

EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Chapter 4 – Section 1. AGRICULTURAL SYSTEM

SUMMARY

Agriculture in Niagara is a prominent and thriving industry both culturally and economically. The Agricultural System contains an agricultural land base and the agri-food network that enables the agri-food sector to thrive. The Agricultural System objectives and policies support agricultural uses, normal farm practices, and diversification uses to ensure the industry continues to prosper in Niagara.

- The agricultural land base, consisting of specialty crop areas, prime agricultural areas, and rural lands will be a mapped schedule in the Niagara Official Plan.
- The Province has identified and mapped an Agricultural System through the *Growth Plan* and *Greenbelt Plan*. In Niagara, specialty crop areas are mapped through the *Greenbelt Plan* and are refined by the Province at the time of plan review. Prime agricultural areas are mapped through the *Growth Plan*, with additional candidate areas for consideration as prime agricultural areas to be determined by the Region in collaboration with local municipalities.
- The Agricultural System supports all types, sizes, and intensities of agricultural uses, activities and normal farm practices.
- Niagara developed farm diversification policies, encouraging a wide range of diversified uses that contribute to long-term farm viability through Regional Official Plan Amendment 6-2009. Diversification policies continue to be a key component of the Agricultural System reflected in the Niagara Official Plan.
- Non-agricultural uses being proposed on agricultural land, will be required to meet criteria in the Niagara Official Plan, including the new Provincial requirement of an agricultural impact assessment (AIA) prepared by a qualified professional. An AIA identifies and evaluates potential impacts of non-agricultural development on agricultural operations and the Agricultural System and recommends ways to avoid or, if avoidance is not possible, minimize and mitigate adverse impacts.

A Draft Policy set is provided with this sub-section document.



Integration Guide for Sub-sections Reported in PDS 17-2021	
<input type="checkbox"/> Regional Structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology
<input type="checkbox"/> Housing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Employment
<input type="checkbox"/> Land Needs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SABR	<input type="checkbox"/> Aggregates
<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Natural Heritage incl.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Infrastructure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Water Systems Options
<input type="checkbox"/> District/Secondary Plans	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Watershed Planning
<input type="checkbox"/> Urban Design	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Climate Change

OVERVIEW

Niagara Region is home to an active and vibrant farming sector which includes a wide range of farming types including grape and tender fruit, greenhouse/nursery/floriculture operations, oilseeds and grain operations, livestock operations, and more. In Niagara Region, approximately 218,251 acres of farmland creates \$1.41 billion GDP impact from agriculture. Agriculture in Niagara has an employment impact of approximately 19,892 jobs.

Mapping of Niagara Region's agricultural land base needs to be updated as part of the Niagara Official Plan exercise. There are differences between the Region's current agricultural land base mapping and the Province's updated mapping as identified by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). Municipalities have been given the opportunity to refine candidate areas proposed for inclusion as prime agricultural areas based on Provincial criteria. Planning staff at the Region have been considering these candidate areas through a collaborative process with local area municipal planning staff. The updated mapping will be included in the agriculture land base schedule of the Niagara Official Plan.

Viable agricultural land, including specialty crop areas, which are comprised of the highest capability soils, are a non-renewable, finite resource that is essential for the existence of a healthy agriculture and food system. Provincial Plans, including *A Place to Grow: Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe* ("Growth Plan"), *Greenbelt Plan*, and *Niagara Escarpment Plan* require implementation of an Agricultural System approach, which includes protection of the agricultural land base and the agri-food network. The Provincial land use plans also introduced the requirement for an agricultural impact assessment, through the 2017 *Greenbelt Plan* and *Growth Plan*, which is a study to evaluate the potential impacts of non-agricultural development on agricultural operations and recommend ways to avoid, or if avoidance is not possible, minimize and mitigate adverse impacts.

Background work for the Agricultural System chapter has been underway since 2015, with a number of reports that have been prepared for Council. A key focus of the Niagara Official Plan review has been the refinement of the Province's Agricultural System Mapping with local area municipalities.

During the Province's Coordinated Policy Review, there have been many requests for land to be removed from the Greenbelt Plan area, which is a Provincial decision. No changes have been made to the Greenbelt Plan area mapping at this time. The issue of agricultural viability of some land designated specialty crop areas is being addressed through policy using specialty crop guidelines developed by Planning staff.

Consultation and engagement to date has included in-person and virtual public information centres on the Agricultural System background work, review of draft mapping with local area municipal planning staff, and review of draft policies with the Region's Agricultural Policy and Action Committee (APAC) and other agricultural stakeholders.

The attached draft policy and mapping, **Appendix 9.2** and **Appendix 9.3** respectively, illustrates the direction the Niagara Official Plan is taking as it continues towards completed final draft status.