

The Future of Farming in Hastings County

Report for the community and local policy-makers

Dr. Peter Andrée and Kim Bittermann with Ken Meter and Louise Livingstone





Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Ten Major Findings.....	4
Recommendations to local governments and community organizations.....	5
Introduction	7
Context: Agriculture in Hastings County	8
Figure 1: Number of Hastings County farms and farm operators in 2011 and 2016, organized by census division (roughly from South to North).....	9
Findings of the research and public meetings	10
Figure 2: Acres of Manure Use: 2006-2016	11
Figure 3: Acres of Soil Amendments 2006-2016	12
Figure 4: Adjusted Net Cash for Hastings County Farms 2006-2016.....	13
Figure 5: Net Cash Income of Farmers in Hastings County Townships: 2006-2016.....	14
Box 1: Three types of Hastings County farmers.....	16
Figure 6: Hastings County Food Needs, 2016	20
Recommendations for local government and community organizations	24
References	27
Appendix A: Asset Mapping Workshops	28
Figure 7: Asset Mapping Framework	28
Maynooth, Hastings Highlands results.....	28
Corbyville, City of Belleville results	29
Appendix B: Existing organization and initiatives that support agricultural sustainability in Hastings County	31

These photos were provided by Harvest Hastings and were not taken by the researchers. The farms depicted may or may not have participated directly in the interviews which inform this study.

Cover Tweed	Fleet Breeze Farm, Red Wartle pigs,	Sun Run Farms, Hastings Highlands
Haanover View Farms, Tyendinaga	Madoc Twp.	Haanover View Farms, Tyendinaga
Oakhills Alpaca, Quinte West	Hastings Highlands	Knuckle Down Farm, Quinte West
Barn raising, Centre Hastings	Springhill Farm, beef cattle, Stirling	Hastings County Farm Show
Front Street market, Quinte West	Rawdon	Harvest, Quinte West
Hastings County Farm Show 2018	Thistle Dew Farm, Tyendinaga	Palmateer Farms, Tweed
Dairy cows, Stirling Rawdon	Ontario Water Buffalo Company,	Amazing Graze Alpaca, Stirling-
Firefly Farm, Stirling Rawdon	Stirling Rawdon	Rawdon
	Dairy parlour, Stirling Rawdon,	

The Future of Farming in Hastings County

Report for the community and local policy-makers

Dr. Peter Andrée and Kim Bittermann with Ken Meter and Louise Livingstone

Executive Summary

This research is grounded in over 30 interviews with farmers from Hastings County and public officials with responsibilities that include Hastings County, as well as data available through the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Hastings County, and Statistics Canada. It is also informed by discussions at three public presentations and two asset-mapping workshops (see Appendix A) and policy recommendations prepared by community-based food system consultant Ken Meter.

This report identifies ten major findings about the state of farming in the County, followed by a set of recommendations for both the community and local governments. (Recommendations to provincial and federal governments are pending). As context, we recognize that powerful outside forces, such as international trade agreements, rising energy costs, government and corporate policies and a changing climate, all restrict options for Hastings County farmers. However, some external forces, for example shifting consumer demands, also create opportunities.

Ten Major Findings:

1. The strong ethic of sustainability

An ethic of sustainable agriculture is strong amongst farmers in Hastings: soil health, community well-being, and economic stability are all important.

2. The critical challenge of achieving sustainable farm livelihoods

The environmental and social sustainability of farming in Hastings County depends on farmers making a viable livelihood. As costs rise and farm receipts decline, all farmers face this challenge of making a reasonable living.

3. Three farmer types

We have identified three, overlapping, categories of farmers with specific goals and needs. These categories do not capture all the ways of farming in Hastings County but help to clarify our findings and recommendations. While their farms and farming practices are different, they are all increasingly dependent on one another as neighbours and as members of the farming community:

- *Adaptive* farmers: specialized commodity producers adapting to changing circumstances and surviving by getting bigger when conditions permit; producing corn, soybeans, dairy, poultry, cows and calves, as well as hogs.
- *Entrepreneurs*: diversified producers, selling at farmers' markets, to restaurants, and through community shared agriculture. Many also add value through processing for local and regional markets.
- *Heritage* farmers: commodity or diversified producers working at a small or medium scale. They are primarily motivated by a commitment to the land, family, community and traditional farming lifestyles.

4. Off-farm income is both a lifeline and curse

Off-farm income represents an important economic survival strategy for most Hastings County

farms, but many farmers wish they did not need it to the extent that they do. Off-farm income is particularly critical for small farms of all types.

5. The challenge of inter-generational succession

Succession causes challenges for each generation involved. This is especially the case for the large *Adaptive* farmers with high debt load.

6. The need to welcome and support new farmers

Retirement of farmers can create opportunities for new farmers. However, there is a need to integrate new, non-traditional, farmers into the rural community and to capitalize on their other experiences and skills.

7. Community-based food system¹ development: an opportunity for collaboration

Hastings County offers opportunities for new, small farm-based businesses serving local and regional markets because of relatively low land prices (to buy or rent) and relatively small parcel sizes. These farmers need capital, mentorship and infrastructure (e.g. farmers markets and food hubs) to take advantage of processing and niche market opportunities.

8. Regulatory and zoning challenges inhibit growth

While governments do formally support agriculture in various ways, local, provincial and federal laws, regulations and standards can present major barriers to farmers of all types.

9. Opportunities for peer-to-peer learning

Many Hastings County farmers rely on self-sufficiency strategies, used or shared equipment and direct marketing. Peer-to-peer learning opportunities that allow them to share their strategies and lessons can really help these farmers thrive.

10. Hope lies in natural assets, community knowledge, resources, and networks

Hope for the future comes from the substantial natural assets the agricultural sector can draw upon, as well as the knowledge base, resources and community networks found in Hastings County, supported by all levels of government.

Recommendations to local governments and community organizations:

More details on these recommendations are provided in the main body of this report.

1. Recognize the economic crisis in agriculture, and especially the impacts on farmer mental health and that of their families, as a complex set of ongoing and serious challenges. The first step could be for local community organizations to cooperate with national organizations (like the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and National Farmers Union) and local mental health services to convene a meeting on this challenge.
2. Build on the wealth of agricultural knowledge and experience in the County through field days, workshops, an annual conference and other events that allow new and experienced farmers to learn from one another. Harvest Hastings, in partnership with other local, regional and provincial organizations, can play a lead role in the organization.

¹ “Community-based food systems” are food systems that strive to create stronger affinities among farmers and consumers, for the purposes of building health, wealth, connection, and capacity within Hastings County and neighbouring regions (Meter 2007).

3. Increase the level of coordination and collaboration among public and non-profit organizations that support agriculture in Hastings County. Begin this process with a database that lists each organization and its role.
4. Develop a core mission at the county and city levels that commits the municipalities to supporting community-based food system development, building on existing commitments to local agriculture in the official plans and related municipal initiatives.
5. Develop an inventory of community agriculture and food infrastructure and services important to the community (e.g. farmers' markets, abattoirs, food hubs, veterinary services) and then identify how to support and maintain this infrastructure.
6. Undertake feasibility studies to assess potential new community food infrastructure such as modern washing, packing and distribution facilities, where appropriate. Feasibility studies should also consider how to make better use of existing facilities like the Colborne Agri-Food Venture Centre.
7. Develop virtual food hubs using social media such as Facebook and Twitter.
8. Mobilize consumer support through outreach campaigns. For example, a "Buy \$5 a week" from Hastings County farms campaign (this would translate into over \$35 M/year income for local farms).
9. Develop a coordinated marketing strategy for Hastings County farmers' markets and other venues (e.g. restaurants) that sell locally produced foods.
10. Collaborate with Community Food Centres Canada and like-minded organizations to help local food banks become community centres that provide more than access to emergency food. They can also provide skills development, food literacy, policy advocacy, and work in partnership with local farmers. These centres can also serve as physical community food hubs.
11. Collaborate with organizations such as Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the National Farmers Union to offer more succession planning and support for all types of farmers.
12. Collaborate with organizations like Farms at Work and FarmStart to develop more land access and mentoring opportunities for new farmers.
13. Continue to protect farmland in Hastings County, the City of Belleville and the City of Quinte West by adopting zoning codes, tax incentives or other programs that reduce the cost of land for bona fide agricultural use.
14. Review all agriculture and food-related regulations (including new bylaws and zoning decisions, etc.) through a 'small business lens' to minimize impact on smaller farm businesses.



Introduction

This report has been produced in the context of the Future of Farming in Hastings County study. This study began in 2016 in a partnership between Carleton University researchers and Harvest Hastings, and funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) through the Food: locally Embedded, Globally Engaged (FLEdGE) partnership research project (<https://fledgeresearch.ca/>) based out of the Wilfred Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems. Additional partners include County of Hastings (Economic Development), Hastings Stewardship Council, City of Belleville, City of Quinte West, Community Futures Development Corporation for North and Central Hastings and South Algonquin, and Crossroads Resource Centre (Minnesota).

The Future of Farming in Hastings County study explores the sustainability of agriculture in Hastings County, with a particular focus on the transition to a new generation of farmers. We are interested in understanding how farmers and communities, working together, can create the conditions needed to encourage the next generation of farmers. We are also interested in how government policies might best support farmers who wish to adopt more sustainable approaches to land management and plan for succession. Our research is grounded in over 30 interviews with farmers from Hastings County and public officials with responsibilities that include Hastings County, seven public meetings (in 2017 and 2018), as well as data available through the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Hastings County, and Statistics Canada.

One theme arising from our research is that there are many outside forces, such as international trade agreements, rising energy costs, climate change, technological changes, the state of public finance, and government as well as corporate policies, which all place restrictions on Hastings County's agricultural sector. On the topic of climate change, for example, we heard from one farmer about the increasing challenge of making hay now, as compared to when they were growing up on a farm: *"it's been warmer, warmer than normal - winters and summers. It's harder to make hay. We used to be able to make dry hay all the time. Growing up as kids we always had too many nice days to make hay but it's harder to make hay [now]. I don't know if it's just shortness between time of rain or the humidity and stuff like that but we have definitely noticed that it's harder to dry hay."* Other farmers spoke about the increased volatility of weather systems. *"We don't get these slowly changing patterns. We get disruptive patterns. Violent winds and then from extreme hot to cold."* Another farmer spoke about recent challenges with the changing weather patterns: *"Our last five years, we've had three bad years and one good year Yeah, it's been a struggle."*

Despite growing external challenges like a changing climate, our work shows that there are also supportive outside forces, such as growing consumer interest in healthy, local and sustainably-produced food, which result in opportunities for strengthening the sector through community-based food system development. Drawing on the work of community-based food system analyst Ken Meter, we define community-based food systems as food systems that strive to create stronger affinities among farmers and consumers, for the purposes of building health, wealth, connection, and capacity (Meter 2007). Hastings County is well positioned to benefit from an asset-based approach to community food system development that builds on the talents and capacities in the community, when supported by governments at all levels.

Our research affirms the importance of farming for those who work in agriculture, and it affirms the positive role farmers play as the backbone of the local community and economy. Farmers we spoke with

emphasized the importance of farming as a way of life that, when done sustainably, helps to ensure that future generations are also able to keep farming. Almost everyone – including those most devoted to commodity production – highlighted that farming was much more than a job or simply food production. They pointed to the important role farming plays to ensure the availability of healthy, local food. Over and over again, they highlighted the values of being self-sufficient, of knowing where their food comes from, and of working with the land. As one farmer said, *“it’s not just a profession, it’s a lifestyle.”* Another said, *“there is something so sacred. There are times when I just feel like the luckiest person. When you are out there in the barn and they are [birthing], ... and you see it, you see that happening....”* Another farmer explained, *“we don’t have to worry about what is in the food that we eat when it is from here”*. This value was articulated as also being important to many of the farms’ local customers.

This report summarizes our research results to date. It begins with a section describing agriculture in Hastings County in the context of what is happening elsewhere in Ontario. The findings of the research are summarized in ten major points. These are followed by a set of recommendations to local government and community organizations.

Context: Agriculture in Hastings County

Stretching over 6,103.92 square kilometres, Hastings County is geographically the second largest county in Ontario, with a population of 138,659 people (in 2016). Bordering Lake Ontario to the south and Algonquin Park to the north, the County extends across a landscape that includes the St. Lawrence lowlands in the south and the Canadian Shield and boreal forests in the north. Indigenous (Anishinaabe and Haudanashaunee) people lived in the area now called Hastings County since time memorial, practising shifting agriculture and hunting. Today, Indigenous people farm on Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory and in various parts of Hastings County. The Territory was formally granted to the Mohawks of the Six Nations Confederacy under the Simcoe Deed (1793) for their support of the British against American rebel forces during the American Revolution. This land was meant as a replacement for Mohawk territory lost to the Americans in what is now New York State (Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, 2018). Since colonization by the British and an influx of settlers beginning in the late 18th century, the varied geography of Hastings County has supported extensive rock and mineral mining, a significant lumber industry, and a diversity of agricultural practices (Livingstone, 2018).

The climate in Hastings County ranges from a plant hardiness zone of 6a to the south and 4a in the north (Natural Resources Canada). This climate, together with the rich soils in the south, supports a significant agricultural industry. While the majority of farms in the county are located south of Highway 7, there are also farms in the northern part of the County, though they are typically smaller due to the hilly and rocky landscape in that area. Approximately 80% of farms are located in the southern part of the County and all farms over 1,120 acres (3% of farms) are in the south.

Hastings County was once a significant hub for cheese production in Ontario. Since the 1960s, the number of farms in the county has declined. Where Hastings County once had over 200 dairy farms, it now has less than 53. Between 2006 and 2016, the overall number of farms in the county dropped from over 1,100 to 974 (Redden, 2006 and Meter, 2018). Figure 1 (below) shows the number of farms located in each of Hastings County’s communities (townships, cities or towns). Farms with a gross income of over \$7000 are classed as a census farm. Note: The figures below thus do not reflect the number of small farms grossing less than \$7000.

Figure 1: Number of Hastings County farms and farm operators in 2011 and 2016, organized by census division (roughly from South to North)²

Census Division	2011	2016	2011	2016
	Farms	Farms	Operators	Operators
Quinte West	234	199	340	285
Belleville	123	125	180	170
Tyendinaga (Incl. Deseronto)	132	112	175	155
Stirling-Rawdon	140	147	220	220
Centre Hastings	88	59	120	85
Tweed	177	122	245	175
Madoc	58	82	85	120
Marmorata and Lake	43	30	65	45
Bancroft and area	28	41	40	60
Carlow Mayo	28	17	40	25
Hastings Highlands	46	40	65	55
Total	1097	974	1575	1395

While there are clearly more active farms today in the South, the northern part of Hastings County has a rich agricultural history that includes supplying food to the lumber and mining industries. Until relatively recently, many farms in the north of the county also supplied cream to a local creamery. When the creamery shifted from using cream to using milk, however, many farms could not make the shift because the equipment they needed was quite different. According to a local farmer, of the original 42 farms that sold cream, only about 15 made the switch to milk and all of those farms have since stopped milk production with the last one shutting down about five years ago. Many businesses that once supported the farming industry in this region have also closed their doors. The northern part of the county once had a train that would bring in supplies and take product out to southern markets. There was also a local butcher shop, feed mill, and agricultural implement shop in Bancroft, all of which have shut down. Today, over 90 per cent of farms in North Hastings have at least one member of the family working off-farm.³

In comparison to the rest of Ontario, Hastings County has proportionally more beef and small livestock farms, fewer fruit and vegetable farms, and a higher percentage of small farms (Duff, 2018).⁴ The County has also experienced a more rapid loss of farms and of full-time farm operators than the provincial average. A comparison of gross farm sales also shows that Hastings County farmers make, on average, less than their provincial counterparts. While the provincial average is that 50 per cent of farms earn less than \$50,000 in gross sales per year, in Hastings County these represent 70 per cent of farmers (Duff, 2018).

It is notable that just over half (51%) of agricultural land in Hastings County is in an unimproved state compared to the provincial average of 22%.⁵ Unimproved land includes pasture (which is not cultivated

² For Statistics Canada, a farm operator is any person responsible for the management decisions made for a census farm. (see <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/170510/dq170510a-eng.htm>)

³ The details in this paragraph came from a statement made by Lynn Davis at our Maynooth focus group.

⁴ The number of farms producing vegetables commercially is on the increase in Hastings County. From 2011 to 2016 the number of vegetable farms (excluding greenhouse vegetables) rose from 74 to 93, with this production expanding from 546 to 642 acres (Statistics Canada, 2016a).

⁵ Over 328,000 acres assessed for farming (MPAC) isn't being actively farmed (total farm area as recorded in Census for Hastings County) Source: OMAFRA calculations based on MPAC and Statistics Canada data. This means Hastings has under 50% usage compared to about 75% as provincial average.

or tile-drained) as well as land that serves as a woodlot. While a higher percentage of unimproved land can be a sign of the lower value of land, in much of Hastings County compared to elsewhere in Ontario⁶, it also serves as a lens into an important set of County assets. The wetlands, woodlots (whether private or Crown land), and natural biodiversity of Hastings County are themselves important livelihood and community assets. Woodlots and wetlands help maintain ground and surface water quality while providing wildlife habitat and sequestering carbon.⁷ Many farmers and other land-owners also harvest their woodlots for milling purposes, or for firewood (both for themselves and to sell) and some farmers we spoke with even use tree branches as fodder for small livestock such as goats.

In Ontario, most farms require at least one off-farm income source in order to survive. Over half of Ontario farm operators (51%) have another stream of income (whether another business, employment, rental or investment income) and those that do not are typically running very large scale or highly specialized farms (Duff, 2018). Off-farm income sources make up about 80% of total farm income in Ontario as a whole (Duff, 2018).

In addition to being home to a greater percentage of smaller, lower-income farms than the Ontario average, Hastings County also has a lower than average income for Ontario. The average Hastings County household has an annual income of \$73,527 before taxes, compared to a provincial average income of \$98,000. Some townships in Hastings County exceed the average annual income, while others are significantly lower (Duff, 2018). This average household has 2.3 people, with total annual living expenditures of \$65,267 for food, shelter and transportation (Duff, 2018).

However, despite earning lower incomes than other Ontarians, Hastings County residents are saddled with some of the highest costs of living in the Province. Based on a custom run of the Statistics Canada 2016 Survey of Household Spending, the average Ontario rural household spends \$28,377 per household member per year on living expenses including food, shelter, transportation -- Almost \$3,000 more than in Toronto or the average for Ontario (Duff, 2018).

Findings of the research and public meetings

1. A strong ethic of sustainability in Hastings County

An ethic of seeking to farm sustainably is strong in Hastings County, and is most closely associated with efforts to maintain and build soil health. One farmer explained soil health this way: *“Put back what you’re taking out. And you should always put back a little more than what you’re taking out. If you’ve mined your farm right out, then you’re open for a lot of [damaging] things. If you build up organic matter, then it’s going to help hold moisture.”* Another farmer argued that *“the most important thing for any soil is your organic matter. When your organic matter is okay, most other things are in place. The soil biome, the bacteria, all the little critters will take care of the rest.”*

Such quotes reveal a deep care and understanding, among some Hastings County farmers, of the need to maintain soil health as an aspect of overall farm resilience. Farmers use a number of other practices to enhance the environmental sustainability of their farms. These include cover cropping (to reduce erosion and enhance fertility), rotational grazing (to enhance productivity, reduce

⁶ A University of Guelph survey found median farmland rental rate of about \$25 per acre and sale price of \$3,000 per tillable acre in Hastings County in 2017. These were the lowest rental and sale prices for land in Southern Ontario. https://www.uoguelph.ca/fare/bios/f_deaton.html

⁷ Hastings County woodlands (privately owned and Crown land) sequester more carbon than the green belt. Hastings County also has an important forestry industry based on both crown and private land, processing lumber and shipping it to Quebec and elsewhere in Ontario.

weed pressure, and build soil organic matter), permanent pastures (where land is unsuitable for cultivation), hedgerow maintenance (to reduce wind erosion and provide wildlife habitat), pollinator habitat creation, and more.

Despite the strong statements we heard about maintaining soils, it is notable that the acres of manure use on Hastings County farms (Figure 2 below) has been in decline from just under 18,000 acres in 2006 to under 10,000 acres in 2016 (as livestock numbers have declined), notwithstanding increases in land prepared for seeding. This suggests that more farms have been forced to seek short-term economic returns (by putting additional acres into crops reliant on herbicide, insecticide, fungicide and inorganic fertilizer applications – see Figure 3 which shows that the use of each of these amendments has grown from 2006 to 2016) but without always adding the animal manure that improves levels of soil organic matter over the longer term. This evidence shows that an ethic of sustainability may be effectively undermined on many farms by a need to generate quick cash returns.⁸

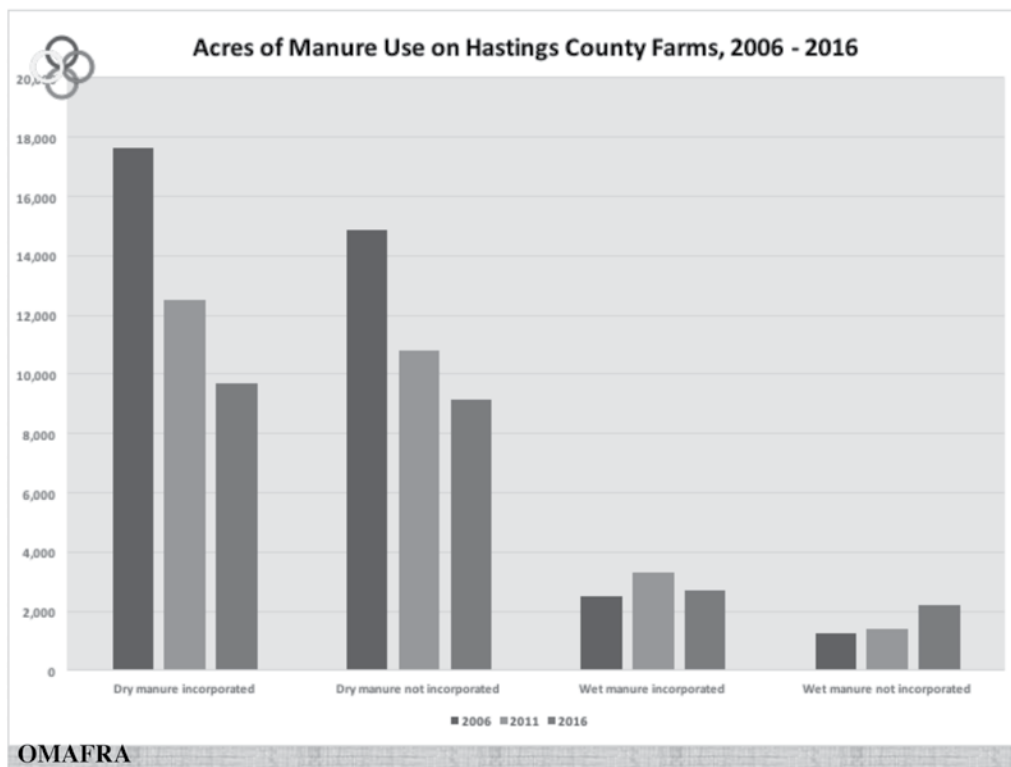


Figure 2: Acres of Manure Use: 2006-2016 ⁹

⁸ One local reviewer of a draft of this report noted that the current situation could represent an opportunity for crop farmers to switch to organic: “Transitioning take times, but not impossible. Organic farming methods use green manures and wider range of crops and crop rotation which in turns improves soil health and make crops more resilient” (Anonymous, 2019).

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all figures in this report were produced by Ken Meter/Crossroads Resource Centre

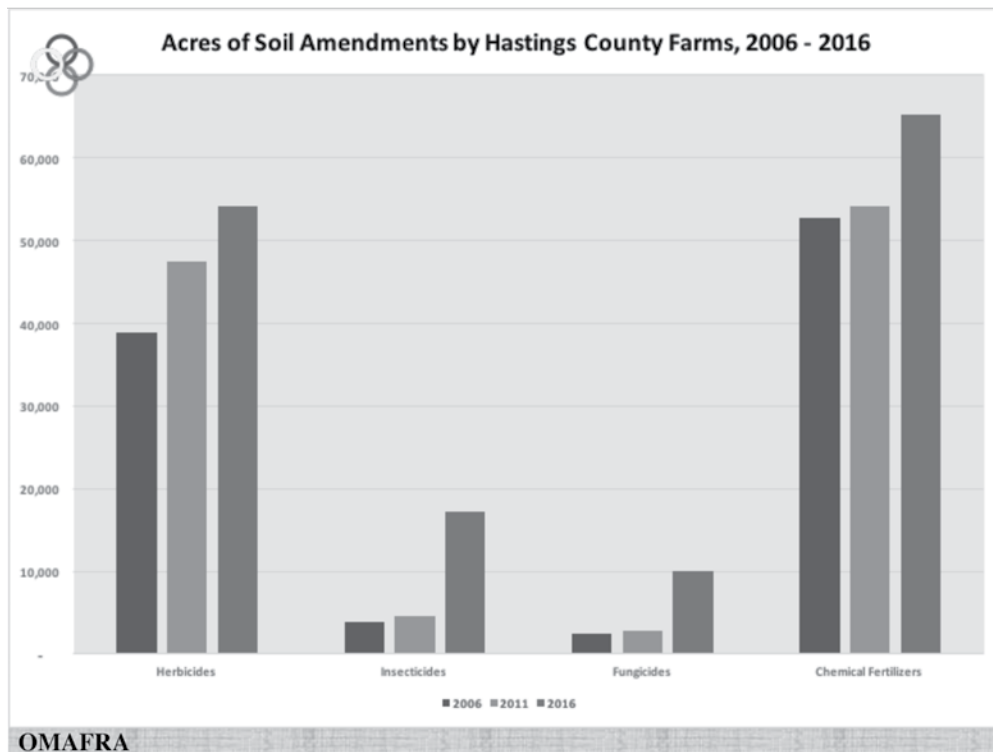


Figure 3: Acres of Soil Amendments: 2006-2016

2. The critical challenge of achieving sustainable farm livelihoods

The environmental and social sustainability of agriculture depends on farmers making a viable livelihood. All types of farmers are facing this growing challenge as costs rise and farm receipts stay level or decline. There remains a broader economic crisis in agriculture which has taken its toll for decades across Canada, and which continues to hit Hastings County severely, with significant impacts on rural community health and on mental health in farming families. Our interviews revealed that farmers of all types were struggling with mental health challenges as they tried to keep their farms economically viable. For some, the struggle was a day-to-day anxiety of maintaining the quality of their farm while also earning enough money to cover living expenses. For others, it was anxiety over debt that they had incurred in order to keep their farm competitive. Over and over again, farmers spoke of the regulatory pressure to modernize their infrastructure, their equipment, and their record keeping, or risk losing their markets or their licenses. As one farmer said, *“Cash flow and the availability of the right funds... [can make] your life miserable ... I don’t mind the workload, or working every day, or never getting to go anywhere, ... [but] it is the constant stress about finances.”*

The trend we see in Hastings County also exists at the national and provincial level in Canada, though the Hastings situation is worse. Between 2006 and 2016, the number of farms in Canada declined by 83,056 farms. The majority of those losses were from farms with fewer than 760 acres (approximately 70 per cent) and about half of the losses were in farms with fewer than 400 acres (51 per cent). Ontario experienced a decline in the number of farm families from 38,000 in 1997 to about 28,000 in 2013 (StatCan 002-0024). In comparison to Ontario as a whole, Hastings County has had a greater than average loss of total farm numbers, total farm area and total land in crops over the last two census periods (Duff, 2018).

Almost all of the farmers interviewed expressed concerns about increasing costs of inputs, skyrocketing hydro bills, the difficulty of getting loans from banks, and the cost of both land and taxes. Figure 4 shows that from 2010 to 2016 growing expenses have outpaced growth in farm receipts, resulting in a decline in net cash income from direct farm activities for all of the producers in Hastings County. At the same time, the number of farms in the county has also declined. As one farmer asked, *“How is anybody still doing business in Ontario with these prices? I don’t understand that.”* Another farmer argued that *“the ability for you to make a decent living [farming] is getting harder and harder.”*

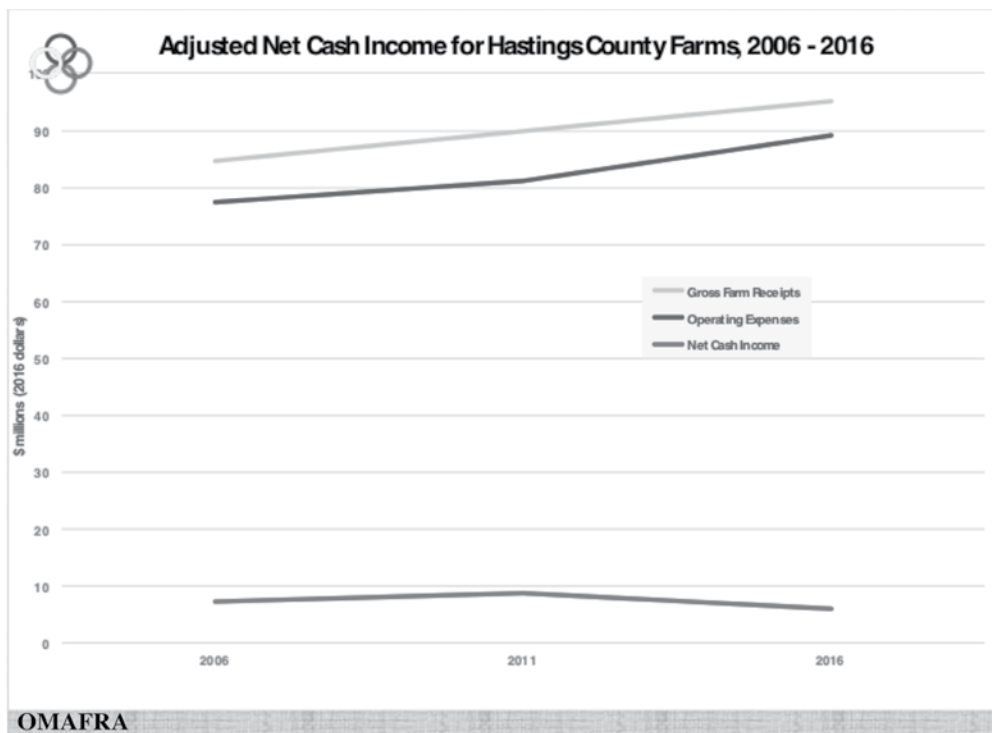


Figure 4: Adjusted Net Cash Income for Hastings County Farms 2006-2016

The general picture of net cash income found in Figure 4 (above; produced by Crossroads Research Centre) belies major differences among the various jurisdictions in the county, as illustrated in Figure 5 (next page). Higher net cash income in 2011 was supported, in particular, by relatively high incomes from cash cropping and dairy farming in Quinte West and in Stirling-Rawdon at that time. Meanwhile, net cash income steadily declined in Belleville, while it steadily increased in Tyendinaga township. Net farm income in the northern townships of Hastings County remained relatively stable (and relatively low compared to the southern townships and towns) over this ten year period.



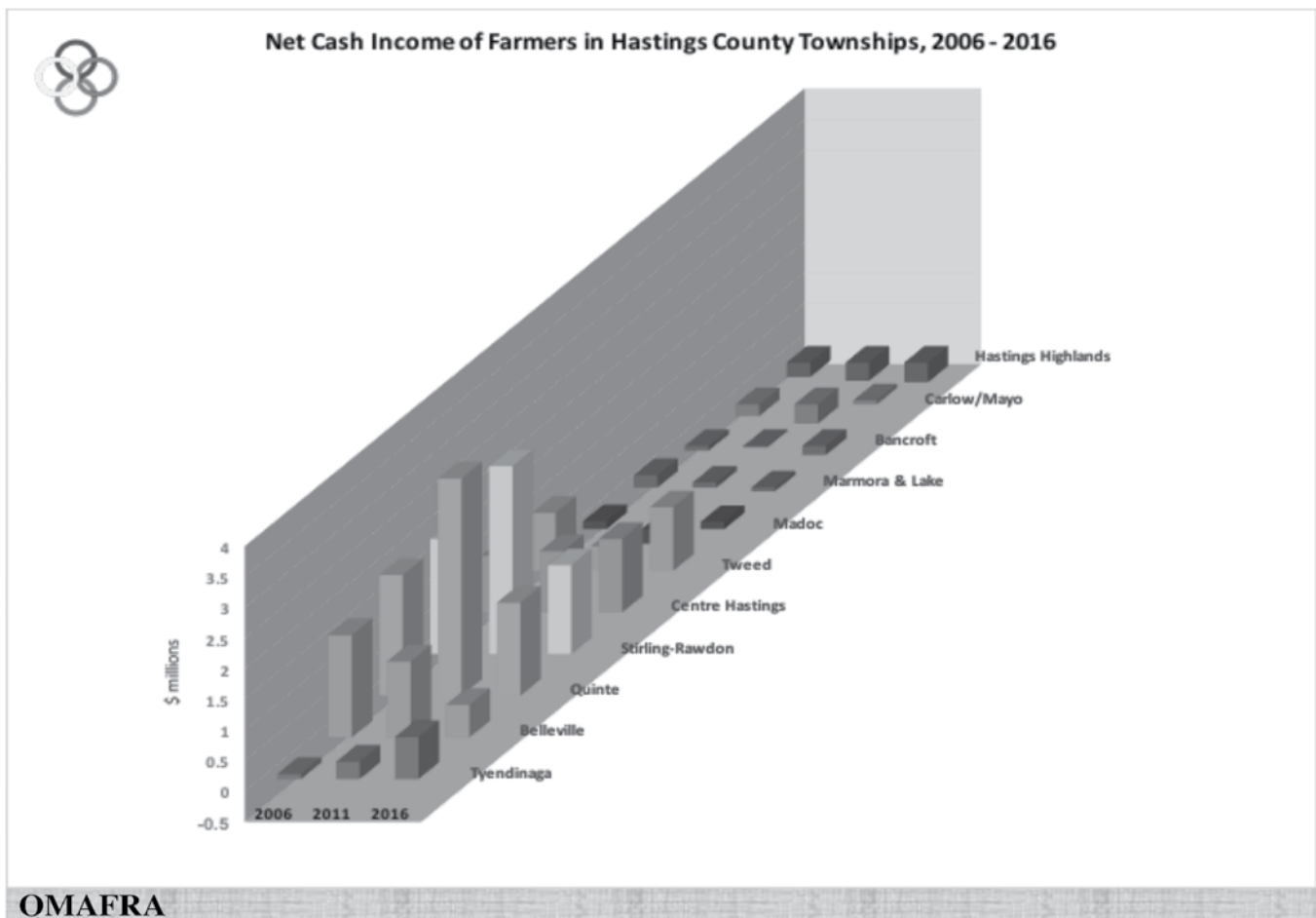


Figure 5: Net Cash Income of Farmers in Hastings County Townships: 2006-2016¹⁰

Many farmers identified corporate consolidation as one of the reasons that input prices are outpacing the cash returns they get for their products. Corporate consolidation refers to buy-outs and mergers that leave fewer, larger, companies in each segment of the agriculture supply chain. Consolidation tends to raise fertilizer, seed and pesticide prices, machinery prices, and feed prices, while lowering the prices paid to farmers by food processors, distributors and grocery stores. As one farmer said,

“I’m not sure what can be done about the buying up by food companies of feed stores and so on. What tends to happen is that if you own the trucks and you own the feed, you price the feed and price all of your competition right out of business. We have seen a significant increase in the price of feed in the last 10 years really, much faster than the rise in food prices, for sure.”

Our interviews emphasized how difficult this economic situation is for small farms, in particular, and it is noteworthy that Hastings County has proportionately more small farms (both in size and income levels) than the provincial average. Approximately 35 per cent of farms in the province are under 129 acres, whereas, in Hastings County, that figure is approximately 45 per cent (Statistics Canada 2016). Further, in

¹⁰ Some farmers work land in more than one municipality within Hastings County. Their income would be included in this chart under their “home” farm.

Hastings County the number of very small farms (under 10 acres) is on the rise. The number of such farms rose from 41 to 50 between 2011 and 2016 (Statistic Canada 2016). In Hastings County there are only 25 farms in the County that are over 1,200 acres.

Owners of small farms spoke about how difficult it is to make ends meet. *“It’s getting harder and harder... for the smaller family farm to be sustainable. So there has got to be a way that the small family farm can keep going and that’s the challenge. It’s making it so that it’s not so ridiculously expensive that they can’t continue.”* One farmer simply stated: *“We are losing our small farms.”*

3) Three farmer types: adaptive, entrepreneurial, and heritage farmers

The work to address agricultural sustainability in Hastings County must recognize that, notwithstanding many commonalities, Hastings County farmers do not all have the same goals and needs. In order to capture some of these differences, we created three categories: “adaptive farmers”, “entrepreneurs”, and the “heritage” (for additional details, see box 1 on next page).¹¹

Adaptive farmers: commodity producers adapting to changing circumstances and surviving by getting bigger; producing corn, soybean, dairy, poultry, cow-calf/feedlot, hogs.

Entrepreneurs: diversified producers, selling at farmers’ markets, to restaurants, and through community shared agriculture. Many also add value through processing.

Heritage farmers: Commodity or diversified producers working at a small or medium scale. They are primarily motivated by a commitment to the land, family, community and the farming lifestyle.

We recognize that these categories do not capture all the varieties of farming in Hastings County, and that many farmers will see themselves in more than one category. Still, we believe they help clarify some of our findings and recommendations. Each group has distinct aspirations and needs when it comes to supporting their ambitions around agricultural sustainability. Further, healthy food and agricultural systems need diverse types of farms: some with deep cultural taproots, others focused on innovation, and still others working at higher volumes of production. Any healthy farm and food system also needs to have entry points for new farmers so that the sector can regenerate itself. Finally, it is important to recognize that these different farm types are increasingly dependent on one another as neighbours and farming community in Hastings County.



¹¹ Our research has not yet included two specific ethnic groups of farmers: a growing population of Amish farmers and Indigenous farmers from Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory. We believe these groups will likely fall into one of the three categories defined here, but cannot say this for certain until we talk with them. Their needs and aspirations will also have a role in shaping the future of agriculture in Hastings County.

Box 1: Three types Hastings County farmers

“Adaptive”: These farmers typically grow for mass commodity markets and have adapted to the industry pressure of “get bigger or get out” by getting bigger. They may grow cash crops, produce milk, raise poultry, hogs, have cow-calf operations or feed lots. They typically do it as intensively as their land allows, although most also try to ensure the environmental sustainability of their operations. Many have bought out neighbours’ properties, or rent additional land in order to produce more. These farmers have been challenged by a lack of market power to set prices, and are the survivors of the competition this situation has produced among farmers. Even while surviving in farming, they are challenged to make ends meet, increasingly turning to off-farm income sources (rather than re-organizing their businesses to focus on different markets, like the “entrepreneurs” below) as their way to keep their farms afloat, and are often having to manage significant farm debt. Adaptive farmers represent a large, albeit threatened, group in Hastings County’s farm community (both in terms of number and in terms of how many acres they have under production), especially in the southern part of the County.

“Entrepreneurs”: Some in this category come from a long history of farmers, but others may be new to farming, either taking it up in early retirement or as young people interested in contributing to food production in Canada. They are entrepreneurial in their approach, often (like some of the heritage farmers below) seeking to sell directly to customers through farmers’ markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) schemes, or through sales directly to restaurants and other buyers. They tend to have smaller farms and are more likely to produce niche products, such as organic produce. Many entrepreneurs have a strong ethic of sustainability, although they may act on it differently than the other farm types (e.g. by adopting certified organic practices). New farmers in this category are attracted to Hastings County because of the relatively smaller parcel sizes available, and the lower prices of land compared to other parts of Ontario. The flip side for them, however, is that the population in Hastings County is less economically affluent than Toronto or Ottawa, so selling directly to customers may require marketing their wares into Toronto or Ottawa. Farmers in this group wish to make farming a full-time, often family affair, but many need to retain outside income sources at this time. These entrepreneurs represent a small but growing part of the farm community throughout Hastings County. The growth of this type of farming is one reason why Hastings County had a greater increase in the number of farm operators under 35 years of age and increase in farms less than 10 acres over the last ten years than other parts of Ontario.

“Heritage” This type represents a large group of land-owners and farmers in Hastings County who farm out of a commitment to their land, maintaining a family tradition, living a farming lifestyle, or because they want to contribute to healthy food production for themselves and their communities. While there are clear overlaps in this description with the other two types, the distinction is that many of our heritage farmers have not really been interested in “getting bigger” (like the adaptive farmers) and are thus best defined as running “small” farms (in terms of gross sales), nor are most interested in becoming entrepreneurial innovators. Like Adaptive farmers, “Heritage” farmers are resourceful. However, this group is more likely than others to rely on self-sufficiency strategies, used or shared equipment and direct marketing. Despite limited prospects for income, the heritage farmers stick with it because they appreciate the other benefits of farming – being rooted to their property, serving as stewards of the land, knowing where their food comes from, raising families on farms, connecting to neighbours over time, etc. For some, however, they are the owners of farms and homes that have been in their family for generations and the anxiety and guilt of being the one to lose the farm keeps them from giving up. Many heritage farmers work full-time on their farm. This group is likely larger in Hastings County (especially in central and northern parts of the County) than in other parts of Ontario because land prices are relatively lower and soil quality lower (thus reducing competition for that land).

4) **Off-farm income is both lifeline and curse**

Off-farm income represents an important economic survival strategy for more than half of Hastings County farms, of all types. According to provincial statistics, only 41 per cent of the individuals who claim 'farming' as their main occupation in Hastings County work full time on their farms (the provincial average is 49 per cent) (Duff 2018) and over half of all farm operators in Hastings County have another source of income. Most farmers we interviewed had at least one family member working, either full-time or part-time, off the farm, and the income generated is critical to the financial viability of the farm as a whole. As one farmer explained, *"it's a big job for a farmer to get into farming. For Hastings County, from what I see, is that for somebody that wants to farm, get in there and get 100 or 200 acres and rent a couple of farms next door, do it on a small scale, you can live a good life. But you've got to work someplace else."*

The reliance on off-farm income to keep farming is a challenge that farmers in Hastings County struggle with in different ways.

One said, *"I found that when I got going [farming], every year I needed that job a little worse."* Another said, sarcastically, that farming was a "hobby" that they effectively paid for through other employment: *"We both have other off farm income to be able to afford the farming hobby."* A third suggested, with some frustration: *"[The] wage is just happiness. It's not monetary."* Finally, some farmers feel strongly that relying on off-farm income is inherently incompatible with how they want to live as farmers: *"I don't think it works properly if one works off farm and the other runs the farm... This is always on your mind. It's a whole family affair."*

Notwithstanding these personal and family struggles, from an asset-based perspective it is important to recognize that the availability of off-farm employment in Hastings County, whether in rural communities or in the nearby towns and cities, Bancroft, Quinte West and Belleville, is a critical asset. This asset allows many farmers to continue with their farming activities despite declining farm-gate revenues. It also allows many farms to operate at scales that are simply too small to provide a viable family income. We spoke to farmers who had family members working as teachers, nurses, mechanics, summer camp employees, and hospital staff. Other farmers are finding off-farm income sources doing "custom-work" for newcomers who are buying up agricultural land in the County.

5) **The challenge of inter-generational farm succession**

Inter-generational farm succession is a significant challenge. In our interviews, farmers of all types voiced concern about succession. This challenge is especially acute for those farmers with many on-farm assets and/or high levels of debt who have children that would like to take over the farms. Farmers often put all of their earnings into their farms and have difficulty retiring without selling their farm and equipment. Some also pointed out that even if their children wanted to farm, they might not be able to afford to purchase the family farm. Multiple farmers discussed plans to incorporate their farms in order to support multiple children, pointing out how difficult succession planning can be when multiple children were involved. Some farmers with more than one child

interested in farming also spoke of plans to enlarge their operations in order to support their children.

Through farm organizations like the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, there are resources and supports available for assisting with farm succession. Some farmers accessed professional support for succession planning through farm organizations and through federal or provincial government grants. (see Appendix B)

6) **The challenge of welcoming and supporting new farmers**

Retirements create opportunities for new farmers in Hastings County, because of relatively low land prices, and smaller land parcel sizes. There is a need to integrate new, non-traditional, farmers into the rural community and to capitalize on their strengths. These new and aspiring farmers need to be given a chance to contribute, to be mentored, to be supported, and to become the “neighbours” that are relied upon in the next generation farm community

Some new farmers spoke about the important role that mentors or benefactors played in their ability to get started: *“I was renting a piece of land, and was given access to equipment. [The farmer] had the knowhow... was there to help if I was freaking out or needed to know something.”* Having a mentor or the opportunity for internships is a huge boost to many new farmers. Discussing the idea of having students apprentice with them, one farmer argued that *“then they stand to gain the knowledge that [we have] from experience. And then, that’s priceless. Knowledge by experience is priceless.”* Another farmer pointed out that it would help new farmers to be *“connected with those people who do know the land and have knowledge. The apprenticeships are great and a great way to learn whether it is something that you actually want to do.”* Fortunately, there are non-governmental organizations in Ontario that assist beginning farmers (see, in particular, FarmStart, FarmLINK and Farms at Work listed in Appendix A). Nonetheless, both new and long-time farmers voiced concerns that more support, both financial and mentor-based, is needed in Hastings County.

7) **Community-Based Food System development: an opportunity for collaboration**

Entrepreneurial farmers are addressing the sustainable livelihood challenge by creating businesses that add value to their product through processing and/or engaging in direct sales to customers. These approaches enable the farmers to have more control over the price they are paid. Despite many challenges, there is room for more collaborative efforts to strengthen these opportunities. Collaboration can include joint marketing initiatives (through Facebook or other social media), and a coordinated plan for strengthening the community food system in Hastings County. (For more detail, see the recommendations section below).

At the community level, interviewees discussed a number of built community assets, both from within Hastings County and nearby. These include accessible provincially and federally-inspected meat processing plants¹², which are a critical piece of the supply chain for farmers raising livestock. Interviewees also identified several community hubs that have helped farms to aggregate, process or distribute locally produced agricultural products, such as Grills Orchards. The Quinte Organic Members Coop which is no longer operating and the Two Rivers Food Hub in Smith Falls which is no longer distributing product although it continues to offer a site for food processing and storage. Farmers’ markets, found in various communities in or very close to Hastings County,

¹² Notably absent in the region is a federally-inspected abattoir. Without one, locally produced meat is not graded and thus not accepted by the supermarket chains or inter provincially.

as well as external markets such as those in Toronto, are important for some Hastings County farmers. 2016 Ontario data shows that 220 Hastings County farms sell direct to household consumers. This represents 23% of all farms compared to the provincial average of 15%. Of this number, 198 sell to consumers directly from their farm gate (Duff, 2018). Thirty-nine participate in farmers' markets. Notably, selling at farmers' markets involves many challenges. For example, selling in Toronto can involve a weekly drive of as many as four hours each way for producers in the Northern part of Hastings County. Some farmers we spoke to who want to sell directly to customers in speciality markets have simply not been able to make the right connections to those markets.

Several of our interviewees (both farmers and non-farmers) spoke about a growing opportunity associated with local production for distribution to local customers who are looking for foods that they trust. One farmer noted,

“we can hardly keep an egg in the place now. And potatoes and all kinds of vegetables and they’ll drive here to pick their stuff up. And they’ve told other people and now they’re calling and they are coming here. People nowadays want to know that there’s no chemicals in their food...”. Another said: “People want to know what’s in their food... that’s the niche now”.

This growing interest in “local” food offers real opportunities, but it needs to be put in perspective. Since the Second World War Ontario has seen a steady increase in the percentage of imported foods due to a rising population, rising incomes, changing demographics, and an increasingly liberalized trade environment. Today, Ontario imports about 40 percent of the food consumed in the province, up from under 30 percent just twenty years ago (Duff 2018). One of the impacts of this provincial trend is the loss of the apple crop in Hastings County. Alongside Prince Edward County, the southern part of Hastings County used to have significant apple production. Demand for this crop fell away, to be replaced in Prince Edward County by wineries. As one farmer noted, *“now if you go to [Prince Edward] County, there’s a lot of grapes for wineries and the apples have kind of gone away.”*



Despite the overarching trend towards increased imports, there are opportunities for stronger connections between local producers and consumers in Hastings County. Hastings County has a net purchasing power of \$3 Billion/year (Meter 2018), and much of the food that residents buy *could* be produced within the county, as we see in Figure 6 (focused on produce, which is the easiest sector to expand), generated by OMAFRA based on average provincial consumption levels.

Figure 6: Hastings County Food Needs, 2016

	Hastings Co. Consumption	Area Required to Meet Demand	Produced in Hastings Co.	Net
Produce	Total (kg)	Total (acres)	Total (acres)	(Acres)
Apples	2,419,600	227	82	-145
Asparagus	140,046	67	19	-48
Beans (Green & Wax)	298,117	102	14	-88
Beets	165,004	13	12	-1
Broccoli	525,518	149	6	-143
Cabbage	593,461	52	8	-44
Carrots	1,329,740	65	15	-50
Cauliflower	420,137	59	7	-52
Celery	422,910	18	1	-17
Cucumber	367,446	37	13	-24
Dry Onion	1,209,106	77	13	-64
Peaches	249,586	74	0	-74
Pears	295,344	102	5	-97
Green Peas	180,257	95	7	-88
Peppers	562,956	54	9	-45
Potatoes	7,762,131	901	61	-840
Pumpkins	452,028	59	52	-7
Radishes	80,422	15	2	-13
Rutabagas & Turnips	148,365	14	4	-10
Spinach	189,963	68	3	-65
Strawberries	550,476	173	42	-131
Sweet Corn	924,856	205	299	94
Tomatoes	4,231,873	143	43	-100

**Sources: OMAFRA/1. Statistics Canada, “Food available in Canada”, CANSIM 002-0011;
2. Statistics Canada, Fruit and Vegetable Survey.**

In response to the data found in Figure 6, Hastings County, in cooperation with local stakeholders, could launch an initiative to make sure that all of these acres are actually planted in the county, and that every resident can purchase each of these products, and that suitable storage is available. This opportunity

does need to be put into the context of Hastings average incomes (discussed above), however. Hastings County has a high proportion of households with limited flexibility in what they can pay for food. Still, a minority of the population has higher than average incomes for Ontario, especially those with work in nearby cities or who own cottages in the northern part of the County. These households can pay a greater portion of their income for food, and might do so if offered the opportunities to directly support local farmers through CSAs, local restaurants (that prioritize buying directly from farmers), markets, and similar mechanisms. We spoke with at least one producer who takes their product all the way to Toronto instead of serving Hastings county markets. They noted the fact that they sought “... *more access to closer markets, because it is a huge time commitment going to Toronto. It eats up a day and a half and gas is going up.*”

Our research also shows that making connections between local producers and consumers requires an educational dimension as well as investments in infrastructure and sustained marketing outreach (e.g. “*You cannot buy green peppers in January... the first thing that comes around is asparagus which will be in May*”). Further, the producer (or a group of producers) needs to ensure “*consistency the whole year through*” in order to supply a hospital or institution, which can be a significant challenge for many products given the seasonal dimension to food production in Hastings County.

After looking carefully at agriculture in Hastings County, and drawing on his experience working with farm communities across the United States, agricultural analyst Ken Meter proposes a number of strategic ways that local governments can invest in community-based food systems in Hastings County. These strategies involve investing in infrastructure to create efficiencies in community foods trade and offer meaningful incentives to local farmers. Infrastructure is here defined broadly to include information, research and knowledge bases, commercial networks, and consumer outreach, in addition to physical facilities such as transportation corridors, warehouses, and farmers’ markets. Ken Meter’s proposals have been incorporated into our recommendations to local organizations and governments.

Given the economic context of Hastings County, which has significant levels of poverty and food insecurity, it is important that any effort to develop the community-based food systems of the County also include efforts to enhance food security for all. In recent decades, food banks have played an important role in helping families in precarious situations access food, and this is equally true in Hastings County. Food banks only provide part of the answer, however, and increasingly food banks in Canada are adopting a new approach promoted by Community Food Centres Canada (CFCC). Built on the thirty-year experience of The Stop in Toronto, CFCC re-envisioned the traditional food bank. The Stop Community Food Centre brings together a food bank, urban agriculture, skills training, meal programs, community kitchens, perinatal and family support, farmers’ markets, food policy advocacy, and more (Saul and Curtis 2013). The Stop sees itself to be “at the forefront of dignified, innovative programs that provide access to healthy food; build skills, health, hope, and community; and confront the underlying issues that lead to poverty and hunger.” CFCC also contracts local farmers for much of the food they use in their programs, while promoting smallholder farmers by running farmers’ markets as well as festivals that promote local agriculture (Andrée et al. 2017). Organizations like Harvest the North are bringing this approach to Hastings County, hoping to transform food banks into community centres that enhance food access while also serving as community food hubs for local food producers.

8) Regulatory and zoning challenges that inhibit business development

Farmers seeking to pursue value added production and direct sales face significant regulatory challenges. Some of these challenges come from provincial and federal regulations. Others come from the local level.

Addressing this regulatory burden to small and mid-sized farm businesses in Hastings County offers an important opportunity for government engagement to support sustainable livelihoods.

Many farmers spoke about being regulated out of farming. To a certain extent, people balanced this with recognition of the reasons regulations exist, but there was a general sentiment that too many regulations were designed for industrial-sized operations and that smaller sized farms were being overly burdened. Farmers spoke about the expenses of egg grading and food labelling that they felt were overly strict, especially for local off-farm sales. Other farmers mentioned recent requirements for nutritional labeling on maple syrup, while still others highlighted the strict labeling requirement of Health Canada for personal care products. There was also a general sense of anxiety from many farmers that further regulatory restrictions were likely and that they did not know how they would be able to handle them. Farmers spoke of changing requirements for animal handling facilities and for traceability that were expensive both in terms of time and money.

Further, while those interviewed recognized the role of supply management systems in protecting farmers, they noted that today quota restrictions for chickens and turkeys effectively privilege large producers. Regulations by other market actors (rather than governments) were also raised as impediments, including the changing requirements of grocery stores and meat packaging and marketing facilities. Farmers voiced concern that corporate consolidation was leading to stricter purchasing guidelines, ultimately impacting small farms the most. As one farmer said, *“everywhere you turn around regulations are restricting you. It’s the regulations that are the biggest concern.”*

Significantly, in focus groups it was noted by participants working in economic development that all small businesses are all dealing with the challenges of steady income but increasing costs, including regulatory challenges. These results, in large part, are due to competition through the internet. As a result, *“[Local businesses] need to get as smart as the people marketing on the web,”* according to one focus group participant.

9) Opportunities to share and learn

Care by governments to eliminate undue regulatory requirements, combined with peer-to-peer learning opportunities (and thus financial support for not for profit organizations like Harvest Hastings that encourage this), as well as supports for direct marketing channels (e.g. farmers markets and food hubs) can enhance the sustainability of Hastings County’s farmers. Discussing peer-to-peer learning opportunities, one farmer talked about the possibility of *“getting maybe 20 farms in the area and then once a month everybody goes to the one farm and see what’s working for them – sharing knowledge, education... If there’s something they need done, then everyone will be there to help do that specific thing and have a potluck.”* Another farmer simply stated that *“knowledge by experience is priceless.”*

This strategy can also be tied in with efforts to create mentorships (discussed above) and they can connect with local schools to help connect children with food production. One farmer argued that *“... at the schools they could learn to grow stuff and see how exciting it is when you see the first stuff comes out of the soil.”* Fortunately, we did hear that some local schools in the county are growing cucumbers, tomatoes, arugula and other vegetables in outdoor garden plots as well as indoors.

10) Hope lies in natural assets, community knowledge, resources and networks.

Hope for the future comes from the substantial resources and knowledge base, community networks and natural assets the agricultural sector can draw on, if supported by sound public policy made by all

levels of government. The stories, commitment and values expressed by Hastings County farmers in our interviews show that there are significant challenges, but there is also hope for the future of farming in the County. One farmer told a story about a structure collapsing on their farm and the support they got from a neighbour:

“A neighbour came over to help out ... Neighbours are definitely instrumental in making things happen.” Another farmer talked about the importance of farming for their kids: *“Everybody says that if you’re not making money, you should get out but we’re feeding our family too. The kids do get something out of it. They’re proud if they eat a cow that they know the name of.”*

Concern for and commitment to the health of the land, the community, and future generations was evident in almost every interview we conducted.

What is needed in Hastings County, is to build on this family-level ethic and commitment to farming and create a true county-wide commitment to food and agriculture. The promise of a “community-based food system”, as articulated in this report, is that the sense of local heritage becomes stronger, and incentivized through public policy and citizen actions. We believe that a food and farm culture that sustains adaptation, entrepreneurship, and heritage across all of its farms can be built on the resources, networks and assets that already exist in Hastings County. To achieve this promise, we offer the following recommendations to local government and community organizations:



Recommendations for local government and community organizations

1) Recognize the economic crisis in agriculture, and especially the impacts on farmer mental health and that of their families, as a complex set of ongoing and serious challenges.

The first step could be for local community organizations to cooperate with national organizations (like the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and National Farmers Union) and local mental health services to convene a meeting on this challenge.

2) Build on the wealth of agricultural knowledge and experience in the County through field days, workshops, an annual conference and other events that allow new and experienced farmers to learn from one another. Harvest Hastings, in partnership with other local, regional and provincial organizations, can play a lead role in organizing, promoting, and/or delivering these events.

3) Increase the level of coordination and collaboration among public and non-profit organizations that support agriculture in Hastings County. At our second focus group, Brad Labadie from The Centre for Workplace Development stated he would convene a meeting of these organizations. At that meeting, we also learned from Karen Fisher that OMAFRA has the beginnings of a database that lists each organization and its role. This database could be updated and shared.

4) Develop a core mission at the county and city levels that commits the municipalities to supporting community-based food system development, building on existing commitments to local agriculture in the Official Plans and related municipal initiatives. The intent of the County's Official Plan is "... to provide opportunities to support local food, and promote the sustainability of agri-food and agri-product businesses by protecting agricultural resources, and minimizing land use conflicts" (Hastings County 2017 p.113) It also notes that "all types, sizes and intensities of agricultural uses and normal farm practices shall be promoted and protected in accordance with provincial standards" (ibid. p.123). Finally, there is a section called the "Emerging Rural Economy" which seeks to "...encourage and accommodate a range of economic activities that contribute to the diversity of the County's economy and assessment base including agriculture..." (ibid. p.130). These commitments can be expanded upon by funding a local organization like Harvest Hastings to act as a connector between local farms and food businesses, and relevant economic development supports (OMAFRA, etc.) as well as taking the lead on other recommendations listed here.

5) Develop an inventory of existing community agriculture and food infrastructure and services important to the community (e.g. farmers' markets, abattoirs, food hubs, veterinary services) and then identify how to maintain this infrastructure.

6) Undertake feasibility studies to assess potential new community food infrastructure such as modern washing, packing and distribution facilities, where appropriate. Feasibility studies should also consider how to make better use of existing infrastructure like the Colborne Agri-Food Venture Centre. These studies could also examine the potential role of small refrigerated vehicles (such as Sprinter Vans) that can efficiently convey smaller quantities of food shorter distances. Community warehousing could expand the ability of farms, restaurants, grocers, and institutions to source food from local farms, especially for root crops that are easy to grow in Hastings County and could be stored for winter use. Coordinated transportation routes might allow smaller growers to better access wholesale accounts. Together, this infrastructure would build new efficiencies in community food trade and could be designed to connect farmers with local consumers as well as offering other community services. These studies can be funded on a case-by-case basis through funders like Ontario Trillium Foundation and could draw on the expertise of local organizations, university or college researchers, and local governments.

7) Develop virtual food hubs using social media like Facebook and Twitter. A social media-based food hub would directly connect farmers with one another and with local customers.¹³ This is not the same as having products listed on an organizational website. It would involve active posting of products as they become available or are needed. This is best started by the farmers who already use social media to market their products, supported by an organization like Harvest Hastings and its network.

8) Mobilize consumer support through outreach campaigns. For example, a “Buy \$5 a week” from Hastings County farms campaign (this would translate into over \$35 M/year income for local farms). If Hastings County farmers are to gain lasting support from consumers in the county, consumer spending must be mobilized through sustained campaigns. One campaign that has been taken root in many locales is a message that combines food and health: “Eat 5, Buy 5.” This tagline urges consumers to eat five fruits and vegetables per day for better health outcomes, and purchase \$5 of food each week from some farm in Hastings County. Since such a campaign could be launched with minimal investment of a few hundred dollars at first, potential returns are quite high. Some municipalities have adopted a simpler slogan; “Buy \$5 a Week.” Although this does not explicitly incorporate health, it is nevertheless a positive step toward supporting county farmers.

9) Develop a coordinated marketing strategy for Hastings County farmers’ markets and other venues (e.g. restaurants) that sell locally produced foods. In addition to existing efforts like the Harvest Hastings ‘Eat, Buy, Live Local!’ magazine, this marketing strategy could include:

- Placing photos of County Farmers in county grocery stores that sell their product
- Hosting gatherings where food from these farms, and the farmers themselves, are featured
- Convening local chefs, grocers, and food-service directors to encourage them to purchase food from county farms. Many communities have used a “speed dating” format. Specific commitments to purchase certain quantities at fair prices have been made.
- Compiling annual data reports that show how much food has been purchased from farmers in the county by county consumers and wholesale buyers
- Compiling annual maps showing the commercial networks that have been built through community food trade
- Incentivising County agencies to purchase food from these farms
- Hosting regular entrepreneurs’ gatherings to build greater trust and commitment to fostering a strong local economy

Leadership on this initiative can come from Hastings County Economic Development and organizations like Harvest Hastings.

10) Collaborate with Community Food Centres Canada and like-minded organizations to help local food banks become community centres that provide more than access to emergency food. They can also provide skills development, food literacy, policy advocacy, and work in partnership with local farmers. These centres can also serve as physical community food hubs. At our first focus group we learned that Alexandra Wetelaken (Sunrun Farms), together with Harvest the North, is taking the lead on this strategy in the northern part of Hastings County. Her initiative can be connected with similar efforts in the south through Harvest Hastings.

¹³ Consumers could also use this vehicle to organize themselves into cooperative buying groups to buy from local farmers at scale, an idea proposed by Vernon Molloy from Centre Hastings.

11) Collaborate with organizations such as Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the National Farmers Union to offer more succession planning and support for all types of farmers.

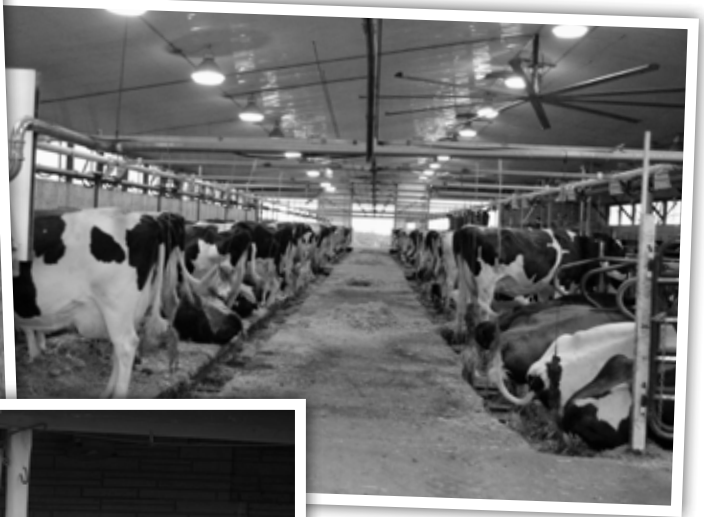
12) Collaborate with organizations like Farms at Work and FarmStart to develop more land access and mentoring opportunities for new farmers. An example which could be emulated would be that, Peterborough and the Kawarthas Economic Development recently announced plans to develop an online tool geared towards connecting new farmers with veteran producers.¹⁴

13) Continue to protect farmland in Hastings County, City of Belleville and City of Quinte West and by adopting zoning codes, tax incentives or developing other programs that reduce the cost of land for bona fide agricultural use. Development pressure has not only removed farmland from production, but also has raised land values to the point where few farmers can afford to buy land based on what they can produce on it. Some municipalities in the US have purchased farmland at the development value, and made it available to farmers who raise food for local consumers.

14) Review all agriculture and food-related regulations (including new bylaws and zoning decisions, etc.) through a 'small business lens' to minimize impact on smaller farm businesses.

This initiative could be led by the economic development branches of local and County governments.

14 <https://m.farms.com/ag-industry-news/peterborough-develops-farmer-mentor-tool-354.aspx>



References:

- Andrée, Peter. Patricia Ballamingie, Stephen Piazza, and Scott Jarosiewicz. 2017. Can community-based initiatives address the conundrum of improving household food access while supporting local smallholder farmer livelihoods? *Nourishing Communities: From Fractured Food Systems to Transformative Pathways*. Knezevic, I., Blay-Palmer, A., Levkoe, C.Z., Mount, P., Nelson, E. (Eds.) Springer. pp.77-94
- Duff, Steve. 2018. Economic Resilience for Local Food: Hastings county. Chief Economist, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. March 15. (on file with authors)
- Hastings County. 2017. The Hastings County Official Plan. December. <http://www.hastingscounty.com/sites/default/files/documents/planning-land-development/official-plan/1%20-%20Official%20Plan%20Part%20A.pdf>
- Livingstone, Louise. 2018. "Diversity in a Diverse Landscape." *Harvest Hastings, Eat, Buy, Live, Local!* 2nd Edition.
- Meter, Ken. 2018. Finding Food in Farm Country: Hastings County, Ontario. Crossroads Resource Centre, March 17. <http://www.crcworks.org/crcppts/onhastings180317.pdf>
- Meter, Ken. 2007. 'Evaluating Farm and Food Systems in the U.S.' in Williams, B. & Imam, I. (Eds, 2007) *Systems Concepts for Evaluation*, pp. 141-160. Point Reyes, CA: American Evaluation Association monograph published by EdgePress of Inverness.
- Redden, Andrew. 2006. "Hastings County Agriculture." Hastings County Economic and Tourism Development Unit. <http://www.hastingscounty.com/sites/default/files/documents/planning-land-development/industry-employment/hastings-sector-profile-agri-mar19-09.pdf>
- Saul, N. and A. Curtis. 2013. *The Stop: How the Fight for Good Food Transformed a Community and Inspired a Movement*. Toronto, ON: Random House.
- Statistics Canada. 2016a. Table 32-10-0418-01 Vegetables (excluding greenhouse vegetables). <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3210041801&pickMembers%5b0%5d=1.1202&pickMembers%5b1%5d=2.1>
- Statistics Canada. 2016b. Table 32-10-0404-01 Farms classified by total farm area. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3210040401&pickMembers%5b0%5d=1.1202>

Appendix A: Asset Mapping Workshops

On October 15 and 16, 2018 we hosted two asset-mapping workshops in Maynooth and Corbyville respectively. Invitees were invited to focus on the assets that sustain farming and food systems in Hastings County, and how these assets can be strengthened. Given our research findings to date, we asked participants to specifically focus on *those assets that are most important to sustaining the economic livelihood of agricultural producers in Hastings County*. Using this collective, inclusive and realistic approach to understanding the local context, these workshops identified an important array of assets, as revealed in the photographs on this page. These assets were organized according to a simple typology: Natural, Built, Service, Economic and Social (Figure 7).



Figure 7: Asset Mapping Framework

Each group then focused on three specific assets, identifying the supports, threats and opportunities associated with each asset. These discussions informed both the presentation of findings and the recommendations made in this report. Note: these goals are not presented in an order of priority.

Maynooth, Hastings Highlands results:

Goal 1: To capitalize on (and sustain) Hastings County's clean environment as a key agricultural asset

Asset (natural): The clean environment of Hastings County.

Challenges: It can be sustained, but there are localized threats (quarries, mining, etc.) and global threats (climate change). We cannot take the sustainability of this asset for granted.

Opportunity: A clean environment can be a selling proposition for producers, just like it is for large companies. There is growing demand among consumers about where food is coming from. From the perspective of consumers, Hastings County farms are more desirable than those next to big power plants. Cottagers also come for a clean environment.

Next Steps: Organizations and local farmers can continue to educate around sustainability. Present the seasonality of food as exciting.

Goal 2: Strengthen farmer networks and farmers' markets in North Hastings (including more sales to cottagers)

Assets (economic): farmers' markets; financial clout of cottager population.

Challenges: inconsistent supply from producers; inconsistent seasons; Markets face declining customer base. Short season. Markets not always meeting expectations; lack of labour (can't find those willing to work hard on farms). Need critical mass of vendors at markets.

Opportunities: Coordinated professional marketing of farmers' markets through Hastings County tourism and economic development. Can a class from Loyalist College help with this? Room for more greenhouses for early season extension.

Next steps: Virtual food hub (a network of local producers and buyers) for North Hastings (through Facebook or other social media); Identify and share grants for greenhouses/small business loans.

Goal 3: Ensure that Hastings County services that support food access, food literacy, skill building and knowledge sharing are sustainable and benefit from links to local agriculture.

Asset (Social) Harvest the North (and other food banks).

Challenges: Food bank is not sustainable. It needs collaboration involving farmers, workshops, volunteers and skill-sharing. Threats include limited funding, average age of volunteers, stigma associated with going to food bank.

Opportunities: The community food centre model makes such a difference. It seeks to reduce stigma of food bank; increase food literacy; support knowledge sharing, skills building, school gardens; Room for 4H in North Hastings to support cooking skills.

Next Steps: Alex from Harvest the North is looking at funding applications. Peter and Kim will include more material on food access and farmer livelihood intersections in the report.

Corbyville, City of Belleville results:

Goal 1: Take advantage of the Hastings County agricultural "brain trust"

Asset (Social): Hastings County still has a deep skill-set and a wealth of experience in agriculture.

Challenge: New farmers need mentorship and skills. Farmers can learn from one another as they adapt to changing circumstances. Youth need to learn where food comes from, how to prepare it, and about the career possibilities in agriculture.

Opportunities: Connect new producers and youth with the experience and skills in the county. Celebrate agriculture, both past and present. Make use of resources, including government programs and services.

Next steps: Strengthen linkages among new and existing farmers and farm organizations (e.g. link to Agribition). Increase agriculture's presence in elementary and high schools (including breakfast clubs using local food).

Goal 2: Increase coordination among organizations that support farm businesses

Asset (Service): Many different organizations are working to help Hastings County farmers with different mandates.

Challenges: Farmers (and these organizations themselves) don't all know what supports are available. There is limited coordination and collaboration among these organizations.

Opportunities: To work together to help farmers have more successful businesses. Shift the conversation from "what grants are available?" to "How can we be more profitable?" Together, organizations could adopt more of a bottom-up, "collective impact" (Kanie and Kramer 2011) approach.

Next Steps: Brad Labadie, Centre for Workplace Development plans to pull these organizations into a room together. This project offers a starting point by identifying key challenges and some opportunities (e.g. \$5/week campaign, shared marketing efforts for farmers' markets).

Goal 3: Maintain and strengthen the local infrastructure (abattoirs, sales-barns, veterinarians, etc.) that Hastings County farmers rely on.

Asset (Built): Hastings County has considerable local infrastructure, including some emergent infrastructure (e.g. Earth Haven farm now has a commercial kitchen).

Challenges: Much of the existing infrastructure is dependent on the large commodity producers whose buying power is bigger, but these farmers are also facing economic difficulties. The result is a fragile situation which small farmers also feel the effects of. Hastings lacks a nearby federal abattoir, but most supermarket policies require federal meat inspection. Municipal planning policies are pretty good, but are not necessarily based on a collective vision of the productive rural landscape we seek to encourage.

Opportunities: Hastings County can partner with facilities like the Ontario Agri-food Venture Centre in Northumberland County (through mini-satellites set up in local commercial kitchens?). Local governments can try to attract veterinarians just like they do with physicians.

Next Steps: Develop a better inventory of local infrastructure/facilities.



Appendix B: Existing organizations and Initiatives that support agricultural sustainability in Hastings County.

Jurisdiction	Organization	Website	Programs
Federal			
	Food Secure Canada	foodsecurecanada.org	Sustainability and advocacy
	National Farmers' Union	nfu.ca	Sustainability and advocacy
	Canadian Federation of Agriculture	cfa-fca.ca	Farmer advocacy
	Farm Credit Canada	www.fcc-fac.ca/en.html	Loans and succession planning
	FarmLink	farmlink.net	Matching farmers with farmland
	Canadian Organic Growers	www.cog.ca/home/about-us/about-cog/	Sustainability advocacy and support programs for organic farmers
	Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council	cahrc-ccrha.ca/about	Focused on human resource issues in agriculture



Provincial			
	OMAFRA	www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/	New farmer support and succession support
	FarmStart	farmstart.ca	Support for new farmers
	Agri-food Management Institute	takeanewapproach.ca	Business management for farmers
	Farms at Work	farmsatwork.ca	Educational opportunities for new and established farmers Mentorship and internship programs
	Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association	www.ontariosoilcrop.org	Responsible for Ontario's Canadian Agricultural Partnership programs
	Sustain Ontario	sustainontario.com	Sustainability advocacy
	The Organic Council of Ontario	www.organiccouncil.ca	Sustainability and advocacy for new farmers
	Ontario Farmland Trust	ontariofarmlandtrust.ca	Advocacy and support for farmland preservation in Ontario
	Ontario Federation of Agriculture	ofa.on.ca	Farmer advocacy
	Christian farmers of Ontario	christianfarmers.org	Farmer advocacy and sustainability
	Ecological Farmers of Ontario	efao.ca	Advocacy and support for sustainable farming
Local			
	Harvest Hastings	www.harvesthastings.ca	Advocacy, networking, advertisement
	Hastings Stewardship Council	hastingsstewardship.ca	Advocacy and support for agricultural and natural resources management in Hastings County
	Two Rivers Food Hub	tworiversfoodhub.com	Commercial kitchen, long-term freezer and cooler storage rentals, and food hub
	Hastings Federation of Agriculture	ofa.on.ca/federations/hastings/	Farmer advocacy





Social Sciences and
Humanities Research
Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches
en sciences humaines
du Canada

Canada

*This research was supported by the Social Sciences
and Humanities Research Council of Canada.*

