

Mayor Marolyn Morrison ? Important to support local farmers and agriculture industry

The Region of Peel recently released its fact sheet on the state of agriculture in our region.

There are some very interesting facts I would like to share with you.

As you likely know, Peel Region is extremely fortunate to have a very diverse agricultural economy providing a wide range of locally grown products. Livestock is our largest agricultural sector with beef, dairy poultry, goat, sheep and the equine industry accounting for more than 41 per cent of Peel's farm operations. Nearly one quarter of Peel's farms grow oilseed and grain crops and a little more than 26 per cent of our land is dedicated to the production of fresh flowers, maple syrup, honey and a wide variety of fruits and vegetables.

Based on the 2011 Census of Agriculture, we know there were 660 farm operators in Peel and they employed more than 990 additional workers. Our farmers are stewards of more than 37,975 hectares or nearly 94,000 acres of precious agricultural land. Peel farmers are efficient producers too ? generating more than \$88.8 million in gross farm receipts in 2010. Agriculture is a very important economic factor in our community.

Peel's agricultural industry is evolving. In 2006, Peel had more than 483 farms but, based on the 2011 census, that number has dropped to 440 farms. Since 2006, the number of acres of land in agricultural use has dropped by 1.5 per cent, which is still considerably less than the average eight per cent decline across the GTA. The good news is farmers working in Peel have seen their gross farm receipts rise by 8.9 per cent, although this is offset somewhat by the roughly 24 per cent decline they experienced between 2000 and 2010. Our agricultural economy is in a constant state of change as farmers adapt, innovate and evolve to meet the continuous challenges of an increasingly global marketplace.

Eating locally grown foods helps to support our local farmers and helps to make their farm businesses more viable. This is something you and your family can do which contributes to preserving the beautiful farmlands and rural flavour of our area. I can assure you that Town council is acutely aware of the state of the agricultural economy in Caledon ? three of our council members are active farmers ? and we are vigilant in our efforts to maintain and enhance our proud agricultural heritage and traditions.

I encourage you to look for ways you can help support our local farmers by patronizing farm gate sales, farmer's markets and buying locally at your neighbourhood grocery store. Every little bit helps and it's a healthy life choice too

