



August 25, 2015

Luke Hillan, Policy Advisor
Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure
Infrastructure Policy Division
Inter-Governmental Policy Branch
5th Floor, 900 Bay Street, Mowat Block
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1C2

Dear Mr. Hillan,

Re: *Building Ontario Up: Moving Ontario Forward Outside the GTHA - Infrastructure Consultations*

Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO) represents the 19,000 beef producers in Ontario by advocating in the areas of policy planning, industry development and research, and domestic and export market development. Ontario's beef industry contributes approximately \$4 billion to the province's economy, supports more than 11,000 jobs and is an important part of Ontario's rural communities. Beef producers have a stake in regional infrastructure across the province, operating their businesses in 49 counties and districts.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on 'Building Ontario Up', the Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure's discussion guide for *Moving Ontario Forward – Outside the GTHA*. To ensure a sustainable and economically viable beef industry that contributes to all regions of Ontario for the long term, necessary infrastructure for rural communities must be prioritized and invested in by the government.

Due to a number of compounded factors, such as cost of entry and competition for land, Ontario's beef industry is experiencing a critically low supply of cattle. The declining production has a direct impact on jobs and income for the province and the entire beef value chain, including food processors. Recovery and expansion of the province's cow herd is essential to improve the health of Ontario's beef industry.

To increase beef production in Ontario and bring the industry back from this tipping point, BFO has developed a plan to expand the industry in Northern Ontario. This region offers incredible potential for expansion, with affordable land, access to water and environmental conditions ideal for raising livestock. Expanding the beef industry with new operations and a regional value chain in Northern Ontario, as well as within the thousands of existing beef farms across Southern Ontario, will depend on the necessary infrastructure being in place.

To support beef farmers in their expansion efforts across all of Ontario and to allow the recolonization and revitalization of Northern Ontario agriculture, BFO submits the following recommendations for your



consideration, in response to the discussion guide's question, *'What type of infrastructure projects could unlock tangible economic development opportunities in your communities?'*

Perimeter Fencing Program

Ontario agriculture has experienced a dramatic change in landscape over the last decade. Thriving livestock operations that were once fenced for cattle have since been converted to cash crop production for various reasons, including high crop prices, ethanol policies and supply management diversification. A dedicated cost-share infrastructure program for perimeter fencing, available province-wide, would be extremely beneficial to rural communities, where there is a need for new pastures to be established in order to support the vital role that a diverse agricultural industry has in local economies.

The high cost of perimeter fencing is a barrier to expansion in Ontario's beef industry and costly for farmers starting or expanding their businesses. For example, it costs approximately \$40,000 to fence 200 acres of land with page wire fencing. This is a large investment that beef farmers must undertake, but it's an investment in more than just their businesses and land. Perimeter fencing is critical infrastructure in any rural community, as it keeps livestock safely separated from roadways and other properties. There are also benefits to the surrounding environment and wildlife, with livestock kept separate from wetlands, waterways and natural wildlife habitats.

Partnering with producers to provide a perimeter fencing program would be an efficient and effective way for the government to support the beef industry and spur expansion. A cost-share program that assists farmers in building quality perimeter fencing in communities across Ontario would be a smart investment in the rural economies of Ontario, and would recognize the important role that simple infrastructure like good fencing has in rural communities.

Dedicated Funding for Northern Infrastructure

Developing agriculture in the north is an Ontario government priority, as laid out in Premier Wynne's 2014-2015 mandate letter to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Honourable Jeff Leal. There are millions of acres of agriculturally capable land in Northern Ontario and, while some of this land has previously been used in agricultural production, these acres are often overgrown. Dedicated funding for Northern Ontario infrastructure that brings land into agricultural production will enable the agri-food sector to grow in northern regions.

A revitalized northern agriculture industry is of great benefit to Northern Ontario communities, which often rely on "boom and bust cycle" industries like forestry and mining and will see economic growth and job creation from economic-diversification based on a renewable resource. A revitalized agriculture industry in Northern Ontario will also encourage a new generation of young farmers in Ontario to emerge, as buying land and establishing a business in the north is more attractive and made feasible, and as agriculture and raising livestock is seen to be a career opportunity instead of a business risk.

Ongoing and expanded loan programs and cost-share funding for the infrastructure necessary for northern agriculture, particularly for land clearing, are key factors in plans for cow herd expansion and a strengthened agriculture industry in Northern Ontario. Programs that assist northern farmers with their land clearing and tiling expenses, such as the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation's Strategic Economic Infrastructure Program, must be a long-term infrastructure priority of the Ontario government.

.../3



Land Ownership and Soil Classification Maps

BFO strongly recommends that the Ontario government make the necessary investments to develop and publicly release up-to-date maps of all regions of Ontario that detail soil classifications and clearly distinguish Crown-owned land from land that is privately owned.

In order to truly understand and realize the opportunities for expanding Ontario's cow herd and the broader agriculture industry in Northern Ontario, the current status of land ownership across the province must be clearly and publicly shared. There are millions of acres of Crown land in Northern Ontario, and privately owned land is interspersed throughout the region. How and where these property lines are defined and located is not easily accessible information, and this must be remedied in order to allow for thoughtful and efficient agricultural expansion in the region.

In addition to asking the Ontario government to share current land ownership maps with the public, we also urge the development and release of detailed and updated land and soil classification maps. Land and soil class information is a crucial part of planning for any type of agricultural business, infrastructure or expansion, and all regions must have current soil classification information mapped and publicly shared.

For beef farming to become established in Northern Ontario as a key industry that creates jobs and contributes to new and existing communities, a critical mass of farmers and farming operations must be achieved. To achieve this critical mass and enable strategic planning by individual farmers and by the Ontario agriculture industry as a whole, there must be comprehensive and detailed maps showing land ownership status (private or Crown) and soil classification of the entire province made available to the public.

Beef Farmers of Ontario would like to thank the Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure for the opportunity to comment on the prioritization of infrastructure investments outside the GTHA. We would be pleased to meet with you to discuss the contents of this letter and we look forward to participating in further consultations on this important issue.

Sincerely,



Bob Gordanier
President

cc: BFO Board of Directors

