environmentally friendly product. As the report noted:

*"Given Halton's soil characteristics and proximity to market it is well positioned to meet consumer's demands ... which are shifting towards high quality – particularly organic and specialty product - and indeed has a competitive advantage over many agricultural regions."<sup>9</sup>*

In concluding, the report made a series of comprehensive recommendations on actions that should be taken to support agriculture in Halton and ensure its permanence. A summary of these recommendations which continue to be relevant today, are included in Appendix 1.

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<sup>7</sup> Donald, B., Morrow, D., Walton & Hunter Planning Associates, "Growing Halton's Agricultural Cluster and Farmland Base", December 2002, pg 71.

<sup>8</sup> Donald, B., Morrow, D., Walton & Hunter Planning Associates, "Growing Halton's Agricultural Cluster and Farmland Base", December 2002, pg vi.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pg 71.

## **Extending On-Farm Business Policies in Halton Region February 2001.**<sup>10</sup>

In 2002, as part of the background to the Region's five year review of the Official Plan, a study was conducted on extending on-farm business policies to support agriculture. The outcome of this exercise was inclusion of policies in the Official Plan that allow a significant amount of flexibility in the business activities allowed on farms. This provided farmers with more economic options.

By incorporating the recommendations of these background studies into current Official Plan policies, Halton has positioned itself to be at the forefront of a growing movement to recognize near urban agriculture as appropriate and desirable.

### **Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Plan**

The GTA Agricultural Action Plan which has been endorsed by Halton Regional Council, is a comprehensive plan to support and promote agriculture in the four regions of the GTA. It is the product of an extensive process which began in 1998 and is based on the principal that agriculture will have a permanent presence in the GTA. The Plan was released in February of 2005 and was endorsed or supported by all levels of government. It is currently being implemented across the GTA.

## **4.0 THE ROLE AND DEFINITION OF AGRICULTURE**

### **4.1 Definition of Agriculture**

Agriculture activity is defined in the current Regional Official Plan as:

*Agriculture or Agricultural Industry or Agricultural Operation or Farming means an activity consisting of animal husbandry, horticulture, beekeeping, dairying, field crops, fruit farming, fur farming, market gardening, pasturage, poultry keeping, mushroom farming, aquaculture, agro-farming, or any other farming activity and may include growing, raising, small scale packing and storing of produce on the premises and other similar activities customarily carried out in the field of general agriculture.*<sup>11</sup>

This is a broad definition of agriculture which is appropriate and supportive of the industry. It allows the flexibility to respond to changing market trends and provides operators with options of adding components to their operations to improve profitability. Farmers have always argued that their industry is a broad ranging sector that constantly changes and evolves with new production techniques and market trends requiring changes and shifts in production profile. A main tenet of agricultural strategic plans, including the GTA Agricultural Action Plan, is the requirement for flexibility in definitions to allow the sector to evolve and adapt.

### **4.2 Role of Agriculture**

Agricultural land performs many functions in a region. Its primary function is the production of food for local, regional, national and international markets. Agriculture is

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<sup>10</sup> VDV Consulting Ltd., and Mark L. Dorfman, Extending on-Farm Businesses in Halton Region, A Discussion Paper, February 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Region of Halton, the Regional Official Plan, Office consolidation August 17, 2006, Section 215, pg 127.

also a fundamental component of Ontario's heritage and the second most important contributor to the provincial economy after manufacturing. It provides recreational and educational opportunities through agri tourism activities and allows urban residents to gain an understanding of where food comes from and how it is produced.

There is an inherent value in the presence of farmland. From an environmental perspective, farms preserve habitat corridors and natural connections between environmental features. Farmers maintain the countryside and agricultural land provides relief from urban form and acts as a separator between urban communities. Crops which contribute to green space can assist with improving air quality. *"During a full growing season an average hectare of corn in Ontario removes 22 tones of carbon dioxide from the air. The ratio of carbon dioxide absorbed to carbon dioxide released (in corn production) is about 17:1".*<sup>12</sup>

### **4.3 Evolving Role of Agriculture**

While food production is the primary focus of agriculture, there is a growing demand for agricultural products for other purposes. Production of crops for bio-fuels and nutraceuticals<sup>13</sup> is creating a new market for agricultural products. Protecting the prime land base will ensure that as demand rises the resource required to meet demand will be available.

Promoting connectivity between consumers and local producers is a growing trend. There is a sense that the ability to access a local food supply contributes quality of life. Movements to promote local cuisine benefit both producers and suppliers.

The growing concern over the global availability of water is raising questions about what impacts improper management of water may have on the world's food supply. Many of the large food producing regions of the world do not have secure sources of water. Therefore where there exists a productive land base supported by an accessible supply of water in close proximity to a large population base, it is prudent to protect it for future food production.

## **5.0 CURRENT STATE OF AGRICULTURE IN HALTON<sup>14</sup>**

To arrive at a conclusion about the future of agriculture in Halton, it is important to understand its current status. What types of agriculture dominate in the Region, are they profitable, what is the land use and ownership patterns and what are the characteristics that define the regional sector. This evaluation is not a comprehensive land evaluation and area review (LEAR) as contemplated in the provincial policies; it is a broad evaluation to provide the basis upon which decisions can be made. However it is supported by the conclusions that were reached in the Provincial LEAR evaluation conducted by OMAFRA in 2006.

The statistics used in this evaluation are taken largely from the 2001 Statistics Canada Census for Agriculture. Although the census was updated in 2006, the agricultural

<sup>12</sup> Ontario Corn Producer's Association Homepage, August, 1999.

<sup>13</sup> Nutraceuticals area defined by the American Nutraceutical Association as functional foods that have potentially disease-preventing and health promoting properties.

<sup>14</sup> All statistics taken from 2001 Statistics Canada Census of Agriculture unless otherwise referenced.

statistics from that process were not available for use in this analysis. Where possible, the 2001 statistics have been updated and augmented with information from other sources.

Halton is one of the smaller regions in the province. Of the 49 upper tier municipalities that constitute Ontario, Halton ranks 46<sup>th</sup> in terms of geographic area. Despite its relatively small size and the amount of urban development contained within its boundaries, in 2001, provincially, Halton still ranked 34<sup>th</sup> in number of farms, 39<sup>th</sup> in farm land acres and 25<sup>th</sup> in amount of gross farm receipts generated. More significantly it had a very high agricultural productivity reflected in the fact that in 2001, it ranked fourth in the Province after Niagara, Hamilton and Waterloo in the value of average gross farm receipts generated per acre of farmland. For Halton in 2001, the average gross farm receipts were more than double the provincial average.

The value of the agricultural sector in Halton reflects the superior resource on which it is located. As noted earlier prime agricultural land is Class 1, 2 and 3 land as defined in the Canada Land Inventory (CLI) Only 5% of the Canadian land mass is prime land. Only 0.5% of it is Class 1 land. A review of Map 2 confirms that Halton contains a significant amount of Class 1 land, most of it located in the PSA. This is a scarce and limited resource in Canada and one that should be carefully managed.

The following statistics provide a snapshot of the status of agriculture in Halton in 2001. Given that a significant amount of designated Agricultural Rural Area is in Halton Hills and Milton, the area that constitutes the PSA, the comments in this section tend to focus on those two municipalities. However it should be noted that Burlington still contained a significant agricultural sector in 2001, much of which is captured in the Greenbelt.

All of the statistics in this section deal with farms and land under production; they do not factor in land use designations.

## **5.1 Number of Farms and Area of Farmland**

As with most parts of the province, and certainly in the Golden Horseshoe, the number of farms in Halton has been in constant decline over time. The rate of decline in the Region is slightly higher than the provincial average but consistent with the rate for other regions in the Golden Horseshoe and lower than the rate of decline in Peel and York Regions.

Considering the change in number of farms in isolation, can give a distorted picture of the state of the industry. Generally, in the province, average farm size is increasing with fewer operators responsible for larger operations. This is happening through consolidation which means the decline in number of farms is often offset by an increase in farm size. In Halton, as shown on **Figure 1**, average farm size increased from 122 acres in 1976 to 160 acres in 2001. The largest increase in average size has been in Halton Hills. There the average farm size increased from 132 acres in 1976 to 215 acres in 2001. In Milton during the same period the increase in average size was much smaller, from 108 acres to 124 acres.

**Figure 1** Average Farm Size (in acres) in the Regional Municipality of Halton by Area Municipality, 1976 to 2001

Geographic Location	Census Years						Percentage of Change		
	1976	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001	1976 - 1991	1991 - 2001	1996 - 2001
<b>Reg Mun of Halton</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>27.0%</b>	<b>3.2%</b>	<b>5.3%</b>
Burlington	111	117	122	131	110	128	18.0%	-2.3%	16.4%
Oakville	184	193	184	134	228	165	-27.2%	23.1%	-27.6%
Milton	108	124	123	120	120	124	11.1%	3.3%	3.3%
Halton Hills	132	143	169	206	195	215	56.1%	4.4%	10.3%

Data for number of farms and farmland area are calculated on all farms reporting. Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture, 1976, 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996, 2001

A review of statistics on farmland area confirms that the trend to larger farms is a factor in Halton. During the period between 1991 and 1996, Halton Hills experienced a decline in the number of farms but a net increase in acres of farmland (9%). Between 1996 and 2001 the number of farms declined by 12%, the decline in the area of farmland was only 3%. Milton has experienced a larger decline in both number of farms and farmland acres but the decline in area of farmland has been slower than the decline in number of farms. Between 1976 and 1996 the number of farms in Milton declined by 28%, farmland area by 19%; between 1996 and 2001 farms declined by 12% the amount of farmland by 10%.

Statistics for number of farms and farmland acres between 1976 and 2001 are contained in **Figures 2** and **3**.

**Figure 2** Number of Farms in the Regional Municipality of Halton by Area Municipality (Percentage Of Change), 1976 to 2001

Geographic Location	Number of Farms						Percentage of Change	
	1976	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001	1976-1996	1996-2001
<b>Reg Mun of Halton</b>	<b>1,035</b>	<b>969</b>	<b>834</b>	<b>744</b>	<b>720</b>	<b>619</b>	<b>-30%</b>	<b>-14%</b>
Burlington	191	160	130	112	113	95	-41%	-16%
Oakville	68	57	63	31	42	27	-38%	-36%
Milton	428	426	365	322	309	271	-28%	-12%
Halton Hills	348	326	276	279	256	226	-26%	-12%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture, 1976, 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996, 2001

**Figure 3** Farmland Area in the Regional Municipality of Halton by Area Municipality (Percentage of Change), 1976 to 2001

Geographic Location	Farmland Acres (ac)						Change in Farmland Acres (ac)		Percentage of Change	
	1976	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001	1976-1996	1996-2001	1976-1996	1996-2001
<b>Reg Mun of Halton</b>	<b>125,792</b>	<b>129,030</b>	<b>118,805</b>	<b>115,036</b>	<b>109,187</b>	<b>98,758</b>	<b>-16,605</b>	<b>-10,429</b>	<b>-13%</b>	<b>-10%</b>
Burlington	21,267	18,671	15,916	14,616	12,469	12,117	-8,798	-352	-41%	-3%
Oakville	12,534	11,028	11,574	4,145	9,559	4,455	-2,975	-5,104	-24%	-53%
Milton	46,120	52,853	44,775	38,778	37,229	33,531	-8,891	-3,698	-19%	-10%
Halton Hills	45,871	46,478	46,540	57,497	49,930	48,655	4,059	-1,275	9%	-3%

Data for farmland area is calculated on all farms reporting. Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Agriculture 1976 to 2001, Special Order

## 5.2 Gross Farm Receipts

Gross farm receipts (GFR) are a measure of productivity. On the basis of this measure, productivity in Halton is very good. In 2001, the provincial average GFR per acre was \$675, for Halton Region, \$1,433 for Halton Hills, \$1,646, for Milton, \$1,027 and for Burlington, \$1,979. In terms of provincial rankings using GFR's per acre as a measure, Halton ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in terms of productivity after Niagara, Hamilton and Waterloo. This is undoubtedly partly attributable to the very high quality of the agricultural land in the portion of the Region south and east of the Niagara Escarpment. With respect to gross production, as illustrated in **Figure 4**, Halton Hills was responsible for generating the majority of the GFR in Halton in 2001.

**Figure 4** Total Gross Farm Receipts (excluding forest product sold) Per Acre for The Regional Municipality of Halton by Area Municipality, 2001

Geographic Location	Farmland Area (ac)	Gross Farm Receipts	
		Total (\$)	Per Acre (\$)
<b>Reg Mun of Halton</b>	<b>98,758</b>	<b>141,473,312</b>	<b>1,433</b>
Burlington	12,117	23,974,891	1,979
Oakville	4,455	3,009,463	676
Milton	33,531	34,419,693	1,027
Halton Hills	48,655	80,069,265	1,646

Data for farmland area and gross farm receipts are calculated on all farms reporting. Source: 2001 Statistics Canada - Catalogue No 95F0301XIE

Statistics which are helpful in understanding the nature of the agricultural sector in an area are gross farm receipts by economic category.

This breakdown is given in **Figure 5**.

**Figure 5** Number of Farms Classified by Gross Farm Receipts in the Regional Municipality of Halton by Area Municipality, 2000

Geographic Location	Number of Farms									
	Total	Under \$2,500	\$2,500 to \$4,999	\$5,000 to \$9,999	\$10,000 to \$24,999	\$25,000 to \$49,999	\$50,000 to \$99,999	\$100,000 to \$249,999	\$250,000 to \$499,999	\$500,000 and over
<b>Reg Mun of Halton</b>	<b>619</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>42</b>
Burlington	95	10	10	17	12	15	12	8	3	8
Oakville	27	4	1	5	3	2	4	4	3	1
Milton	271	33	20	35	55	31	29	27	25	16
Halton Hills	226	22	12	21	41	39	26	34	14	17

Data for number of farms is calculated on all farms reporting. Source: 2001 Statistics Canada - Catalogue No. 95F0301XIE

Statistics Canada defines a farm as any operation generating more than \$2,500 per year in gross farm receipts. Therefore there are numerous very small operations included in the statistics. These are generally the life style or hobby farms whose operators do not rely on agriculture for a living. To fully understand the strength of the industry it is important to look beyond these operations and consider the number of farms generating gross farm receipts of significant value.

In Halton, on the basis of number of operations, the majority of farms are in the classes that generated \$50,000 in gross farm receipts or less. However in 2001, there were still

significant numbers of farms that generated more than \$50,000 in GFR per year. Both Milton and Halton Hills had numerous operations that generated in excess of \$500,000 GFR's per annum and Burlington reported eight.

In considering GFR it is also important to consider both trends and expenses. With respect to trends, as shown in **Figure 6**, despite the various crises affecting the agricultural sector in the last 15 years, the GFR's generated have continued to increase significantly in Milton and Halton Hills. The decline in Burlington and Oakville is consistent with the changes that are occurring in land use in those municipalities.

**Figure 6** Gross Farm Receipts (excluding forest product sold) in the Regional Municipality of Halton by Area Municipality (Percentage of Change), 1996 and 2001

Geographic Location	Gross Farm Receipts (\$)		Percentage of Change
	1996	2001	
Reg Mun of Halton	129,313,767	141,473,312	9.4%
Burlington	33,794,742	23,974,891	-29.1%
Oakville	3,038,958	3,009,463	-1.0%
Milton	27,165,505	34,419,693	26.7%
Halton Hills	65,314,562	80,069,265	22.6%

Data for gross farm receipts is calculated on all farms reporting. Source: 2001 Statistics Canada - Catalogue No. 95F0301XIE; 1996 Agricultural Profile of Ontario, Statistics Canada - Catalogue No. 95-177-XPB

On the expense side, farm operating expenses are high in Halton. **Figure 7** confirms that expenses represent a significant percentage of the GFR's generated annually. The level of expenses will be partially attributable to the type of farming that is occurring and partially attributable to the cost of land. It will also be affected by the fact that many of the operations are not primary businesses but lifestyle choices that are funded by off farm income.

**Figure 7** Farm Operating Expenses and Operating Costs in the Regional Municipality of Halton by Area Municipality, 1996 and 2001

Geographic Location	Number of Farms		Farmland Area (ac)		Farm Operating Expenses (\$)		Operating Costs			
	1996	2001	1996	2001	1996	2001	Per Acre (\$)		Per Farm (\$)	
							1996	2001	1996	2001
Reg Mun of Halton	720	619	109,187	98,758	112,362,942	123,410,370	1,029	1,250	156,060	199,371
Burlington	113	95	12,469	12,117	34,022,600	22,698,362	2,729	1,873	301,085	238,930
Oakville	42	27	9,559	4,455	2,775,742	2,565,469	290	576	66,089	95,017
Milton	309	271	37,229	33,531	23,516,229	31,626,728	632	943	76,104	116,704
Halton Hills	256	226	49,930	48,655	52,048,371	66,519,811	1,042	1,367	203,314	294,335

Data for number of farms, farmland area and farm operating expenses are calculated on all farms reporting. Source: 2001 Statistics Canada - Catalogue No. 95F0301XIE; 1996 Agricultural Profile of Ontario, Statistics Canada - Catalogue No. 95-177-XPB

The impact of the cost of land is reflected in the farm capital statistics for Halton as shown in **Figures 8** and **9**. Figure 8 confirms that average capital farm value is well over \$1 million in each of the area municipalities and over \$2 million in Halton Hills and Oakville. In Oakville it is expected that this would be directly attributable to the land value. In Halton Hills it could be partially attributable to the type of farming that is occurring. As noted later in this report, in 2001 there were 18 dairy farms in Halton Hills. These operations generally represent a significant capital investment.

**Figure 8** Farm Capital Data in the Regional Municipality of Halton by Area Municipality, 1996 and 2001

Geographic Location	Number of		Farm Capital (\$)		Average Farm	
	1996	2001	1996	2001	1996	2001
<b>Reg Mun of Halton</b>	<b>720</b>	<b>619</b>	<b>777,415,207</b>	<b>1,009,980,734</b>	<b>1,079,743</b>	<b>1,631,633</b>
Burlington	113	95	107,746,962	151,934,228	953,513	1,599,308
Oakville	42	27	90,411,444	69,381,172	2,152,653	2,569,673
Milton	309	271	278,201,354	333,815,444	900,328	1,231,791
Halton Hills	256	226	301,055,446	454,849,890	1,175,998	2,012,610

Data for number of farms and farm capital are calculated on all farms reporting. Source: 2001 Statistics Canada - Catalogue No. 95F0301XIE; 1996 Agricultural Profile of Ontario, Statistics Canada - Catalogue No. 95-177-XPB

On a provincial basis, Halton has one of the highest farm capital values per acre. In 2001 it ranked third after Peel and York at \$10,227 per acre. These very high values are symptomatic of the challenges facing farmers in Halton. Competition for land and speculation drive up land prices which impacts the supply, the capital required to start and maintain an operation and ongoing costs such as land taxes. Operators are competing with farmers in the province who have much lower costs, therefore they must be extremely productive to be profitable. It speaks to the quality of the resource and the skill of Halton farmers, that they can do this successfully.

**Figure 9** Farm Capital Per Acre, a Comparison of Various Municipalities, Counties and Districts, 2001

Geographic Location	Farm Capital (\$)	Farmland Area (ac)	Farm Capital Per Acre (\$)
Ontario	50,529,783,505	13,507,357	3,741
Huron County	3,190,430,260	719,066	4,437
County of Middlesex	2,922,927,721	620,321	4,712
County of Perth	2,842,655,094	502,926	5,652
County of Oxford	2,703,747,784	445,458	6,070
Mun of Chatham-Kent	2,398,770,451	552,402	4,342
County of Lambton	2,320,498,969	604,555	3,838
County of Wellington	2,259,725,987	471,389	4,794
Simcoe County	2,081,575,843	540,870	3,849
Reg Mun of York	2,053,980,635	175,965	11,673
Reg Mun of Niagara	1,764,362,508	232,817	7,578
Bruce County	1,591,157,380	611,461	2,602
Elgin County	1,582,995,090	382,786	4,135
Reg Mun of Durham	1,577,423,794	330,286	4,776
Grey County	1,470,509,861	593,121	2,479
Norfolk County	1,440,549,857	292,703	4,922
Region of Peel	1,433,724,388	104,433	13,729
UC Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry	1,416,021,581	496,498	2,852
Reg Mun of Waterloo	1,386,845,041	225,800	6,142
<b>Reg Mun of Halton</b>	<b>1,009,980,734</b>	<b>98,758</b>	<b>10,227</b>

Data for Farm Capital and farmland acres are calculated on all farms reporting. Source: 2001 Statistics Canada - Catalogue No. 95F0301XIE

### 5.3 Production Profile

**Figure 10** summarizes the top ten ranking commodities in Halton in 2001 by GFR. The top three commodities are ones generally found in areas that are experiencing pressure for urban growth. Both the greenhouse and nursery sectors which rank first and second, focus on relatively high value products that can be produced on smaller acreages. Both benefit from close proximity to large urban markets. Dairy, a relatively stable sector, is also well represented in Halton Hills. It is notable that fruit, a commodity often associated with specialty crop lands and one that requires productive land and a benevolent climate such as are found along the Lake Ontario shoreline, ranked 6<sup>th</sup> in value of production in both Halton Hills and Milton in 2001.

**Figure 10** Top Ten Ranking by Gross Farm Receipts (\$2,500 and over) for the Regional Municipality of Halton by Area Municipality, 2001

Rank	Reg Mun of Halton	Burlington	Oakville	Milton	Halton Hills
1	Greenhouse Products <sup>1</sup>	Greenhouse Products <sup>1</sup>	Horse & Pony <sup>1</sup>	Horse & Pony <sup>1</sup>	Nursery Product & Sod <sup>1</sup>
2	Nursery Product & Sod <sup>1</sup>	Cattle	Nursery Product & Sod <sup>1</sup>	Greenhouse Products <sup>1</sup>	Other Small Grain <sup>2</sup>
3	Horse & Pony <sup>1</sup>	Oilseed <sup>2</sup>	x	Nursery Product & Sod <sup>1</sup>	Dairy
4	Other Small Grain <sup>2</sup>	Horse & Pony <sup>1</sup>	x	Poultry & Egg	Cattle
5	Cattle	Vegetable	x	Other Small Grain <sup>2</sup>	Horse & Pony <sup>1</sup>
6	Poultry & Egg	Nursery Product & Sod <sup>1</sup>	x	Fruit	Fruit
7	Dairy	x	x	Vegetable	Poultry & Egg
8	Fruit	x	x	Dairy	Greenhouse Products <sup>1</sup>
9	Hog	x	x	Corn for Grain <sup>2</sup>	Corn for Grain <sup>2</sup>
10	Oilseed <sup>2</sup>	x	x	Oilseed <sup>2</sup>	Oilseed <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> - For purposes of this table Miscellaneous Specialty has been broken down into: horse & pony; greenhouse product and nursery product & sod. None of the remaining commodities in this grouping are significant in the Regional Municipality of Halton.

<sup>2</sup> - For purposes of this table Grain & Oilseed has been broken down into: oilseed, corn for grain, and other small grain. None of the remaining commodities in this grouping are significant in the Regional Municipality of Halton.

X - Data suppressed to protect confidentiality

Note: Data for number of farms is calculated on farms reporting gross farm receipts of \$2,500 and over.

Source: 2001 Statistics Canada - Catalogue No 95F0301XIE

**Figures 11a and 11b and 12a and 12b** break down commodity production by number of operations. These figures show a different profile. When number of operations is considered rather than value of production, the largest sectors in 2001 were “wheat, grain and oilseed”; “horse and pony”; and cattle<sup>15</sup>. Greenhouse production was 4<sup>th</sup> in a grouping with “nursery and sod”, fruit and dairy. Vegetable and “poultry and egg” were about equal in number and represented the next category with more than 20 operations reported.

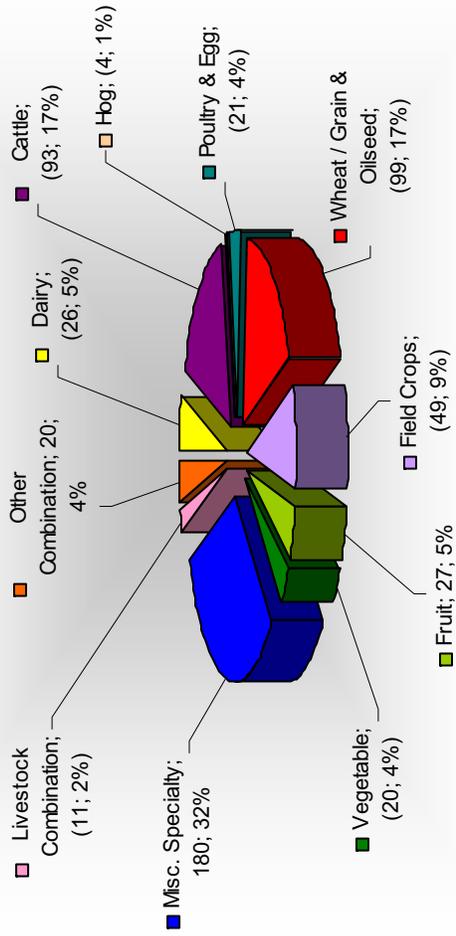
<sup>15</sup> Note Miscellaneous specialty as a sector is further broken down in Figure 12.

**Figure 11a** Number of Farms by Farm Types in the GTA by Area Municipality on Farms with Gross Farm Receipts of \$2,500 and over, 2001

Geographic Location	# of Farms	Farm Type										Gross Farm Receipts (\$)	
		Dairy	Cattle	Hog	Poultry & Egg	Wheat / Grain & Oilseed	Field Crops	Fruit	Vegetable	Misc. Specialty	Livestock Combination		Other Combination
Reg Mun of Halton	550	26	93	4	21	99	49	27	20	180	11	20	141,385,553
Burlington	85	2	16	1	2	13	11	3	6	25	2	4	23,965,386
Oakville	23	1	1	0	1	4	2	2	1	10	0	1	3,003,019
Milton	238	5	35	2	10	40	18	10	11	91	5	11	34,376,040
Halton Hills	204	18	41	1	8	42	18	12	2	54	4	4	80,041,108

Data for number of farms and gross farm receipts are calculated on farms reporting gross farm receipts of \$2,500 and over. Source: 2001, Census of Agriculture, Statistics Canada, Special Order

**Figure 11b** - Number and Percentage of Farm Types by Number of Farms for the Regional Municipality of Halton, 2001

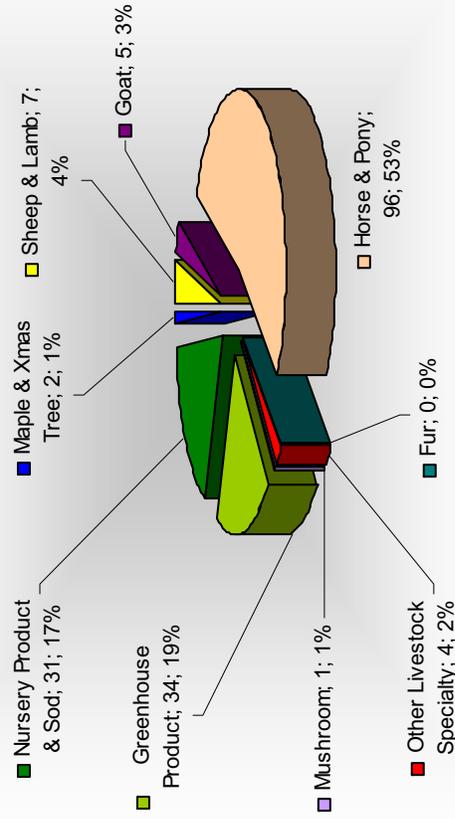


**Figure 12a** Miscellaneous Specialty Farm Type by Number of Farms in the Regional Municipality of Halton by Area Municipality on Farms with Gross Farm Receipts of \$2,500 and over, 2001

Geographic Location	# of Farms	Miscellaneous Specialty										Gross Farm Receipts (\$)
		Sheep & Lamb	Goat	Horse & Pony	Fur	Other Livestock Specialty	Mushroom	Greenhouse Product	Nursery Product & Sod	Maple & Xmas Tree		
Reg Mun of Halton	180	7	5	96	0	4	1	34	31	2	92,255,885	
Burlington	25	0	2	9	0	1	0	9	4	0	14,379,483	
Oakville	10	1	1	4	0	0	0	0	4	0	812,088	
Milton	91	5	1	51	0	2	0	16	15	1	19,852,420	
Halton Hills	54	1	1	32	0	1	1	9	8	1	57,211,894	

Data for number of farms and gross farm receipts are calculated on farms reporting gross farm receipts of \$2,500 and over. Source: 2001, Census of Agriculture, Statistics Canada, Special Order

**Figure 12b** - Number and Percentage of Farm Types by Number of Farms for the Regional Municipality of Halton, 2001



The commodity profile in Halton is similar to that of other regions in the Golden Horseshoe. The top five commodity groups by GFR in the Golden Horseshoe in 2001 were in order of value of production; greenhouse products, poultry and egg, nursery product and sod, dairy and fruit. For the ring of municipalities around the Golden Horseshoe, including Wellington which abuts Halton to the north, the top 5 commodities were dairy, cattle, poultry and egg, hog and "other small grain". Comparisons of production in the area south of the Oak Ridges Moraine and south and east of the Niagara Escarpment along the shoreline of Lake Ontario reveal a more specialized commodity mix made possible by the combination of level topography, excellent soils and higher heat units.

#### **5.4 Land Tenure**

Land tenure can be an indication of vulnerability in a rural community. Owner occupation of agricultural land generally confirms a commitment to an operation which is manifest by a higher degree of care and management of the resource, the land base. To remain at peak productivity agricultural land must be managed and investments made in it on an ongoing basis. This is more likely to occur when the land is being used as part of an active farming business, not for an interim use.

A high incidence of rental land can be due to a number of factors including ownership of land by land speculators, retirees or non farm residents seeking a rural lifestyle. Because land under production qualifies for a much lower property tax rate than rural land, non farming land owners are often interested in having their land farmed and therefore make it available to local farmers.

Farmers take advantage of the available land for a variety of reasons. Often the participation of non farm purchasers in the real estate market drives the prices up to the point where farmers may not be able to afford to buy it outright. The difference between speculative land value and productive value can become prohibitive when purchasing land for agriculture.

Although access to rental land can be of benefit to farmers, research has shown that farmland rental arrangements are usually short term and informal. This creates uncertainty about long term access to the land and may discourage farmers from making the capital investments required to maintain it at peak productivity. This can result in a decline in the productive capacity of the land which in turn leads to a situation where investors argue that the land is no longer productive, that the farm infrastructure is gone and therefore non farm development should be allowed. Areas experiencing pressure for growth are vulnerable to this trend.

The incidence of rented farmland<sup>16</sup> is high in Halton. In 2001 it was at 54%, as shown on **Figure 13**. This was consistent with the other regions in the GTA but considerably higher than the provincial average of 31%. Rental land rates in Wellington County to the north were 31%; in Hamilton to the west they were 43%. Rental rates in Peel Region in 2001 were 54%.

While a high incidence of rental land can be a concern, it can also be a benefit. If land is available on a long term basis, access to it through rental rather than purchase allows

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<sup>16</sup> Includes rented, leased and sharecropped lands.

farmers to expand their operations or get into the industry without a large requirement for capital up front. If the supply of rental land is stable and long term, investments in maintaining and improving it can be made with confidence.

**Figure 13** Farmland Area (ac) Owned and Rented in Ontario, Surrounding GTA and the GTA by Area Municipality, 2001

<b>Geographic Location</b>	<b>Farmland Area (ac)</b>				
	<b>Total Area</b>	<b>Owned</b>	<b>% of Total Area Owned</b>	<b>Rented</b>	<b>% of Total Area Rented</b>
<b>Reg Mun of Halton</b>	<b>98,758</b>	<b>45,823</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>52,935</b>	<b>54%</b>
Burlington	12,117	7,261	60%	4,856	40%
Oakville	4,455	910	20%	3,545	80%
Milton	33,531	18,054	54%	15,477	46%
Halton Hills	48,655	19,598	40%	29,057	60%

Source: 2001 Statistics Canada - Catalogue No. 95F0301XIE

To try and understand the current status of rented versus owned land, assessment data was reviewed for the PSA. This review suggested that the amount of owner occupied lands in the PSA is relatively low and varies across the PSA. However, caution must be exercised in using this assessment data. Although it provides some input on patterns; because of the myriad of ways in which land ownership can be registered, it may be misleading. Given the importance of ownership to the long term sustainability of the agricultural sector, additional work should be done to understand the ownership and occupancy trends for agricultural land in the PSA.

## 5.5 Farm Operators

In assessing the current state of agriculture in Halton, the characteristics of the farm operators are an important factor. Who are they, how old are they and how many of them work full time on the farm?

In 2001 the average age of farmers in Halton was 53.9 years. On the basis of age breakdown, 7% of Halton operators were younger than 35, 46% of operators were between 35 and 54 and 46% were older than 55 years.

Much is made of the age of farm operators in Canada. Statistics are routinely published that show an aging profile, a fact that causes much concern for the future of the industry. While it is a cause for concern, there are several factors that must be considered.

Statistics Canada allows up to three operators to be recorded for each farm operation. Therefore, if the farm is an intergenerational operation, it would be possible for members of three generations to be recorded. This could skew the result toward a higher average age and mask the presence of the younger generation.

The other factor to consider is that all operations generating in excess of \$2,500 per year are counted as farms in the census. Therefore the operators with small acreages, retirees and hobby farmers will influence the average age profile.

A detailed breakdown of the age of Halton farmers in 2001 by level of production is included as **Figure 14**. It shows that in 2001, for operators generating between \$2,500 and \$50,000, a class that includes 63% of all operators the average age was 55.4 years. For operators generating between \$50,000 and \$500,000 which represents 37% of the total, the average age was 51.8 years.

**Figure 14** Average Age of Farm Operators by Sales Class and Age Distribution for the Regional Municipality of Halton, 2001

Sales Class	All Operators		Under 35 Years		35-54 Years		Over 55 Years	
	No.	Avg Age	No.	Avg Age	No.	Avg Age	No.	Avg Age
Under \$2,500	95	53.0	15	30.8	35	45.4	50	66.4
\$2,500-\$4,999	60	58.4	5	25.0	20	46.7	35	66.7
\$5,000-\$9,999	110	53.4	5	27.0	50	46.2	50	65.8
\$10,000-\$24,999	160	55.2	10	25.9	65	45.3	80	66.3
\$25,000-\$49,999	120	57.2	5	30.0	40	45.7	70	68.3
\$50,000-\$99,999	85	52.2	5	28.6	50	46.5	35	63.8
\$100,000-\$249,999	105	50.8	5	29.7	60	45.0	40	63.9
\$250,000-\$499,999	75	51.8	5	27.1	30	46.1	30	64.1
\$500,000 and Over	60	52.4	5	29.0	30	46.4	25	64.5
All Sales Classes	860	53.9	65	28.7	395	45.8	395	65.9

Source: Farm Operators Data, Statistics Canada 2001

Generally in Ontario, although the average age of operators is rising, operators running the largest operations are younger. The drop in age in Halton is not as significant as it is in other parts of the province and this could be a concern. The average age in Ontario for operators generating in excess of \$500,000 in annual gross farm receipts in 2001 was 46.9, in the area immediately surrounding the GTA it was 47.7, in the GTA it was 49.7 and in Halton it was 52.4 years. The older age profile in Halton could be indicative of the inability of younger operators to afford land where the value is influenced by speculation, it can also be indicative of a lack of confidence in the future of agriculture as a career in Halton.

With respect to the characteristics of Halton operators, in 2001, 29% were women, 71% were men. In the same year 33% of operators reported working less than 20 hours per week on the farm; 25% reported working between 20 and 40 hours per week on the farm and 42 % reported working an average of more than 40 hours per week on the farm.

## 5.6 Associated Economic Activities

To clearly understand the nature of the farm economy it is important to consider economic activities related to agriculture as well as the direct agricultural operations. In this regard, Halton has both a strong agriculturally related economy and specific policies to encourage economic activities on the farm. Farm related businesses include agri tourism, farm gate sales, operations related to the farm operation and businesses that are secondary to, but unrelated to the farm operation.

The farm gates sales and agri tourism operations in Halton are promoted through a Regional initiative, "Simply Local". It provides listings of and promotes on site farm

attractions and retail operations with the goal to “promote Halton farms and encourage healthy eating and physical activity<sup>17</sup>”.

A review of the participating operations listed in the brochure produced in May 2005, confirms a significant number in the categories of Fresh Produce and Farm Entertainment, Nurseries and Garden Centres, Horse Farms and Recreational Activities and Farmers Markets. The map showing location of participating operations shows clusters of horse operations in Burlington and northwest Oakville, one nursery operation on the lakeshore in Oakville with the balance of operations split between Halton Hills and Milton. The largest cluster of the operations listed in the publication is located in the PSA area south of Georgetown. There is considerable diversity in the products being offered by the various operations. A recent update of the mapping has resulted in an increase in the number and diversity of operations participating in this program.

On a broader scale, Halton and the regions around it are home to a well developed food processing industry. In fact, the Toronto food and beverage cluster is the third largest food processing cluster in North America. In the “Growing Halton’s Agricultural Cluster” study completed in 2000, it was noted that while the regional food processing industry does not necessarily rely on Halton farmers for a major portion of their inputs, Halton Farmers depend on the processors as purchasers of output. As part of the work done on the processing industry over the past 5 years, efforts were made to strengthen the links to local processors. It is expected that the linkages have strengthened and that this relationship is important in the regional economy.

## **5.7 Surrounding Regions**

As shown in **Figure 15** below, in 2001 the commodity profiles of the regions surrounding Halton varied slightly. The profile of production in Halton is similar to the profiles in Hamilton, York and Niagara which are dominated by the production of products that benefit from proximity to a large and sophisticated market. Wellington County has a more traditional profile and Peel and Durham are dominated by dairy.

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<sup>17</sup> Simply Local “A Guided Tour of Halton Farms” Halton Region, May 2005.

**Figure 15** Top Ten Ranking by Gross Farm Receipts (\$2,500 and over) for the Regional Municipality of Halton and Surrounding Cities, Counties and Regions, 2001

	<i>Halton</i>	<i>Peel</i>	<i>York</i>	<i>Durham</i>	<i>Niagara</i>	<i>Hamilton</i>	<i>Wellington</i>
<b>GFR</b>	<b>\$114,385,553</b>	<b>\$116,481,898</b>	<b>\$178,853,519</b>	<b>\$233,673,214</b>	<b>\$511,132,568</b>	<b>\$222,236,596</b>	<b>\$433,567,555</b>
<b>Rank</b>							
<b>1</b>	Greenhouse Products <sup>1</sup> (15.5%)	Dairy (19.9%)	Vegetable (15.5%)	Dairy (21.9%)	Greenhouse Products <sup>1</sup> (42.6%)	Poultry & Egg (20.7%)	Dairy (25.4%)
<b>2</b>	Nursery Product & Sod <sup>1</sup> (13.1%)	Greenhouse Products <sup>1</sup> (14.3%)	Greenhouse Products <sup>1</sup> (14.6%)	Nursery Product & Sod <sup>1</sup> (14.4%)	Fruit (18.9%)	Nursery Product & Sod <sup>1</sup> (15.96%)	Cattle (21.7%)
<b>3</b>	Horse & Pony <sup>1</sup> (8.4%)	Horse & Pony <sup>1</sup> (13.2%)	Poultry & Egg (13.5%)	Cattle (9.5%)	Poultry & Egg (17.8%)	Greenhouse Products <sup>1</sup> (14.6%)	Poultry & Egg (14.7%)
<b>4</b>	Other Small Grain <sup>2</sup> (7.3%)	Cattle (11.1%)	Horse & Pony <sup>1</sup> (10.4%)	Other Small Grain <sup>2</sup> (8.6%)	Nursery Product & Sod <sup>1</sup> (5.4%)	Vegetable (8.9%)	Hog (14.2%)
<b>5</b>	Cattle (6.4%)	Other Small Grain <sup>2</sup> (5.1%)	Cattle (9.5%)	Horse & Pony <sup>1</sup> (8.5%)	Dairy (4.6%)	Mushroom <sup>1</sup> (6.8%)	Other Small Grain <sup>2</sup> (5.7%)
<b>6</b>	Poultry & Egg (5.9%)	Oilseed <sup>2</sup> (2.4%)	Nursery Product & Sod <sup>1</sup> (8.5%)	Poultry & Egg (7.9%)	Oilseed <sup>2</sup> (2.0%)	Cattle (6.5%)	Horse & Pony <sup>1</sup> (3.2%)
<b>7</b>	Dairy (4.4%)	Nursery Product & Sod <sup>1</sup> (1.8%)	Dairy (6.1%)	Fruit (5.6%)	Other Small Grain <sup>2</sup> (1.6%)	Dairy (6.1%)	Cattle & Hog <sup>3</sup> (3.2%)
<b>8</b>	Fruit (3.2%)	Corn for Grain <sup>2</sup> (1.6%)	Other Small Grain <sup>2</sup> (4.5%)	Mushroom <sup>1</sup> (5.3%)	Hog (1.6%)	Corn for Grain <sup>2</sup> (3.7%)	Oilseed <sup>2</sup> (2.9%)
<b>9</b>	Hog (1.4%)	Fruit (1.4%)	Mushroom <sup>1</sup> (3.9%)	Greenhouse Products <sup>1</sup> (4.0%)	Cattle (0.9%)	Fruit (3.4%)	Other Livestock <sup>3</sup> (2.5%)
<b>10</b>	Oilseed <sup>2</sup> (1.2%)	Vegetable (1.3%)	Corn for Grain <sup>2</sup> (3.1%)	Corn for Grain <sup>2</sup> (3.7%)	Horse & Pony <sup>1</sup> (0.8%)	Other Small Grain <sup>2</sup> (3.4%)	Corn for Grain <sup>2</sup> (0.9%)

<sup>1</sup> - For purposes of this table Miscellaneous Specialty has been broken down into: horse & pony; mushroom; greenhouse product and nursery product & sod. None of the remaining commodities in this grouping are significant.

<sup>2</sup> - For purposes of this table Grain & Oilseed has been broken down into: oilseed, corn for grain, and other small grain. None of the remaining commodities in this grouping are significant.

<sup>3</sup> - For purposes of this table Livestock Combination has been broken down into: cattle & hog; and other livestock combination. None of the remaining commodities in this grouping are significant.

Note: Data for number of farms is calculated on farms reporting gross farm receipts of \$2,500 and over. Source: 2001 Statistics Canada - Catalogue No 95F0301XIE

There are many linkages between the Halton agricultural community and the agricultural communities in the other regions of the Golden Horseshoe. In 1998 the Federations of Agriculture of the GTA came together to study the industry and implement actions to support and sustain it in the long term. This work led to the creation of the GTA Agricultural Working Group comprised of members of staff from the four regions. This group worked with the agricultural community to create an agricultural action plan which has been endorsed by Regional Councils and is being actively implemented.

Sustaining a healthy agricultural sector is a principle that all of the upper tier municipalities in the Golden Horseshoe have endorsed. Increasingly, agriculture is recognized as an important component of a healthy community.

## **6.0 RURAL USES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE THE EXISTING MIX OF RURAL USES**

In addition to agriculture, the countryside has long been the location of a variety of land extensive and non urban uses. Some are there because they are appropriate to a rural setting, others are there because they are land extensive and rural land is relatively cheap. Many of these uses compete with agriculture for land and once established, can create difficulties for agricultural operations.

Other rural land uses that are protected by Provincial policy to varying degrees include aggregate resources, woodlots and natural heritage areas. These uses often co-exist harmoniously with agriculture; sometimes they conflict with or fragment agricultural areas. Each of these rural uses is being considered in other papers in this series. The rights and requirements associated with each of these uses will have to be considered, addressed and balanced with those of agriculture in formulating the Sustainable Halton vision.

In considering the rights associated with these uses, the area left to agriculture needs to be considered. In 2005, it was estimated by Regional staff that 28% of land on farms was in natural area.<sup>18</sup> It is unknown how much of this is in the PSA. The recommendations in the paper dealing with Natural Heritage Systems in Sustainable Halton recommend increasing this area.

While agriculture can co-exist with natural heritage features farmers are concerned that environmental designations may reduce the amount of land available for production over time. If the amount of natural heritage land is to be increased as part of Sustainable Halton, consideration must be given to the impact this may have on agriculture.

The requirement for preservation of aggregate resources mandated under the Planning Act and PPS, will also affect the area available for permanent agricultural use. Although there is a possibility that once the resource is depleted, land will be rehabilitated for agricultural production, the reality is that this rarely occurs and if it does, the quality of the land for agriculture is usually degraded.

As part of Sustainable Halton, the long term policy options for managing aggregates is being addressed. However at the time this report was being prepared, all of the information required to complete the aggregate review had not been received from the Province. Therefore it was not possible to comprehensively assess the impact on prime agricultural areas or implications for the future of the industry. As this information becomes available, it will need to be considered.

Uses that are found in the countryside that compete with agriculture for the land base include waste disposal sites, transportation facilities, golf courses, cemeteries, churches, land extensive recreation facilities and rural estate residences. Not only do these uses compete with agriculture for land, once established they often create conflicts for agriculture and negatively impact a much larger portion of the agricultural area than just the land upon which they are located. They often fragment an agricultural area, create conflicts over agricultural practices, reduce the critical mass of farms required to support

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<sup>18</sup> GTA Agricultural Action Plan, February 2005, pg. 22.

farm based services and generally weaken the integrity of the agricultural area. For a strong agricultural area to survive, these incursions need to be prevented.

To date, Halton has done a relatively good job of managing these more intrusive uses. The current Halton Official Plan policies direct that some of these uses be located above the “Escarpment Brow”. Although there have been Official Plan amendments approved to allow these uses in the PSA, generally the policies have allowed the integrity of the PSA as an agricultural area to remain relatively intact.

There are exceptions to this. The area south of Milton between the First and Fourth line is the site of the Halton Waste Management Site. There is a golf course on the lands immediately east of the Waste Management site, on Regional Road 25. CN Rail has raised the possibility of establishing an inter-modal terminal on a large block of land south of Milton, something the Region has not to date supported. If the inter-modal facility proceeds, it will affect a large area that is currently available for production.

The Greenbelt Act has implications for the Regional policy framework. While many of the uses directed to the area above the brow are permitted in the Greenbelt, some are not. The role of the Greenbelt as an agricultural preserve, particularly in Halton, is weakened by the fact that much of the land included in it is not prime land. The ongoing role of the Greenbelt in accommodating other rural uses is something that will have to be understood and addressed.

There is an opportunity, as part of the 10 year review of the Act to amend and adjust the Greenbelt. Recommendations for adjustments may be appropriate as the Sustainable Halton process progresses and may be considered as the 2015 date approaches. However at this point the Greenbelt is accepted as a given and the Sustainable Halton process will proceed on this premise. In developing policies to manage both agricultural and rural uses, Halton must consider the role of the Greenbelt vs. the PSA and the relationships that exist between the two.

Clearly there are certain uses that locate in the rural area because of the availability of relatively cheap land. This is not a reasonable planning rationale for allowing these uses in the countryside. Certain uses such as land extensive recreational amenities and cemeteries may have to be accommodated in the rural area. Others, such as churches should be located in urban areas.

The policies should prevent the establishment of intrusive uses and protect the integrity of agricultural areas. Where it is appropriate, or necessary to locate a potentially conflicting use in the rural area, this must be carefully managed to maintain the integrity of the agricultural area.

## **7.0 AGRICULTURE IN URBANIZING AREAS**

Research being done on agriculture in areas that are experiencing significant urban growth, confirms that there are certain types of production that tend to emerge. The production profile is characterized by high value production, responsive to the demands of a large sophisticated market. In the Golden Horseshoe of Ontario, the profile is also affected by proximity to border crossings; the superior quality of the agricultural resource

around Lake Ontario; the availability of water; the skill of the farmers, proximity to large diverse urban markets and the established infrastructure of farm services.

The commodities which tend to dominate in urbanizing areas include greenhouse, nursery, horse and pony, fruit and vegetable. This type of production is often referred to as “near urban” agriculture. Other commodities that can be sustained on a small acreage such as poultry and egg also occur. Dairy is usually present, not because it thrives in urbanizing areas but because dairy operations tend to be long established uses with significant investment in properties which are expensive to relocate. Cash crop exists, but is often dependent on availability of rental land.

Halton exhibits an agricultural profile that is consistent with the production profile of urbanizing areas. It benefits from proximity to other areas that are developing clusters of what is characterized as “near urban” agriculture. In a report produced for the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance<sup>19</sup>, the presence of a greenhouse cluster including producers and service providers was noted in Niagara and Hamilton. Halton could benefit from and possibly become part of this cluster. In 2001, greenhouse production in Halton was the leading commodity group in generation of gross farm receipts and represented more than 15% of the total value of production. There may be an opportunity to develop a greenhouse cluster in the area south of Milton where the possibility of using waste heat from the Region waste disposal facility could be investigated.

The “Growing Halton’s Agricultural Cluster and Farmland Base” report referenced earlier contained a number of recommendations regarding steps that could be taken to encourage near urban agriculture. These recommendations are attached as **Appendix 1**. Many of these recommendations are being implemented through the GTA Agricultural Action Plan. Implementation of this plan is in its preliminary stages so it is not yet possible to substantiate the impact it is having on reviving the agricultural industry in Halton.

## **8.0 IMPLICATIONS OF THE GREENBELT**

Although this paper deals specifically with the long term future of agriculture in the PSA, it cannot be considered in isolation. The Greenbelt, which in this report includes the Halton Greenbelt’s System, the Niagara Escarpment Rural and Protection areas and the Protected Countryside north of the Escarpment brow, occupies a significant land area in Halton. The rural activities in that area consist of a blend of agricultural, natural heritage and rural uses and will complement and compete with the rural activities in the PSA.

There may be an argument that setting aside the land in the Greenbelt achieved long term permanence for agriculture in Halton. This is not necessarily the case. Much of the Greenbelt area is natural heritage land. Throughout its history Halton has recognized that the strength of the agricultural sector includes and may indeed be based on the PSA lands.

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<sup>19</sup> Planscape & Regional Analytics Inc., Greenhouses Grow Ontario, An Economic Impact Study of the Greenhouse Industry in Ontario, 2006.

In deciding on the future role of the PSA and the type of agricultural presence that is desired in it, the character of the agricultural sector in the Greenbelt does need to be considered. Although the Halton Greenbelt does not contain the extent of prime land that the PSA does, it still includes a significant agricultural community. Many of the services required to sustain an agricultural industry are there, farmers in that area will support the agricultural service sector in the PSA and many farmers will run operations in both areas. The connections between the two areas need to be considered in creating policies for Sustainable Halton so the agricultural interests in both areas are mutually supportive.

## **9.0 Criteria for Consideration**

Halton has consistently implemented policies and programs that support the long term preservation of a viable agricultural sector in the Region. The recently approved ROPA 25 has this as a fundamental pillar with the PSA being designated for agricultural use to 2021. The question that the Sustainable Halton exercise is addressing is how agriculture will be managed for the period from 2021 to 2031 and what role agriculture will play in Halton's future.

The criteria that need to be considered in addressing the future of agriculture include:

- The future role of agriculture in the PSA;
- The definition of a viable agricultural sector;
- The amount of land that should be protected;
- Where agricultural land should be set aside;
- How to manage other Countryside uses.

## **9.1 The Future Role of Agriculture In The PSA**

In considering the future of agriculture in the PSA there are a number of factors that must be considered.

The land in the PSA has been confirmed as prime land with the majority of it qualifying as Class 1. The supply of prime land in Canada is limited to less than 5% of the country's total land mass. The supply of Class 1 land is limited to 0.5% of that area. It is critical to properly manage and preserve this limited resource for agricultural production both for future generations and in response to the policies of the PPS.

Agriculture makes a significant contribution to the economy of the Region. In a study produced in 1999, it was estimated that agriculture in the GTA generated \$1.3 billion in annual gross sales and supported 35,000 jobs.<sup>20</sup>

There is an active agricultural community currently operating in the area supported by a network of farm services. Halton, through a variety of actions and through participation in the GTA Agricultural Action Plan is supporting this infrastructure.

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<sup>20</sup> Walton & Hunter in association with Dr B Donald, Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Economic Impact Study, 1999.

Agricultural land contributes positively to the quality of life for regional residents. It is an integral part of the southern Ontario rural landscape and provides a well maintained separation of urban uses. Maintaining farmland supports the Region's policy of retaining distinctive communities.

Agriculture contributes positively to the environment. Farmers act stewards of rural land and through environmental farm plans implement measures to support natural functions. As noted in the Natural Heritage paper, agricultural land itself is porous and therefore is an integral part of the natural heritage system for functions such as connectivity and provision of habitat.

Canadians have a responsibility to manage the agricultural resource. As the implications of global warming are better understood, it is anticipated that there will be implications for food production. Many of the largest agricultural areas in the world do not have access to sufficient water to be sustainable in the long term and as global warming progresses, this situation may worsen. Halton in common with the other regions in the Golden Horseshoe is favoured with access to a sustainable water supply. Preservation of the land base will ensure Halton has the resources to contribute to food production over time.

The final point that must be considered is competing demand for land in the PSA. The natural heritage study which is being conducted concurrently with this study, identifies three options for a natural heritage system for Sustainable Halton. These options contemplate the designation of 25 to 34% of the land in the PSA as part of the NHS. While some of this land will continue to be available for agricultural production, a significant proportion will not.

As noted early the impact of the aggregate policies cannot be quantified until the province completes additional analysis of Halton's resources.

The Growth Plan requires Halton to accommodate a certain level of growth to 2031. The land supply study conducted as part of the Sustainable Halton process, estimates that 3000 to 4200 hectares of the PSA will be required to accommodate urban land needs to 2031. Growth that occurs beyond 2031 will consume additional land.

Factoring in agriculture to 2031 and beyond will require difficult decisions to be made involving the management of growth.

## **9.2 The Definition of a Viable Agricultural Sector**

A viable agricultural sector is one which has flexibility to adapt to changing markets. It is a sector which is supported by an infrastructure of farm related services. In looking at critical mass, the existence of a significant population of producers is critical to a successful agricultural area. There is strength and support in numbers; modern agriculture relies on partnerships. A strong cluster of producers and a diverse commodity profile facilitates this. A significant contiguous mass of land is required to provide separation from conflicting and incompatible uses.

The most productive type of agricultural community is one where there is certainty. Certainty that the land will remain in production and the circumstances will exist to support agriculture. To achieve certainty, intrusive uses must be removed, prohibited or

managed. The right to farm must be rigorously upheld, the infrastructure must be farm friendly and any attempts to re-designate land must be denied.

The definition of viability can change depending on the type of production that is occurring. Greenhouse production has different requirements than the cash crop sector. The key to viability is ability to change and adjust production as circumstances change. An example of why this is important can be found in the introduction of the vinifera grapes in Niagara. These varieties were not a factor in production prior to the 1990's, advancing technology supported their introduction and now they are the basis for the evolution of the Niagara wine industry. These grapes are grown on land that previously was not considered as "prime" for agricultural production but was protected as part of the larger agricultural area. If those lands had not been protected to support the larger agricultural area, the wine industry would not have been able to achieve its current status.

In establishing permanent agricultural areas sufficient land must be included to allow flexibility in production; it must allow the industry to evolve; and it must be adequate to generate returns that can support a comprehensive agricultural community which includes support services as well as direct production.

### **9.3 How Much Land Should Be Protected?**

The question of how much of the land in the PSA is required to sustain a viable agricultural sector is a difficult one. Ideally all of the land should be preserved but it is recognized that there is strong competition for the land and trade offs that must be made to accommodate the growth assigned to Halton in the GGH Growth Plan. The ideal goal of maintaining all of the PSA in the agricultural designation is not achievable if the growth projected for the Region is to be accommodated. Therefore the question becomes what kind of agricultural sector should be encouraged and where and how much land is required to achieve this.

The healthiest type of agricultural area is one where there is a broad range of production and sufficient land for operators to switch and expand production. Therefore larger areas are desirable. Although very profitable greenhouse and specialty crop production can occur on smaller acreages they too need room for expansion and for a buffer from non agricultural neighbours.

Small farm parcels are vulnerable to conversion to residential estates; a process that can occur without any planning approvals and which results in the intrusion of non compatible uses and fragmentation of the agricultural area. Small operations can be profitable and productive but they have a better chance for long term survival if they are part of a larger agricultural area.

Ideally, in creating an agricultural area for Sustainable Halton it should be one of sufficient size to accommodate a range of commodity production and establish a large connected area that is dedicated to agriculture. As with the natural heritage systems, connectivity increases the chances of survival and diversity.

The criterion of connectivity is a starting point. From there, the extent of the area set aside for agriculture should be maximized so it is sufficient to accommodate the multi faceted agricultural community and create a buffer from competing and conflicting uses.

Specification of a minimum area that is required to support a viable agricultural community is somewhat speculative. It is dependent on the definition of “viable” and the range of production to be accommodated. It is not necessarily mutually exclusive of natural heritage areas or area of less productive land. It should incorporate buffers from non agricultural uses and linkages to other agricultural areas. The larger it is the stronger it will be.

The size can also depend on the nature and extent of the resource. The Holland Marsh which is a defined area based on a specific resource is approximately 2900 hectares in area. The Agricultural Land Reserve in the Lower Mainland in British Columbia contains approximately 49,000 hectares. In the LEAR evaluation done in support of the Greenbelt, OMAFRA stated that “Prime Agricultural Areas (as defined in the PPS) should be 250 hectares or larger”.<sup>21</sup>

The PSA is comprised of approximately 16,800 hectares. The Natural Heritage paper suggests that 25 to 34% of the area be set aside as natural heritage area, some of which could remain in agricultural production. The analysis of growth options concludes that 3000 to 4100 hectares of the PSA is required to accommodate the growth assigned to Halton in the Growth Plan to 2031.

Depending on which if any of the various scenarios is implemented, the degree of intensification that is achieved and the realization of growth targets, the area of land available for agriculture could potentially range from 7000 to 10,000 hectares. If managed carefully and combined with the rural area set aside in the Greenbelt, this will allow for continuation of a viable agricultural sector in the PSA.

#### **9.4 Where Should Agricultural Land Be Set Aside?**

To evaluate the preferred locations for permanent agricultural lands a comprehensive evaluation of the resource and the characteristics affecting it should be undertaken. Included in this evaluation should be an assessment to determine the presence of specialty crop land as defined in the PPS. In conducting this assessment the following factors should be considered.

- Land classification;
- Size of property holdings;
- Existing farm infrastructure;
- Ownership;
- Connectivity to Greenbelt;
- Presence of non farm uses;
- Conflicting uses; and
- Current production
- Aggregate resources
- Area required to accommodate growth and
- Natural Heritage System requirements.

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<sup>21</sup> Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs, Greenbelt Study Area - Agricultural Land Evaluation and areas Review August 2006, pg27.

As a starting point for this evaluation, the PSA has been divided into five areas as shown on **Map 4**. In each area there are characteristics that will impact the potential for and type of long term agricultural activities that may occur.

Area 1, south Halton Hills, is comprised of predominately Class 1 land which supports diversity and flexibility in production. It is characterized by large holdings with farm infrastructure in place. The area ranked relatively high in the LEAR evaluation undertaken by OMAFRA for the Greenbelt. Owner occupation of the land, based on assessment information, appears to be relatively high<sup>22</sup> although it varies throughout the area. The west portion of the area is obviously most closely connected to the rural area of the Greenbelt. This area retains the potential to create a comprehensive, highly connected agricultural cluster.

Area 2, south central Milton, is surrounded on 3 sides by Greenland Systems. It contains primarily Class 1 land and is characterized by large holdings. There is still owner occupation of large tracts but the area is relatively isolated.

Area 3, south west Milton, is the area west of 16 Mile Creek and south of Milton. This is the area that contains the Halton waste disposal site, a golf course and where CN owns large tracks of land which have been proposed as the location of an inter-modal facility. Depending on the outcome of the CN proposal this area may have too many conflicting uses to be viable as an agricultural area. Conversely, as noted earlier it may be an appropriate location for a “near urban” agricultural cluster focused on greenhouses which would have access to waste heat from the waste disposal site.

Area 4 is the smallest area and is centred on the existing market garden cluster on the 8<sup>th</sup> Line. Although this is an area that is currently intensively farmed its fragmented nature and size make its long term viability vulnerable.

Area 5, south east Milton, is predominately prime land but has some pockets of lower class land. If appropriate portions of Area 1, were part of a permanent agricultural area, linkages with Area 5 could be maintained so it would be connected to a larger agricultural community. The lot fabric confirms that in the northern portion of this area the land holdings are still large. There is fragmentation in the southern portion, specifically in the area of market garden operations on the 8<sup>th</sup> Line. Servicing corridors and proposal for future employment areas may impact the viability of this area for agriculture.

To determine which of the areas or parts thereof would be most suitable for inclusion in a permanent agricultural area more detailed assessment should be conducted.

## **9.5 Other Countryside Uses**

As noted earlier, both aggregate and natural heritage features are legitimate uses in the Countryside. There is provision for these two uses to co-exist with agriculture. This should be encouraged to the extent possible. Additional work will need to be done to identify where the resources overlap, where they could co-exist and what steps need to be taken to manage this.

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<sup>22</sup> Assessment data is only one tool to use in understanding ownership patterns and does not capture options and agreements.

Although there are large shale deposits in the PSA, the Province is currently studying how much of this resource needs to be protected. In the interim, designating the areas for agricultural production will have the effect of protecting the aggregate resource until the province completes its work. Once this is done, agriculture can continue on the resource lands until the resource is required. Once it is mined, the land can be rehabilitated for agricultural production.

If a decision is made to protect a permanent agricultural area in the PSA, other rural uses such as recreation complexes, golf courses and cemeteries should not be permitted in that area. The ability to protect an area for agriculture is already constrained by the requirement to accommodate natural heritage systems, aggregates and future growth. It cannot sustain additional intrusions. These uses should be directed to rural areas outside of the agricultural area or incorporated in other land designations.

## **10.0 TOOLS FOR SUPPORTING AGRICULTURE**

As time has proven, planning controls in and of themselves are not sufficient to protect agricultural land or ensure that it is under production. Additional tools are required.

Some of the tools that can be use to foster agricultural production include:

- easements, creations of trusts or purchase of development rights;
- tax incentives;
- economic development programs;
- provision of rural infrastructure;
- educational programs to raise the awareness about agriculture; and
- use of development charges to fund agricultural land preservation programs.

The certainty that land will be available for long term agricultural production can be enhanced by imposition of additional protections such as easements, creations of trusts or purchase of development rights. These tools could be considered for the area of the PSA that is chosen as a permanent agricultural area. Work is being done on this approach to managing the agricultural land base by the Ontario Farmland Trust and through work being done at Guelph University. The Region of Niagara is interested in investigating stronger controls for the tender fruit lands and the Pickering Preserve has introduced some tools for long term preservation. Halton could join the discussion on additional controls and could become a pilot project for development of additional tools to protect farmland.

The question of economic viability is often raised with respect to the preservation of agricultural land. The reality is that there are cycles in the economics of agriculture. As in any business, there are successful operators and unsuccessful operators. The question that must be asked is if it would be in the public interest to give up the land that feeds us because of short term economic trends? Canadians enjoy the cheapest food in the world and are willing to consume large amounts of imports to achieve this but is at what cost? At what cost to the environment, at what cost to quality of life and at what cost to future generations, do we give up the resource that would allow us to provide a local food supply?

On a more pragmatic note, agriculture in Halton is amongst the most profitable in Ontario. The GFR's rank fourth in the province and the operators produce a range of products for multiple markets. There are large and successful operations in Halton.

There are certainly vulnerabilities in the Halton agricultural community. The age profile in Halton is older than the provincial average, many farmers view the land as their retirement fund and resent interference that may affect their options, there is a high incidence of rental land. The GTA Agricultural Action Plan has identified and is implementing programs to address these issues but if there is to be a permanent agricultural presence in the PSA these issues are will also need to be addressed by both the Region and farmers.

Finally, there is the reality that there are many competing uses for the land in the PSA. The Greater Golden Horseshoe Growth Plan mandates that Halton must accommodate a certain proportion of population and employment growth to 2031. How this is achieved will depend on the tolerance for intensification and the willingness to trade certain urban options for agricultural preservation. The individual growth options for area municipalities are not incremental. There are servicing and infrastructure considerations that will have major implications for growth patterns. However, in balancing these competing interests the importance of preserving agricultural land for the future should not be underestimated.

This discussion of the tools available to support agriculture is just an introduction to a very complex topic. If the decision is made that an active and successful agricultural area is part of the vision for Sustainable Halton, additional work should be done to identify tools to support the vision.

The GTA Agricultural Action Plan which has been endorsed by Regional Council is an important tool for supporting agriculture. Combined with Regional economic development initiatives and programs such as Simply Local, implementation of the Plan will be an important support for agriculture.

## **11.0 CHALLENGES**

There are numerous challenges associated with retaining a permanent agricultural presence in the PSA. Competition for the land base is intense. By approving the Greenbelt Plan and the Growth Plan the Province has intensified the pressure on this prime agricultural area. Halton will not be able to meet the growth targets set in the Growth Plan without encroaching into this area. Competition for natural heritage areas and aggregate extraction add additional pressures.

Farmers in the area operate under difficult circumstances. Speculation and competition for land drive prices up beyond the level of productive value. It is unclear how much of the land remains in the ownership of farmers and how much has been acquired by speculators who are not maintaining the agricultural infrastructure.

For properties that continue to be owned by farmers the presence of non rural uses makes the business of farming difficult. The future is uncertain, making decision on investments in farm infrastructure and improvement difficult.

Despite all of these challenges, agriculture continues to have a significant presence in the PSA. Increasingly there is public recognition that the production that occurs is valuable. It adds to the quality of life of urban residents and makes a positive contribution to environmental sustainability. The land in the PSA is a limited resource; it is part of a very limited supply of Class 1 land available to Canadians. The decision to surrender it to non farm development should not be taken lightly. Once the agricultural land in the PSA is gone, it cannot be replaced.

Finally, even if an agricultural area is preserved in the PSA to 2031, management of growth after 2031 will have to be addressed. If the targets of the Growth Plan are realised there will be a new challenge to face. Unless decisions are made to limit growth, the long term future of agriculture in the PSA will be vulnerable.

The solution to this is to manage agricultural land using the approach that is now taken to natural heritage areas. The value of the agricultural resource should be acknowledged and the need to permanently protect it, factored into decision making.

## **12.0 CONCLUSIONS**

Halton has a strong agricultural resource that can support a successful industry if conditions are right. The land soil and climate are conducive to a comprehensive commodity profile. There is an apparent desire and a public interest in maintaining a viable agricultural sector in the mature state. This sector should include lands in both the PSA and the Greenbelt.

However there are many competing uses for agricultural land. Population and employment growth after 2021, and the provision for a natural heritage system and aggregate extraction all reduce the supply available for permanent agricultural use. A balance will have to be struck and compromises made to satisfy competing demands.

In developing agricultural policies for Sustainable Halton, there are two questions that must be answered:

- Is it desirable for agriculture to have a permanent presence in the PSA?
- Is it possible for agriculture to have a permanent presence in the PSA?

The answer to the first question is yes. The majority of the land in the PSA qualifies as Class 1, a category that applies to less than 0.5% of the Canadian land mass. The land itself is a non renewable resource and its value is enhanced by good climatic conditions and availability of water. There is an existing agricultural sector which in terms of value of gross farm receipts, is highly productive. The quality of the resource allows flexibility in production and access to a large and sophisticated market creates opportunities for producers.

Agriculture is an integral part of the economic, cultural and historic fabric of the Region. There is a growing public interest in maintaining local food production and agriculture is considered an important component of a sustainable community. Agricultural areas provide relief from urban form and farmers act as stewards of the rural landscape. If managed properly, agriculture can contribute to environmental sustainability and quality

of life. While land in the Protected Countryside can respond to some of these needs, the prime land in the PSA is best suited to do so.

The answer to the second question revolves around “permanency”. If the purpose of the Sustainable Halton exercise is just to address the period from 2021 to 2031, the answer is yes, it is possible to maintain an agricultural presence in the PSA. Concurrent studies confirm that not all of the land in the PSA is required to accommodate growth or other resource interests to 2031. A significant area remains that given the requirements of Section 2.3 of the PPS, must remain designated for agriculture. The uncertainty associated with the future of the area may adversely affect the strength of the agricultural operations that exist, but there will continue to be land for agriculture in the PSA.

However if the goal of Sustainable Halton is to create an ongoing permanent agricultural presence, this is a more difficult challenge. There are numerous conditions that must exist to maintain a permanent, agricultural presence in the PSA. A viable agricultural sector is one which is located on productive land with suitable climatic conditions, is of sufficient size to allow flexibility in production; is supported by an infrastructure of farm related services; occupies contiguous parcels of land to provide separation from conflicting and incompatible uses and operates in a supportive environment. The area must be protected from urban encroachment by strong and permanent urban boundaries. The most productive type of agricultural community is one where there is certainty that land will remain in production and the circumstances will exist to support agriculture.

The PSA has many of the characteristics required to sustain a permanent agricultural area. The quality of the resource is outstanding, there is a large contiguous area of production and Halton has been very supportive of the agricultural sector. Actions such as the creation of an Agricultural Advisory Committee to ensure agricultural interests are represented in Regional decision making; implementation of the Simply Local program to promote regional farms and implementation of the GTA Agricultural Action Plan to promote agriculture in the GTA are representative of this support.

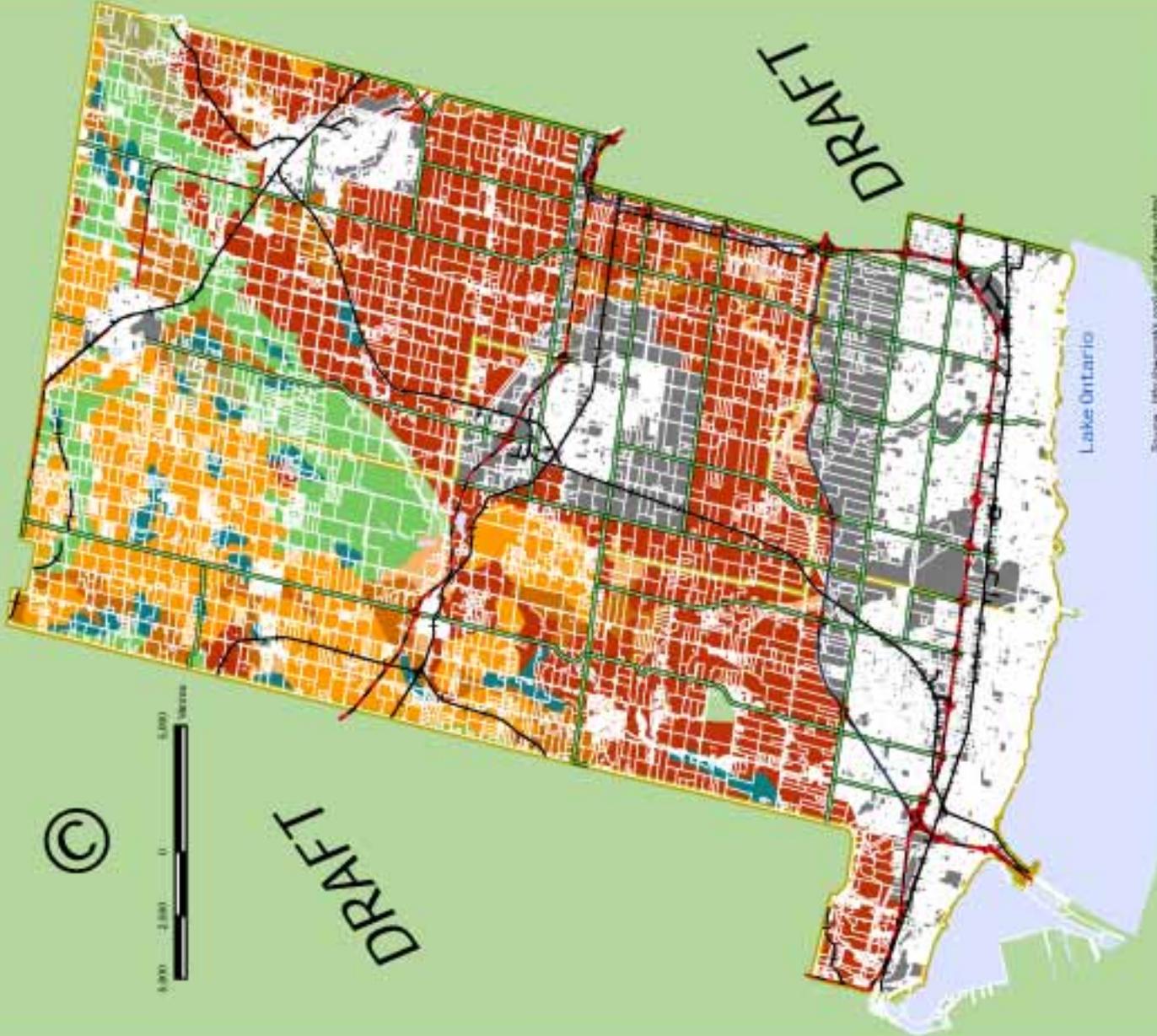
The element that is missing and creates vulnerability in the sector is certainty. With each update of the Official plan there is the possibility of more agricultural land being converted for urban expansion. The expectation that this will continue, fuels speculation that drives land prices beyond productive value. Younger farmers do not see a future in the area and are unwilling or unable to invest. Land being held for speculation is often not maintained at peak productivity and farm infrastructure is neglected. This detracts from the overall integrity of an agricultural area, discourages farm service providers and makes the businesses of farming more difficult. The impact of this uncertainty in the PSA is reflected in the aging profile of the farmers and the prevalence of rental land. If there is to be a permanent agricultural sector in the PSA, this uncertainty must be addressed.

Long term sustainability is compromised by the Provincial requirement for Halton to accommodate a specific level of growth. This cannot be accomplished without encroachments into the PSA. If agriculture is to have a permanent presence in the PSA, the Region must accommodate this growth while creating circumstances that will sustain an ongoing agricultural presence. Land use policies alone will not achieve this. Other tools will have to be employed the cost of which must be understood and accepted.

Creation of a permanent viable agricultural sector in the PSA will require strong political will, commitment by the agricultural community and public support.

If the Region decides to build on its existing policies of agricultural protection and endorse the policy of a permanent agricultural presence in the PSA, additional work must be done to establish how large an area should be established, where it will be established, what the tools are to ensure permanency and what the costs and implications of creating this area will be.

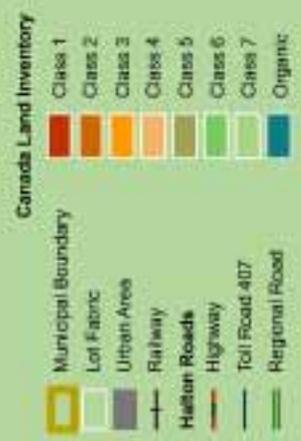




Source: <http://geogratis.gc.ca/geogratis.nsf/geo/00000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000000>  
 Department of Regional Economic Expansion, Soil Capability Classification for Agriculture, The Canada Land Inventory, Report #2, 1989.  
 Environment Canada, Lands Directorate, Land Capability for Agriculture, Publication Report, Canada Land Inventory, Report #20, 1978.  
 The Regional Municipality of Halton, Planning & Public Works Department, 2006.

# RURAL CLUSTER: AN AGRICULTURE / COUNTRYSIDE VISION

Map 2  
 - Lot Fabric Overlay  
 on to the  
 Canada Land Inventory Mapping -



## CANADA LAND INVENTORY (CLI)

**Class 1** Soils have no significant limitations, generally level or very gentle slopes, deep, good water holding capacity, and are well to imperfectly drained.

**Class 2** Moderate limitations that restrict the range of crops or require moderate conservation practices. Soils are deep with good water-holding capacity. Limitations are moderate (i.e. adverse regional climate, poor soil structure, low fertility, moderate erosion) and are generally easily correctable.

**Class 3** Moderately severe limitations that restrict the range of crops or require special conservation practices, but are considered fair to moderately high in productivity for a wide range of field crops. Limitations may be a combination of those found under Class 2 or may include one or more of the following: moderate climatic limitations, moderately severe erosion, intractable soil mass or very slow permeability; correctable, low fertility; moderate to steep slopes; frequent runoff accompanied by crop damage; and soiliness necessitating some clearing.

**Class 4** Severe limitations that restrict the range of crops or require special conservation practices. This class is generally considered suitable for only a few crops (yield for a range of crops low/very low). Productivity is low to medium for narrow range of crops with a higher productivity for specially adapted crop types. Limitations include the following: steep slopes, severe past erosion, frequent surface runoff, severe acidity or aridity, and saline stressors.

**Class 5** Very severe limitations that restrict their capability in producing perennial forage crops, and improvement practices are feasible. This class generally includes serious physical, climatic and other limitations that make it incapable of sustaining production of annual field crops.

**Class 6** There soils are capable only of producing perennial forage crops, and improvement practices are not feasible. Improvement practices on these types are not economical due to adverse climate and other physical limitations. Soils are marginal for agricultural use though they are generally used for periodic rough grazing for farm animals.

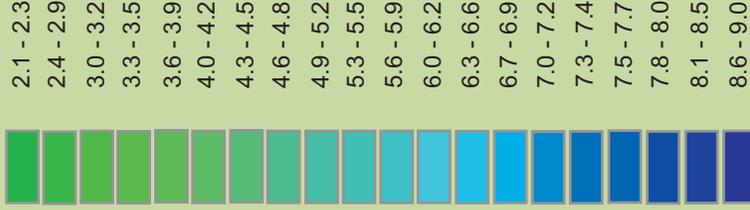
**Class 7** No capacity for arable culture or permanent pasture. With a low economic feasibility caused from a combination of adverse climate and physical limitations this class is not suitable for agricultural use. All classified areas not including organic are placed in this Class including areas of exposed rock and small water bodies.

Organic Soils: Not placed in capability classes.

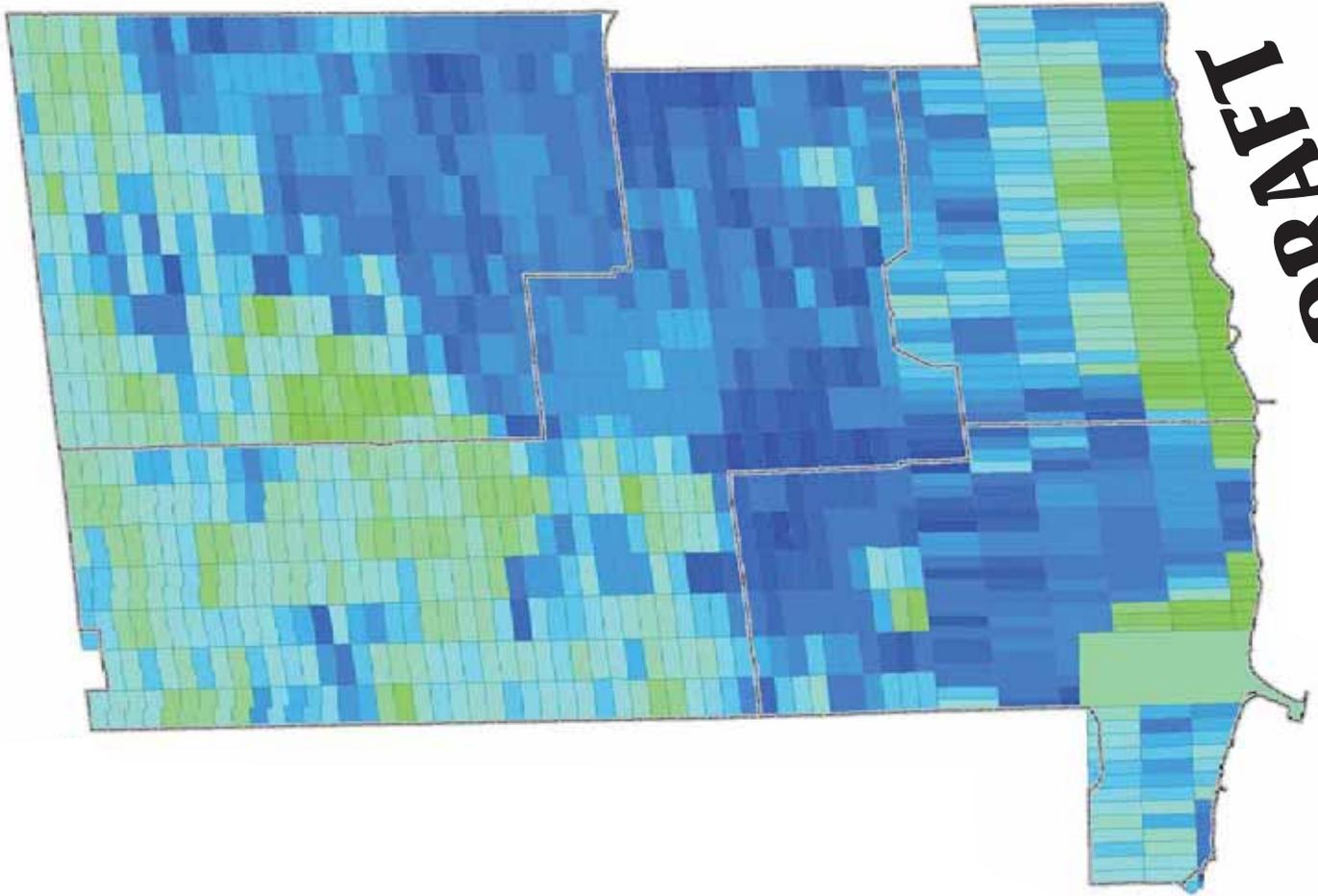
Map 3

RURAL CLUSTER:  
AN AGRICULTURE / COUNTRYSIDE  
VISION

- LEAR Scores for Halton -



DURABLE HALTON PLAN:  
Building Our Future



**DRAFT**

# Map 4

## RURAL CLUSTER: AN AGRICULTURE / COUNTRYSIDE VISION

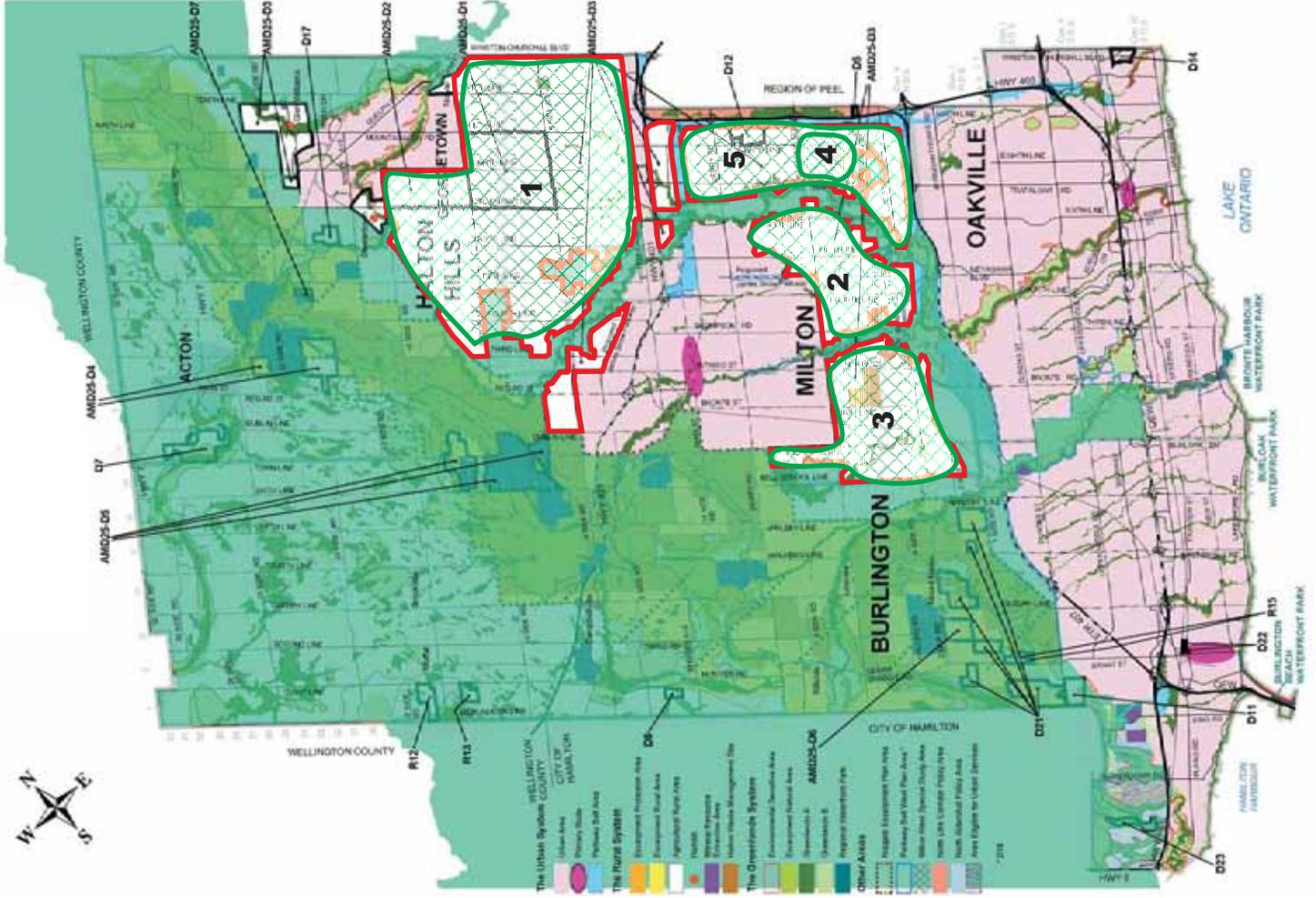
### - Proposed Agricultural Area -

- Primary Study Area
- 3 Agricultural Areas

*This map is for general illustration purposes only. For boundary interpretation please contact the Halton Region Planning & Development Department.*

# DRAFT

## DURABLE HALTON PLAN: Building Our Future



## **APPENDIX 1**

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**Excerpt from “Growing Halton’s Agricultural Cluster and Farmland Base”  
Executive Summary  
Donald, B., Morrow, D., Walton & Hunter Planning Associates, December 2002.**

- 1) Halton should establish a Halton Farmers and Regional Government Partnership to exploit the following competitive attributes that set it apart from other Regions:
  - a) proximity to major urban markets and transportation infrastructure;
  - b) proximity to innovative agricultural research and development centres (University of Guelph and OMAFRA);
  - c) high quality soil, fresh water availability and conducive climate;
  - d) progressive leadership at the Regional level.
  
- 2) This partnership should exploit its competitive attributes in the following ways:
  - a) develop infrastructure (such as road improvements) in consultation with farmers;
  - b) take a leadership role in developing networks with other regional governments and with OMAFRA to strengthen the agricultural clusters;
  - c) provide value to farms and farm-related business by identifying growth areas in agriculture;
  - d) promote farming that concentrates on
    - i) newly emerging markets;
    - ii) small acreage high intensity cropping with value-added product potential;
    - iii) high-quality product;
  - e) promote the further development of the equine industry in Halton;
  - f) promote the further development of the nursery and greenhouse subsector in locations that consume as little of the Region's prime agricultural lands as possible, potentially in or near urban areas where lake-based water services could be provided;
  - g) protect the agricultural land base.
  
- 3) The partnership should promote innovative agriculture in the following ways:
  - a) sponsor events and intra-regional competitions;
  - b) showcase farms that engage in 'best practices';
  - c) facilitate the registration of ISO 9002 certification by farmers in the Region;
  - d) market Halton's 'service quality' (i.e. its 'farmer friendly' nature);
  - e) market Halton's 'product quality' (i.e. its soil quality, agricultural cluster, and proximity to major markets);
  - f) develop and promote product differentiation and regional differentiation marketing programs based on product quality and service;
  - g) business attraction of life science industries (e.g. nutraceuticals, biofuels, etc.);
  - h) assist in the development, maintenance and promotion of market interaction initiatives to bring consumers, restaurateurs, wholesalers, retailers and farmers together.
  
- 4) Halton should play a role in protecting the land base in the following ways:
  - a) continue to uphold strong agricultural policies in the Regional Official Plan;
  - b) develop programs and projects in concert with the Agricultural Rehabilitation and Development Directorate of Ontario to protect and enhance water and soil for agriculture purposes;

- c) develop programs for the sale of conservation easements and restrictive covenants, and for the capitalization of funds for the purchase of those rights from farm owners;
  - d) continue to implement measures to assist farmers in remaining economically viable to counter development pressures.
- 5) Halton should promote agricultural clusters in the following ways:
- a) work with other regional (and county) municipalities, OMAFRA, and industry organizations to exploit the potential of the equine and nursery products clusters;
  - b) promote linkages between local producers and consumers (including restaurants, food processing plants, and retail outlets) through events and marketing.
- 6) Halton should promote viable farms and sound business management within the Region in the following ways:
- a) work with the Guelph Centre on Family Farm Succession
    - i) to establish a FarmLink database of retiring and aspiring farmers;
    - ii) to facilitate farm succession workshops in the Region;
  - b) develop a database of farm-related organizations in Halton as well as service professionals such as accountants, lawyers and business advisors, and succession planners;
  - c) loosen restrictions on non-agriculturally-related activities carried out on farms to supplement farm income;
  - d) work with local agricultural associations and the Province to establish a financial incentive program to assist new entrants into the farming business.