



# COUNTY OF WELLINGTON

## COMMITTEE REPORT

**To:** Chair and Members of the Planning Committee  
**From:** Jameson Pickard, Senior Policy Planner  
**Date:** Thursday, March 09, 2023  
**Subject:** **County Official Plan Review – Agricultural System Mapping and Policy Review**



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### 1.0 Purpose

This report is intended to provide the Planning Committee and Council with an update on the work County planning staff and our consultants have been completing related to the Agricultural System Mapping and Policy Review under the Official Plan Review.

### 2.0 Background

Over the past several years, various Provincial governments have made changes to Provincial policy, necessitating municipalities to update their planning documents. A significant area of Provincial policy change has focused on agriculture.

Key changes came in 2017, when a new version of "A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe" (Growth Plan) was released. Within this document, the Province introduced a new series of policies related to agricultural support and protection, based on a systems approach, and committed to mapping a continuous agricultural land base across the Growth Plan area. Through the Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO), the Province consulted on draft versions of the Provincial Agricultural Land Base Mapping. Through Planning Committee Report PD2017-23 and several discussions with ministry staff, the County provided significant feedback on this mapping.

On February 9, 2018, the Province issued the final version of the Agricultural Land Base Mapping for the Growth Plan. At that time, the mapping took effect immediately upon issuance and took precedent over the County Official Plan mapping. However, when the Progressive Conservative government took office, they made additional changes to the Growth Plan, which delayed the implementation of the mapping (outside of the Greenbelt Area) until such time as upper-tier municipalities implement the mapping in their official plans. This is the current status of the Provincial mapping in Wellington County.

### 3.0 Agricultural Mapping and Policy Review

As part of the Official Plan Review, the County will review and refine the Provincial Agricultural Land Base Mapping issued under the Growth Plan and update the County Official Plan to align with current Provincial agricultural land use policy. The County retained Planscape Inc. in early 2022 to assist with these Official Plan updates.

### 3.1 Agricultural Land Base Mapping Review

The Agricultural Land Base Mapping issued under the Growth Plan was prepared by the Ministry of Food, Agriculture, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) through a Land Evaluation and Area Review (LEAR), which identified the following:

- areas already designated as prime agricultural areas in existing Official Plans;
- additional areas identified as meeting the definition of prime agricultural areas, subject to municipal review; and
- candidate areas that could be prime agricultural areas subject to municipal review.

The Provincial Agricultural Land Base Mapping for the County can be viewed online through the Province's Agricultural System Portal, found [here](#), and is shown in Appendix 1 of this report. The Province has noted that this mapping was a desktop exercise and that municipal refinement is necessary for its implementation. The County may refine the agricultural land base mapping at the time of initial implementation in the County Official Plan, based on the [Implementation Procedures for the Agricultural System in Ontario's Greater Golden Horseshoe](#) issued by the Province.

In Table 1, below, staff have shown some statistics comparing the unrefined Provincial Agricultural Land Base mapping against the current prime agricultural land base in the County. The following is noted about the Provincial mapping in the County:

- In Centre Wellington, Guelph/Eramosa, Mapleton, and Wellington North, the Provincial Agricultural Land Base generally aligns well with only minor differences. The review by County planning staff in these municipalities has focused on the ensuring alignment with current Official Plan designations in the rural area (Rural Area Employment Areas, Recreational Areas, Country Residential Areas, etc.).
- In Erin, Minto, and Puslinch, the Provincial Agricultural Land Base has generated significant differences from the County of Wellington Official Plan mapping. This is in part due to new prime agricultural areas being identified by the Province in these municipalities, as well as the identification of many large candidate areas. County Staff and consultants have been expending considerable effort to review over 1,000 areas of difference and refine them in accordance with Provincial criteria. It is anticipated that there will be a reduction in the Secondary Agricultural designation in the County once refinements have been completed.

At this time, County planning staff and our consultants are nearing completion of a final draft of the agricultural land base mapping for public and agency review. Planning Staff have been meeting with member municipality staff to discuss draft mapping refinements and will be looking to complete those engagements in the coming months. Due to the extent of the mapping changes and the review associated with those changes, delays have resulted in bringing draft mapping forward. However, we intend to make the refined draft mapping available for public and stakeholder review later this year.

Notification about the release of the mapping will be sent to our Planwell email subscribers list and posted online. If you would like to be added to the Planwell email subscribers list, please send a request to [planwell@wellington.ca](mailto:planwell@wellington.ca).

**Table 1. Agricultural Land Base Comparison**

Municipality	Prime Agricultural Area (ac)			Candidate Area (ac)
	Province**	County of Wellington**	Difference Between Province and County Prime Agricultural Areas* (+/-)	
Centre Wellington	73,867 ac	74,151 ac	-284 ac	20 ac
Erin	34,088 ac	23,421 ac	+10,668 ac	9,027 ac
Guelph/Eramosa	51,531 ac	51,746 ac	-215 ac	7 ac
Mapleton	109,280 ac	109,171 ac	+109 ac	0 ac
Minto	45,388 ac	42,584 ac	+2,805 ac	3,388 ac
Puslinch	14,127 ac	9,921 ac	+4,206 ac	10,477 ac
Wellington North	94,157 ac	94,404 ac	-247 ac	3 ac
<b>Totals</b>	<b>422,439 ac</b>	<b>405,399 ac</b>	<b>17,040 ac</b>	<b>22,921 ac</b>

\*these figures are approximate and will change through the refinement process.

\*\*these figures exclude natural heritage features.

**Note:**

This report offers statistics about agricultural land areas in the County for information purposes. It is important to note that the land area statistics related to the Provincial Agricultural Land Base in this report do not include natural features and is based on a Provincial LEAR analysis and informed by Provincial land use planning policy. The “Farm Area” statistics used by Statistics Canada, and shown in Appendix B, includes a broader range of lands and is defined as lands owned and operated by an agricultural operation and includes: cropland, summer fallow, improved and unimproved pasture, woodlands and wetlands and all other land (including idle land and lands on which farm buildings are located). As a result, there are difference in the land area numbers and caution should be used when comparing.

### 3.2 Agricultural Land Use Policy

Since the last comprehensive update of the County Official Plan, there have been several Provincial planning documents released or updated which provide important Provincial direction related to agricultural land use planning in Ontario. Some of these documents include:

- Provincial Policy Statement, 2020;
- Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agricultural Area;
- Greenbelt Plan, 2017;
- Growth Plan, 2019 (as amended); and
- Minimum Distance Separation Document (MDS) - Formulae and Guidelines for Livestock Facility and Anaerobic Digester Odour Setbacks.

The County planning staff is generally supportive of the Provincial changes in agricultural land use policy, as they aim to create a more permissive environment for farmers to diversify their incomes while also making positive changes related to agricultural land protection and supporting the agri-food sector. The County, working with our consultant team, will update the County Official Plan to address current Provincial policy requirements in a way that builds on the current successes in Wellington’s agricultural industry.

Currently, we are nearing completion of an Agricultural Background Report that will provide a detailed review of the latest 2021 agricultural census results for Wellington, a review of our mapping refinement process, draft mapping refinement recommendations, as well as provide a series of policy options to help inform policy development for the Official Plan.

In advance of the Agricultural Background Report County staff have prepared an infographic to highlight some of the 2021 Agricultural Census results for Wellington (Appendix 2). It is noted that there are some positive trends happening in Wellington's agricultural industry, particularly increases in the number of farms, total farm area reported and an increase in total operating revenues per acre since the 2016 census. This is an indicator that Wellington continues to be an attractive location for investment by the agricultural industry.

## **5.0 Recommendations**

That the report “County Official Plan Review – Agricultural System Mapping and Policy Review” be received for information; and

That the County Clerk forward the report to Member Municipalities.

Respectfully submitted,

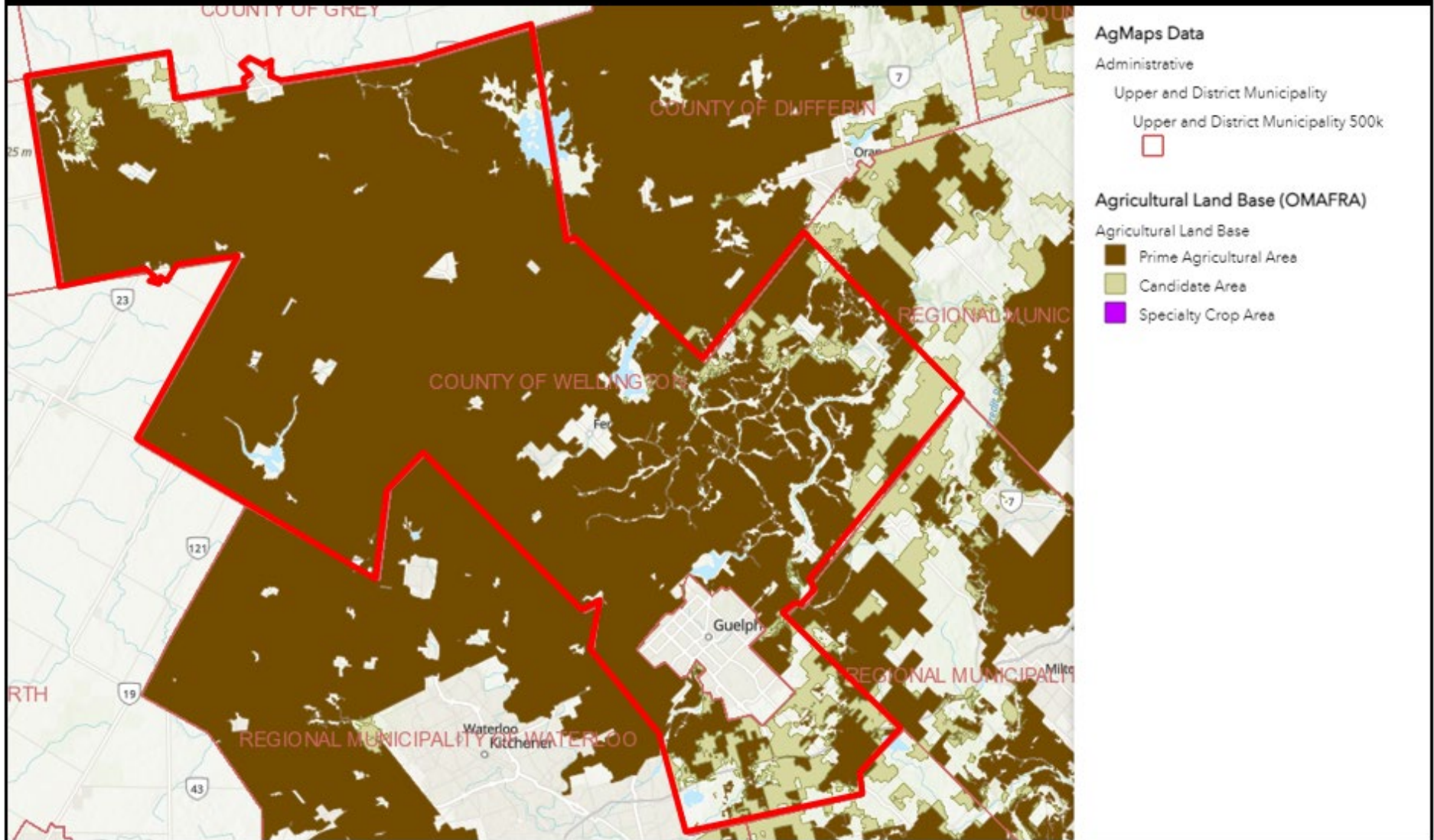
A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jameson Pickard". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

Jameson Pickard B. URPL, MCIP, RPP  
Senior Policy Planner

## **Appendix-1**

### **Provincial Agricultural Land Base Mapping**

## Agricultural System Portal



Source : Provincial Agricultural System Portal

## **Appendix-2**

### **2021 Agricultural Census Overview**



# Agriculture

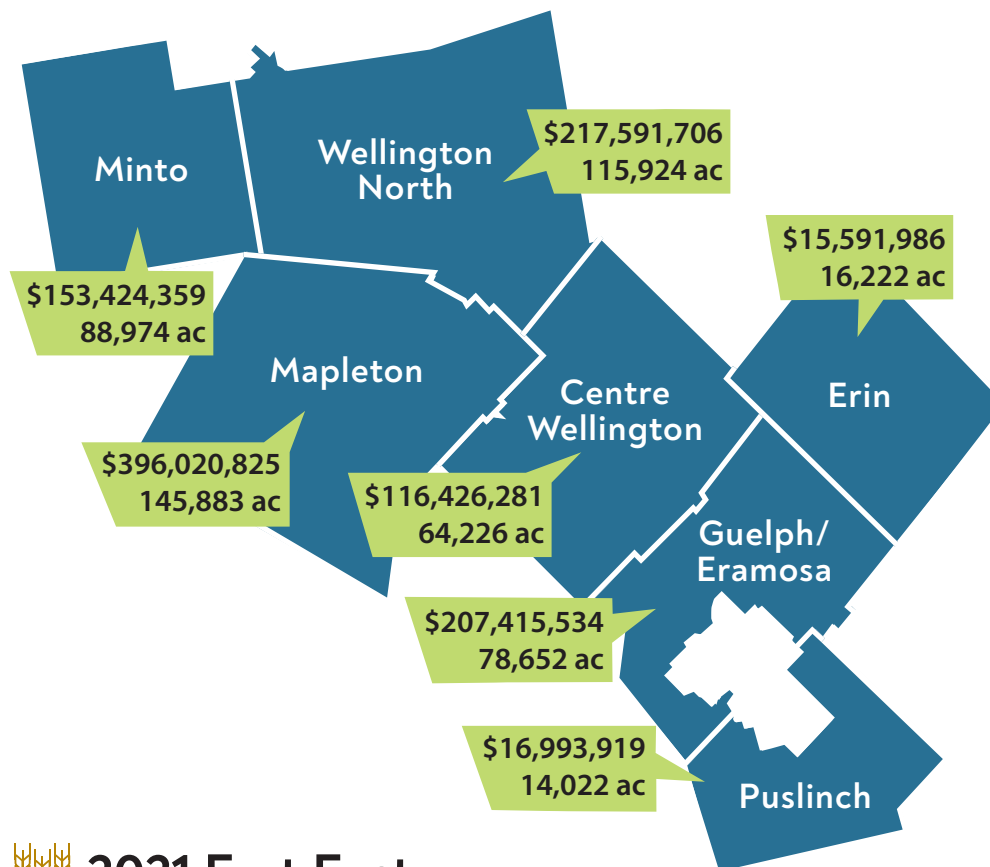
## Total Operating Revenues and Farm Area



Total Operating Revenues - \$1,173,464,610

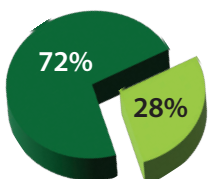


Total Farm Area - 523,903 ac



## 2021 Fast Facts

- From 2016 to 2021 Wellington County recorded an increase of 269 farms (11%) and an increase of 57,503 acres in farm area (12 %)
- The average farm size reported in Wellington was 200 ac. This is below the Provincial average of 243 ac.
- The average age of farm operators in Wellington County is 53 years old.



## Farm Tenure in Wellington

- 72% of farm area owned
- 28% of farm area rented, leased or crop shared

## Wellington County Farms by Industry

2,617



703 Farms (27%)

Oilseed and Grain Farming

503 Farms (19%)

Beef Cattle Ranching and Farming

374 Farms (14%)

Dairy Cattle and Milk Production

314 Farms (12%)

Other Animal Production

212 Farms (8%)

Other Crop Farming

205 Farms (8%)

Poultry and Egg Production

101 Farms (4%)

Hog and Pig Farming

93 Farms (4%)

Sheep and goat Farming

61 Farms (2%)

Greenhouse, Nursey and Floriculture

38 Farms (2%)

Vegetable and Melon Farming

13 Farms (1%)

Fruit and Tree Nut Farming