

From Queen's Park by Sylvia Jones MPP ? International Plowing Match 2016 highlighted agriculture



Dufferin-Caledon and Ontario have a rich agriculture history.

Our agriculture sector plays a significant role in our local communities, with more than 70,000 farms across the province which employ over 15,000 individuals.

Every year, the agriculture community from across the province celebrates Ontario's proud agriculture history by attending the International Plowing Match and Rural Expo (IPM). The IPM showcases our province's renowned agriculture sector and provides an opportunity for individuals and families to learn about the sector and its rich history. This year's IPM took place close by, in the Town of Minto in Wellington County from Sept. 20 to 24.

Representatives from all levels of government, including all three political parties, attended the IPM. The Plowing Match was kicked-off with the opening parade followed by the opening ceremonies. There were a variety of events for families and individuals to enjoy, including live entertainment, medieval jousting, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Musical Ride, an antique show, as well as more than 500 vendors. There was truly something for everyone at the IPM! This yearly tradition could not happen without the help of local volunteers. I want to thank all the volunteers for their effort in making this year's IPM a success.

In addition to being an opportunity to showcase our province's agriculture sector, the IPM also provided a chance to talk about the issues impacting our agriculture community. This summer's hot and sunny weather has severely impacted the livelihood of our province's farmers, who experienced a drought due to the lack of rain. As a result, it has led to lower crop yields as well as higher susceptibility to insect damage.

Another major issue for farmers across Ontario are rising hydro rates. Families and businesses in rural Ontario have been negatively impacted by the government's mismanagement of the province's energy sector. Many Dufferin-Caledon residents have been driven into energy poverty. Last year, there were 567,000 electricity customers in arrears. In fact, in rural Ontario more than one in five business are in arrears. There seems to be no end in sight to rising hydro bills as many rural Ontario families will pay an 11.5 per cent increase on their hydro bills due to distribution costs. It's time for the government to recognize their years of mismanagement have resulted in unaffordable energy, and provide real change to Ontarians and businesses across the province.

One thing I know about our agricultural industry and the people of Dufferin-Caledon is that they work hard and add life and employment to our community. As we celebrate the hard work and history of agriculture in our communities, I am reminded that we need to do more to make things easier for our farmers and businesses, so they can continue to be essential partners in our community.