

ACADEMIC FARMERS

LAND USE COUNCIL

“advocating social, economic and environmental balance in government legislation affecting land”

May 1, 2010

Town of Markham Mayor and Council
101 Town Centre Boulevard
Markham, ON., L3R 9W3

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Re: Saving Family Farms

The Land Use Council is an Ontario consortium of private sector Associations mandated to track government policies affecting privately owned land as well as the activities of special interest groups relating to or influencing such policies.

In that context we have examined a recent submission of the Academic Alliance for Agriculture, identified as a number of faculty members associated with several prominent universities, that calls for Town of Markham council “support” of family farms under council jurisdiction. It appears this initiative contemplates “saving” farmland as a geographic asset. However it ignores the reality that statutory harassment, permanently depressed commodity prices and virtually no tariff protection is unlikely to attract new believers in the business of making a living from Markham area agricultural land, “saved” or otherwise..

Whether the Council invited this submission, whether its authors are expressing personal or transplanted views, whether, in either case, same might be later considered grounds for litigation - these are typical of many questions arising from the Academic Alliance for Agriculture paper.

Meanwhile, this example of collective academic thought lacks structural clarity and outlines no workable business plan. In our view, “enhancing markets for locally grown food” is not a business plan. Moreover, Dr. Etcheverry and Darcy Higgins do not identify or evaluate saleable produce in accordance with best management practices. Nor do they provide a marketing program with detailed cost lines as would be required to meet generally accepted accounting principles in any application for start-up funding from reputable financial institutions.

Their generalized expertise and assurance of “support” doesn’t recognize Guelph University and its extensive data bank that highlights institutional failure to address the income crisis prevailing in Ontario agriculture where excessive regulation has devalued land equity and destroyed occupational incentive. Instead, ideological platitudes abound while systemic problems such as the ever-increasing average age of to-day’s farmers and the generational rollover thereby required to support the illusion of profitable greenbelt and food belt farming in the absence of financial viability are not mentioned.

Legal precedent confirms injury to business viability arising from government decision or the claims of professional lobbyists sometimes warrants directed recovery of injurious costs from those traditional sources of commercial damage. In that regard, it is unclear whether the Academic Alliance submission to Markham council enjoys the support and binding commitment of the institutions its authors appear to represent. Thus creditability of the document and accountability of its individual signatories may later relate to allegations of injurious affection within the agricultural industry, a possibility that deserves vigilant attention in advance.

We urge Town of Markham authorities to review a recent paper from the Fraser Institute regarding common law rights of land ownership. This incisive analysis confirms the importance of those rights to Canadian society at large and can be seen at:

http://www.fraserinstitute.org/Commerce.Web/product_files/key-concepts-property-rights

In summary, our consortium feels many members of Markham's council may be influenced by the views of individuals and groups with less than sufficient knowledge of to-day's agricultural complexities. We accordingly suggest, with respect, that the recent Academic Alliance paper is noticeably short of detail essential to its official adoption by Council which, in turn, might unintentionally cause or contribute to injury and hence to compulsory restitution to injured parties in perpetuity.

Thanks for your attention.

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The Land Use Council is a public service consortium sponsored by the combined memberships of:

***Food Chain / Halton Region Federation of Agriculture / Ontario Landowners Association
Ontario Property and Environmental Rights Alliance / Peel District Federation of Agriculture***

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