



# Message from the Chair

September 2, 2011

Ten years ago if anyone had suggested that I would be attending a farmer appreciation event hosted by the regional conservation authorities, I would have laughed at them. Yet, there I was, not only attending, but as the Chair of the Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group (PAAWG), I was asked to make a short presentation to celebrate the success of the Peel Rural Water Quality Program (PRWQP). The following is some of the background of this program and the reasons I am so excited about it.

In 2003 the Credit Valley Conservation (CVC) and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) got together to develop a program for agricultural landowners in the Region of Peel to voluntarily implement beneficial management practices on their land to help improve and protect the quality of surface and ground water. In 2005, in partnership with the Peel Federation of Agriculture (PFA), the Peel Soil and Crop Improvement Association, the Region of Peel the Great Lakes Sustainability Fund, and the Peel Rural Water Quality Program was created.

The goals of the program are:

- To provide technical and financial assistance to the agricultural community in the Region of Peel in order to achieve their environmental and stewardship goals;
- To protect agricultural lands as a natural resource of major importance in the Region of Peel;
- To support Region of Peel farmers and agricultural organizations as valuable contributors to the environment, community and economy of Peel;
- To promote healthy rural communities that respect the natural environment and water resources;
- To increase awareness of and mitigate rural non-point pollution sources by promoting environmentally sound land management practices to surface and ground water; and
- To increase awareness of climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies for agriculture within the Region of Peel and promote activities to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The Peel Agricultural Advisory Working Group (PAAWG), an interface between the PFA and the Region of Peel, together with members from the local agricultural societies, citizens at large and the Peel Junior Farmers are asked to peer review the projects that were anonymously submitted by farmers.

As you can imagine, the first couple of years of the program were very difficult on the conservation people that did the leg work, knocking on farmers' doors, taking a fair amount of abuse in some cases, persevering and being rewarded by working with progressive-minded farmers to develop plans to protect water on their property.

By 2009, the five-year anniversary of the PRWQP, almost \$236,000 had been paid out to farmers. The program is in its seventh year and still growing strong. The farming community has started to embrace this program and the conservation people are now welcomed when they show up on a farmer's door step. Well, usually.

So, why has there been an about face? Here are some of the reasons.

First, the TRCA has over 3,000 acres of farmland in its jurisdiction and up until a few years ago, their policy was to



Nick Ferri (center) with Mark Eastman, of the Credit Valley Conservation Authority, and Nadine Abrams of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority at the Peel Rural Water Quality Program "Agriculture Appreciation BBQ". Photo: Anne Howden Thompson

plant trees on all the land. Now, because of their interaction with the farm leaders and also the local food movement, they have changed their policies to maintain their inventory of agricultural land, to provide long-term leases of five to ten years encouraging a wider variety of crops and sustainable farm practices, to promote innovation and established a committee tasked with achieving 40 per cent local food procurement for their facilities by 2012. They have also set aside farms such as the McVean Farm in Brampton, the Living City Farm at Kortright and, most recently, the Albion Hills Community Farm, as incubators for new farmer interns and they now have a mentorship program in place.

Secondly, the CVC has been working on valuing ecological good and services and has published a number of fact sheets summarizing their findings. They have partnered with the University of New Brunswick and Simon Fraser University to develop a survey that has been delivered to residential households in three cities across Canada. The surveys have been collected and the data is currently being analyzed. The same survey will be delivered to rural residents and farmers this fall, with data to be tabulated in late fall. The survey asks questions such as; "Do you think the general public should help to pay for environmentally sensitive areas that are presently being cared for by private land owners?" and "How much compensation should a private land owner receive for looking after a wet land: \$50 per acre per year, \$150 per acre per year or \$250 per acre per year?" These aren't the real questions but are meant to serve as examples. The survey is quite detailed with many questions similar to the ones above, covering many different circumstances. Some people will say, "So what, it will just end up on a shelf like all the other surveys and studies". I say, this will be a valuable document that we will be able to use in our Food and Farming Action Plan for the Golden Horseshoe. The CVC has already stepped up to the plate and identified themselves as champions for this cause.

The environmental stewardship programs run by the conservation authorities such as the ones in Peel, the Grand River Conservation and other regions are very successful and are good examples of public money being spent wisely on preserving rural water quality, benefiting all

## Thursday, September 22

### **"City to Country" Bus Tour**

City to Country is a daylong mobile conference that will bring together people who are transforming food systems, and their supporters. The day will begin with bus tours and end with a celebratory feast and sharing session. City to Country will explore good food solutions, challenges, and opportunities in the Greater Toronto Area. This event is free with the exception that we expect participants to offer their thoughts, expertise and energy to the tours.

Presented in partnership with Sustain Ontario, the Toronto Food Policy Council, the Toronto Community Food Animators' Project, the Foodshed Project and World Crop Research Project, funding has been generously provided by the Metcalf Foundation's 50th anniversary grants. This is an invitation only event and space for this event is limited. RSVP by Friday, September 9 or call 647 348 0235. For complete details please visit [www.sustainontario.com/initiatives/city-to-country](http://www.sustainontario.com/initiatives/city-to-country).

*In September the Halton, Durham and York Agricultural Advisory Committees are hosting their annual bus tours. Be sure to visit our website at [www.gtaaac.ca](http://www.gtaaac.ca) for more details on these events.*

residents, and ensuring a more pristine environment for future generations.

So, am I excited to be working with the conservation authorities? You bet. It's a great partnership and our future together looks very promising.

Respectfully,  
Nick Ferri, Chair, GTAAAC

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