

## Letters

# Protect greenbelt farmland from industrial corporate greed

By Dan Curran-Blaney

The writer farms in East Flamborough

If the Greenbelt and source protection laws really mean something to the McGuinty government, the Premier and his Ministers need to honour the original purposes of those laws and act to protect our farmland and drinking water from the very real threat of industrial corporate greed.

These laws have not been without controversy in the farm community because of their implementation impacts and requirements on farmers as landowners. This government should not simply pass laws and transfer the burden of them to the farming community; it should step up and use the laws to actively protect what it has publicly committed to preserve: farmland, natural features, and drinking water at the source.

Why do I place this challenge? I am a farmer in East Flamborough, part of the City of Hamilton's Rural Area. My acreage is located in the Natural Heritage System of Ontario's much touted Greenbelt and in a city-signed Drinking Water Protection Area, in one of the Source Protection Regions created by Ontario's much touted Clean Water Act. You would think that my only very real challenges should be the vagaries of weather, fuel costs, commodity prices, and the like.

The reality is that farmland and drinking water, in this so-called protected area, are as threatened as ever by industrial development of mega proportions – in this case, in the form of aggregate quarrying.

Four years ago, the development, a new Greenfield proposed below-the-water-table limestone quarry, was filed with Hamilton by Lowndes Holdings Corp. Our broad community organized ourselves to vigorously defend against such an unreasonable proposal, intertwined amongst lands zoned residential, conservation management and agricultural in the heart of the Greenbelt and a source protection region. Our initial resistance was cause for the proponent to sell its interest to St Marys CBM, wholly owned by a Brazilian conglomerate. The threat from industrial corporate greed continues, now from an organization with no roots in our country, let alone our community.

East Flamborough currently is home to significant and diverse agricultural businesses – businesses in a sector that generates more than \$1 billion annually for Hamilton's economy and one that the City has targeted for future economic development. Equine, forage, grains, oil seed and market gardening businesses exist harmoniously with our residential neighbours, sharing the essential aquifer that allows us to coexist in this region of Hamilton Wentworth.

The location of the proposed quarry site is 11th Concession East, Freelon, which is surrounded by a number of medium density housing developments, concession residences, and numerous agricultural businesses. The site is also the recharge area for the same aquifer from which the nearby Rural Settlement Area of Carlisle draws water for its established residential developments and lies within Carlisle's Wellhead Protection Area (and its 2 year Time of Travel zone).

The Minister of the Environment's Technical Expert Committee on Source Protection in a 2004 report related to developing a threat assessment framework recommended that there be no new quarries permitted within the 5 year Time of Travel zone in a municipal Wellhead Protection Area – this site is even closer. As well, the aquifer is the life blood for numerous green houses, orchards, irrigated crops and livestock operations. The site contains wetlands, woodlands and environmentally sensitive areas which have provincially and regionally significant designations and contains habitat for species at risk. If allowed to proceed, this quarry will become the seventh largest in Canada, based on 2006 industry annual production tonnage estimates.

Earlier this year, our community began its call on the provincial government to step in and act. The community resources – in after-tax dollars and volunteer time – that have been spent to bring honesty to data submitted by the proponent, for the City of Hamilton's land use planning review are enormous. And, the public tax dollars being expended are

significant as well. Our submissions, to date, have raised validating concerns from Hamilton's Department of Public Health, the Ministry of the Environment, the City of Hamilton, Conservation Halton, the neighbouring municipalities of Milton, Burlington and Halton, and our own Hamilton-Wentworth Federation of Agriculture.

The proponent's submission for Official Plan and zoning amendments clearly demonstrates its disregard for our agricultural enterprises and farmland in favour of its focus on corporate profits from aggregate extraction. In a province, where the Environment Commissioner of Ontario notes there is no shortage of rock, the submission extensively documents the quality of the rock and the demand in the province and region.

Yet, the submission contains a section on agriculture, whereby a weak case is made to support an argument that concludes that the land in question is poor quality and is not significant in terms of contribution to the region's agriculture business. The prevarication of facts, including using land class to determine agricultural value, is ethically wrong. With the technology that exists today, a skilled farmer with class III land can out perform a farmer with class I land. How many politicians and bureaucrats will be knowledgeable enough to see through the smoke screen embedded in this application?

To add insult to injury, of the acquired land by St Mary's CBM, about 150 acres of the site has been farmed with market garden produce, recognized as a high value crop, for the past 15 years, and a further 154 agricultural acres on adjacent purchased lands is planned for expansion of the quarry. No where does the proponent's submission address the impacts of airborne particulate matter (especially PM<10, on farm workers, live-stocks and crops), of haul route interference with the movement of farm equipment, or quarry dewatering on farm water usage. The reality that the removal of agricultural lands and operations affects the critical mass necessary to sustain our support infrastructure of veterinary, feed, equipment and other services is not even mentioned. Removal of farmland and erosion of the farming community is counter to the underlying premise of the Greenbelt and to other prevailing trends.

Farming is one of the largest private land uses in the area and farmers are increasingly important stewards of our ecological and hydrological features. The world demand for food has risen sharply in the last few years. The significance and importance of a country and province's ability to be self sustaining regarding agricultural production is now encouraged by buy local and related policies. Not having serious regard for taking arable land, located close to market, permanently out of production is inexcusable.

The proposed quarry also represents a significant threat to the aquifer's ability to safely supply the rising demand for water in the future. The Federal Government has recently issued a report, titled "A Federal Perspective on Water Issues". We cannot take our extensive water supplies for granted, says the report. The newly released document says Canada's stores of fresh water are not as plentiful as once thought and water shortages threaten to pinch the economy and pit provinces against each other.

Ontario's past experience with contamination of potable water in Walkerton carries lessons learned. Protection of drinking water at the source comes first; experimenting with unproven technology should be rejected. The fractured bedrock is the conduit to Carlisle's municipal drinking water system and to the surrounding rural residential and agricultural wells. The blasting and mining of such a large area has the potential to cause irreversible change to the quality and quantity of the water that is essential for our farming businesses and our homes. Mitigation by supplying the local farmers with a reservoir to feed livestock & irrigate is not an option.

I still believe that a development, so ridiculous, in such a setting, will certainly attract provincial attention and terminate the endless effort required by our community to resist this greedy initiative. To intervene would demonstrate the McGuinty government is willing to "walk the talk" on its source water protection and Greenbelt laws, laws that were introduced to prevent travesties like this from ever happening, and to protect our farmland and drinking water.