

Introduction

Of the 126,000 hectares that make up Strathcona County, approximately 100,000 hectares are used for agricultural purposes. This is the largest, single form of land use within the County. Agriculture, as it has done in the past, will continue to play a role in the County's overall character in the future.

According to the *Future of Agriculture Study, 2002*, traditional, medium-sized farming operations are on the decline. However, the number of smaller intensive agriculture operations such as; poultry farms, greenhouses, nurseries and specialty fruit and vegetable operations have been increasing in the County. While this trend has been noted, there has previously been little done to foster or promote the development of this growing sector of the agricultural industry.

Farming communities are facing many difficult challenges, which in turn threaten the future of agriculture not only in Strathcona County, but throughout Canada. The cost of fuel, fertilizer, chemicals, equipment as well as the cost of living, have steadily been outstripping the return on the commodities that farmers produce. In order to make their operations more economically viable, some farmers are diversifying their product lines or seeking employment off the farm. Many of those who continue to work the land have tried to purchase adjacent sites. In some areas it has been difficult for farmers to amass contiguous properties due to existing subdivision or fragmentation of land surrounding their operations.

Conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural land uses have been cited as an issue by both the general public and active farmers. Residential acreage owners may be negatively impacted by agriculture-related activities that occur sporadically throughout the year such as manure spreading or during specific times, such as spring seeding or fall harvest. Conversely, acreage owners may have negative impacts on farming operations, such as the problem of domesticated pets attacking livestock on neighbouring farms. Although Strathcona County recognizes this issue and will continue to work toward preventing future conflicts through policies that promote buffering between conflicting land uses, residents of the rural areas must be aware that Strathcona County is a strong supporter of right-to-farm legislation, as provided under the Agricultural Operation Practices Act.

The Agri-Industrial Transition Policy Area will act as a transition from heavy and medium industry to agricultural and light industrial land uses. The intent of this area is to provide for the development of intensive soil-based agriculture as well as primary and secondary processing of agricultural products. This area will be encouraged to incorporate synergy principles into development, such as the use of waste products from neighbouring heavy industrial uses as an energy source.

On January 1, 2002, amendments were made to the Agricultural Operation Practices Act which provided the Provincial Government with greater control over the development of "confined feeding operations" (CFOs). Applications for new or expanded CFOs, or any plans to build or change a manure storage facility, now require the approval of the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB). When reviewing applications, the NRCB is required to check for compliance with province-wide standards that have been developed. These standards are designed to ensure that operations are managed in ways that minimize negative impacts on existing residents (e.g. odour, noise and dust), protect the environment (e.g. water and soil contamination) and allow for the sustainable development of the industry.

Although municipalities have little control over the development of confined feeding operations, they can provide input with respect to the location of these operations. Municipalities are required by the province to identify conditions under which confined feeding operations may or may not occur through their Municipal Development Plan policies. When considering criteria, we must consider compatibility of the development with existing land uses as well as any land use changes that may be planned for the immediate area in the future.

Objectives

Strathcona County's agricultural objectives are to:

- 1) Maintain and enhance the viability of the existing agricultural community and agricultural industry;
- 2) Protect, wherever possible, agricultural land which has a Canada Land Inventory (C.L.I.) soil class ranking of 1 or 2;
- 3) Minimize non-agricultural development within areas where the focus is on promoting agricultural development;
- 4) Reduce the fragmentation of agricultural land within the Agriculture – Large Holdings Policy Area;
- 5) Accommodate the diversification and intensification of agricultural activities, such as intensive horticulture, in suitable areas;
- 6) Minimize potential conflicts between agricultural and non-agricultural land uses;
- 7) Encourage the practice of agriculture in an environmentally responsible manner;
- 8) Limit the potential for conflict between confined feeding operations and other land uses within the County;
- 9) Identify criteria for consideration in the development or expansion of confined feeding operations; and
- 10) Pursue the protection of High and Medium Priority Environment Management Areas, as development of smaller sized, specialty agricultural initiatives occurs. Development must be in accordance with the principles contained within this document as well as the requirements of the appropriate Land Use Bylaws designations.

Policies

General

Strathcona County will:

- 14.1 Encourage the growth and expansion of value added agricultural and industrial agricultural uses such as food processing facilities and ensure that these processing facilities are located appropriately;
- 14.2 Encourage the development of facilities or agricultural operations that utilize waste streams from industry or confined feeding operations, in order to reduce the use of fossil fuels and minimize impacts;
- 14.3 Promote agricultural practices that are sustainable and environmentally responsible; and
- 14.4 Minimize non-agricultural development in areas where agriculture is the predominant land use.

Agriculture – Large Holdings Policy Area

Strathcona County will:

- 14.5 Continue to promote the development of extensive/large traditional agricultural operations within the Agriculture – Large Holdings Policy Area;
- 14.6 Minimize the fragmentation of agricultural land by limiting subdivision within the Agriculture – Large Holdings Policy Area in order to maintain and further promote the development of large agricultural operations; particularly those operations that provide the raw resources for the development of sustainable sources of energy such as ethanol, biodiesel and biogas; and

- 14.7 Refer to Chapter 5 - Residential Development for residential related policies, such as first parcel out subdivisions, applicable to the Agriculture – Large Holdings Policy Area.

Agriculture – Small Holdings Policy Area

Strathcona County will:

- 14.8 Promote agriculture, conserve High and Medium Priority Environment Management Areas and allow large rural residential land uses to be developed within the Agriculture – Small Holdings Policy Area where such uses are compatible with adjacent uses;
- 14.9 Acknowledge existing non-agricultural developments and consider new developments on a case by case basis on lands within the area south of Highway 16, East of Highway 21, North of the Canadian National rail line and West of Secondary Highway 824 subject to the parameters outlined within the Transition Area Master Plan 1995, as amended from time to time. However, the predominant use within the above mentioned area will continue to be agriculture, until such time as urban level services are expanded into this area, if at all possible;
- 14.10 Allow the subdivision of agricultural land for the development of small agricultural operations where such uses are compatible with adjacent uses; and
- 14.11 Refer to Chapter 5 - Residential Development for residential related policies applicable to the Agriculture – Small Holdings Policy Area.

Agri-Industrial Transition Policy Area

Strathcona County will:

- 14.12 Encourage the development of agri-industrial value added and product processing uses within the Agri-Industrial Transition Policy Area, which are synergetic to the primary nature of the agricultural land use such as seed cleaning and food processing plants;
- 14.13 Allow lands within the Agri-Industrial Transition Policy Area to be subdivided for the development of light industrial and agri-industrial operations subject to the adoption of a Conceptual Scheme, which has been prepared in accordance with County policy, for the entire quarter section;
- 14.14 Support the use of by-products from neighbouring heavy industries to service light industry or agricultural facilities (eg. greenhouse heating system);
- 14.15 Encourage synergy with neighbouring heavy industry to promote economic viability; and
- 14.16 Refer to Chapter 7 – Industry and Energy for policies related to industrial uses within this area.

Beaver Hills Moraine Policy Area

Strathcona County will:

- 14.17 Continue to support agricultural uses on lands that are not identified as High Priority Environment Management Areas within the Beaver Hills Moraine Policy Area;
- 14.18 Limit the subdivision of land within the Beaver Hills Moraine Policy Area, in order to help conserve and enhance the unique ecosystem; and
- 14.19 Refer to Chapter 5 – Residential Development for residential related policies, such as first parcel out subdivisions, applicable to the Beaver Hills Moraine Policy Area.

Rural/Urban Transition Policy Area

Strathcona County will:

- 14.20 Allow existing agricultural operations to continue within the Rural/Urban Transition Policy Area; and
- 14.21 Ensure that the Rural/Urban Transition Policy Area Growth Management Strategy addresses potential conflicts with existing agricultural operations within the Rural/Urban Transition Policy Area and adjacent Agricultural Small Holdings Policy Area. (Bylaw 42-2012)

Country Residential Policy Area

Strathcona County will:

- 14.22 Allow existing agricultural operations to continue within the Country Residential Policy Area; and
- 14.23 Ensure new country residential developments address potential conflicts with existing agricultural operations.

Confined Feeding Operations

Strathcona County will:

- 14.24 Be an interested party under, and in connection with all applications, hearings and appeals for confined feeding operations occurring within Strathcona County that have been submitted to the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB);
- 14.25 Support the following criteria as required areas for consideration when evaluating the appropriateness of a specific parcel for a confined feeding operation. The proposed confined feeding operation should be:
 - a) Located 3.2 kilometres (2.0 miles) from the boundary of any:
 - i) City or Urban Service Area;
 - ii) Hamlet, town or village;
 - iii) Area already developed or that is designated for institutional uses such as schools, hospitals, commercial or multi-lot residential uses with more than 3 (three) residential lots per quarter section. Measurements are to be taken from property line to property line; and
 - iv) Federal, provincial or municipal park or recreation area, and any other areas used or intended to be developed for recreational facilities.
 - b) Located 1.0 kilometre (.62 miles) from High and Medium Priority Environment Management Areas;
 - c) Located on soils that are not medium to fine textured and do not overlie either groundwater recharge or discharge areas; and
 - d) Sited in accordance with Provincial Regulations. If the Province requires larger setback distances, that distance will apply.
- 14.26 Continue to allow all existing confined feeding operations to exist, per the Agricultural Operation Practices Act–Standards and Administration Regulations as updated from time to time;

- 14.27 Not allow subdivisions for residential purposes to infringe upon an approved confined feeding operation facility; and
- 14.28 Consider the results of a minimum distance separation (MDS) calculation using the Agricultural Operations Practices Act-Standards and Administration Regulations when considering:
- a) The subdivision of agricultural parcels for residential purposes;
 - b) The re-designation of a parcel to a district that may allow uses that are sensitive to confined feeding operations; or
 - c) Any proposed development.