

Highway 413: Death of the Farm

By Dan O'Reilly

Stretching from Highway 401 near Milton and deadening at Highway 400 just south of the King Sideroad, the 59-kilometre-long mega highway will have profound and detrimental impacts on their lives, livelihoods, and communities.

Especially hard hit will be the Orr Family of Mill Road, whose future in farming is in peril.

Approximately one-quarter of the land Peter Orr rents for his cash crop operation are in the direct path of the highway's route.

And 40 acres of that land is dedicated to an organic farm his son Dean started in 2020. On that land, he grows soya and kidney beans and last year planted quinoa on a 1.4-acre plot in a test experiment in partnership with, and supported by, the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario.

?It (the test) didn't work out very well. I planted the grain in June which is probably too late.?

?Quinoa is more of a cold climate crop,? he says, noting they were originally cultivated in the Andes.

Certified by the Canada Organic Regime, Dean's plan this year is to plant three test sections, one in late April, the second in late May, and the third in early June.

Although graduating from the University of Guelph in 2018 with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology, a Bachelor of Science in Human Kinetics, and a Minor in Neuroscience, Dean returned to his agricultural roots and works part-time for his father.

?I am concerned about climate change and thought I could do something about it being a farmer.?

His entry into organic farming opened after his father acquired the 40-acre rental property which had been used solely for haying for decades and did not have any residual pesticides. As such, he was able to meet the Canada Organic Regime's rigorous standards.

All that effort and investment will be lost if construction of Highway 413 proceeds. The highway will have particularly severe impact on his father's operation and will wipe out his business. The larger overarching concern is the impact it will have on the Greater Toronto Area, he says.

?I think what concerns me as much as having our business get pushed into a corner is that it says a lot about the provincial government's approach to food security. All that land that is in the proposed highway as well as what is being developed in the GTA is great farmland, and habitat, but it's also the farmland and habitat closest to Toronto and the rest of the GTA. The government and local municipalities seem to be okay with building [negative] equity in the form of food insecurity and instability. Not to mention a reduction in the ecological systems that allow us to do our jobs. They are setting [us] up for a real disaster.?

In Laskay, well-known activist and Highway 413 opponent Sherry Draisey is ?downright frightened? about the future of the historic community where she and her husband Mayes Mullins have lived for the past 40 years in, what is believed to be, the hamlet's oldest house.

?It (the highway) will be the end of Laskay.?

Apart from the loss of several of its original buildings, such as the relocation of Laskay Hall to the King Township Museum in King City in 2017, the community has to contend with traffic bottle necks at the Weston Road/King Sideroad intersection. Drivers use Weston Road on weekends to bypass Highway 400 and that traffic congestion will be multiplied if Highway 413 is built, she says.

Similar fears are shared by Nancy and Alan Hopkinson. Residents of Nobleton since 1974, they have watched it swell from a small village with one traffic light to one with more than its share of traffic congestion on both Highway 27 and the King Sideroad. As Highway 413 includes a planned Highway 27 interchange just south of the King-Vaughan Townline, more traffic will be funneled into the community, says Nancy.

"We are in a climate emergency and we need to reduce our CO2 emissions and make public transit more attractive," she says, adding that living in Nobleton requires "getting into your car to drive anywhere."

Apart from the traffic escalation, Highway 413 will severely limit spaces to enjoy nature, says Nancy. The retired couple like to hike in nearby conservation areas such as Cold Creek and the Nashville Conservation Tract- which, like Dean Orr's organic farm- is in the direct route of the Highway 413 corridor.

For more information visit: www.environmentaldefence.ca