



SCHOOL OF  
**ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN  
AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**



Ministry of  
Agriculture, Food &  
Rural Affairs



# **Municipal Capacity Related to Rural and Agri-Food Opportunities - A Northern Ontario Focus**

**Northern Directions - November 2022**

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## AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS

In Northern Ontario

### What does it mean to support agriculture in Northern Ontario?

- **Growth Plan for Northern Ontario**, Section 2.3.3 includes a series of opportunity areas for the agricultural sector:
  - Research on climatic, land conditions
  - Buy local programs
  - Expanding production toward sustainable, local food sources for Northerners
  - Supply/value chain development
- **Why local and regional agri-food systems are important:**
  - Food security and food access
  - Resilience





“ A thriving agricultural industry depends on the knowledge and support provided by municipal governments.

Caldwell et al., 2020

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

## Introduction



## Research Questions

- To what extent do municipalities vary in their capacity to respond to and support the local agri-food sector?
- Which provincial agricultural and rural land use policies are the most challenging for municipalities to implement?
- What can be done to increase municipal capacity for more efficient implementation?

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

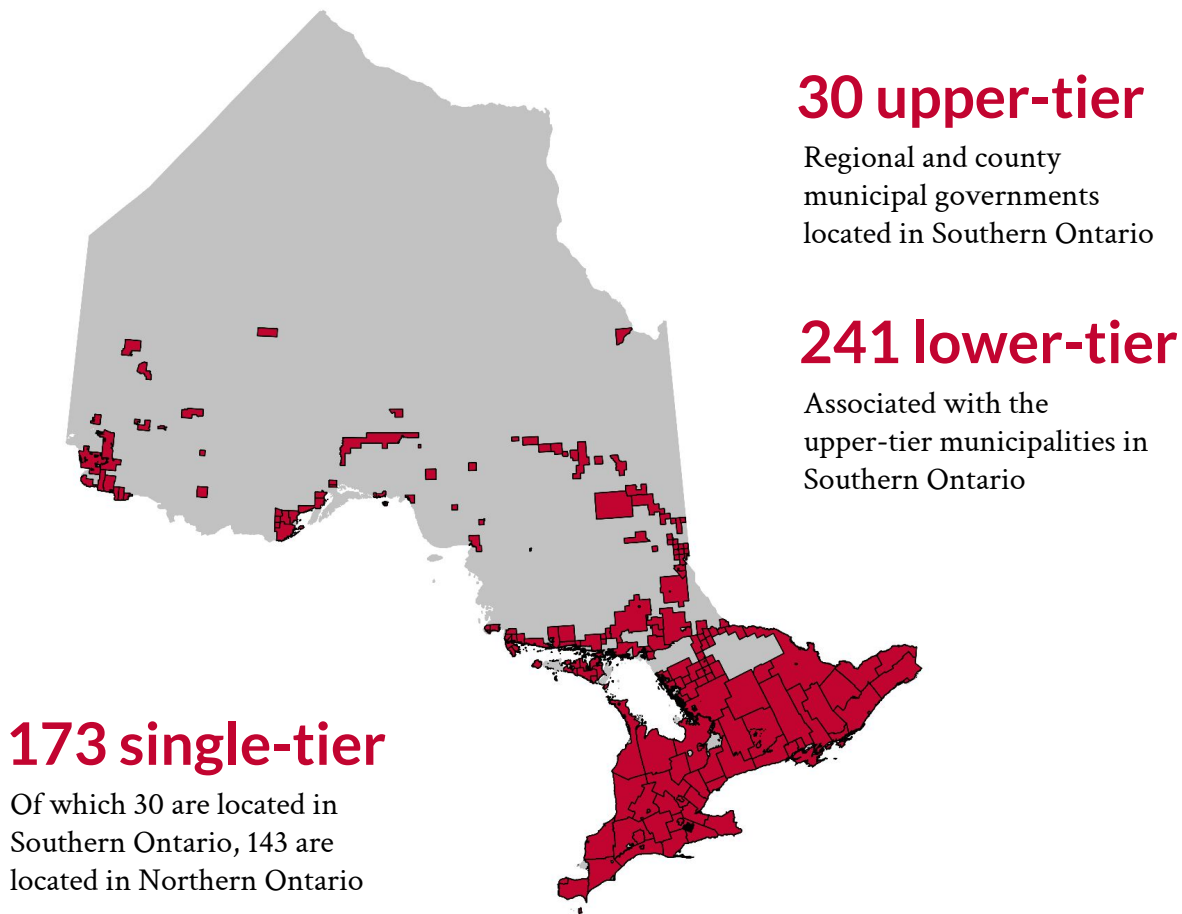
## Intended benefits

- Stakeholders: municipal staff, elected official, OMAFRA, agricultural communities, and the public.
- Knowledge of the factors influencing municipal effectiveness at meeting and satisfying agricultural and rural provincial policies.
- Understanding of which policies municipalities find challenging to address and implement.
- Identification of gaps in training and resource materials.
- A more knowledgeable, supportive, and predictive planning system.
- Evidence to inform decision-making and program development related to agricultural and rural communities.



## PROJECT OVERVIEW

### Study Area



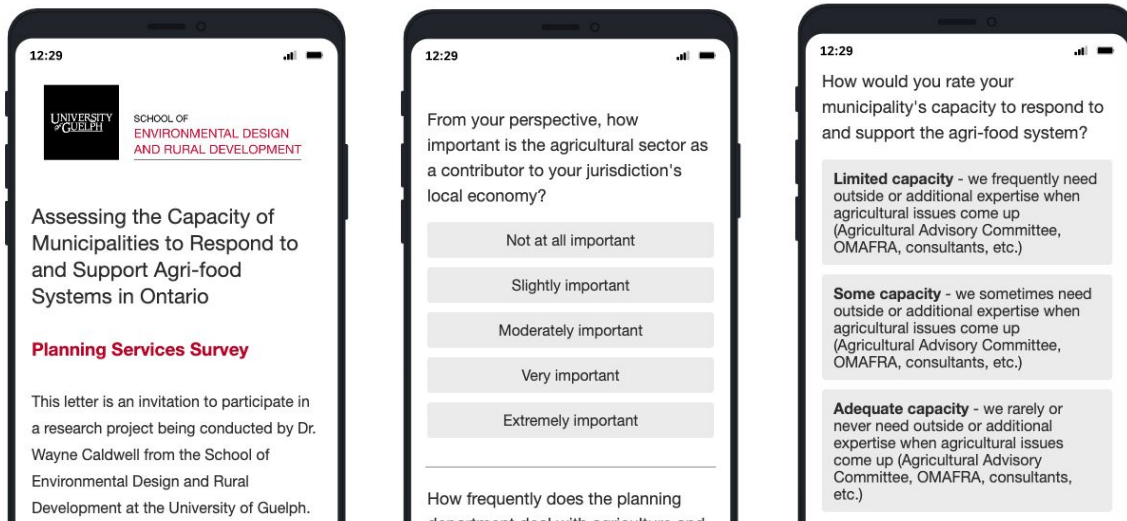


# PROJECT OVERVIEW

## Methods

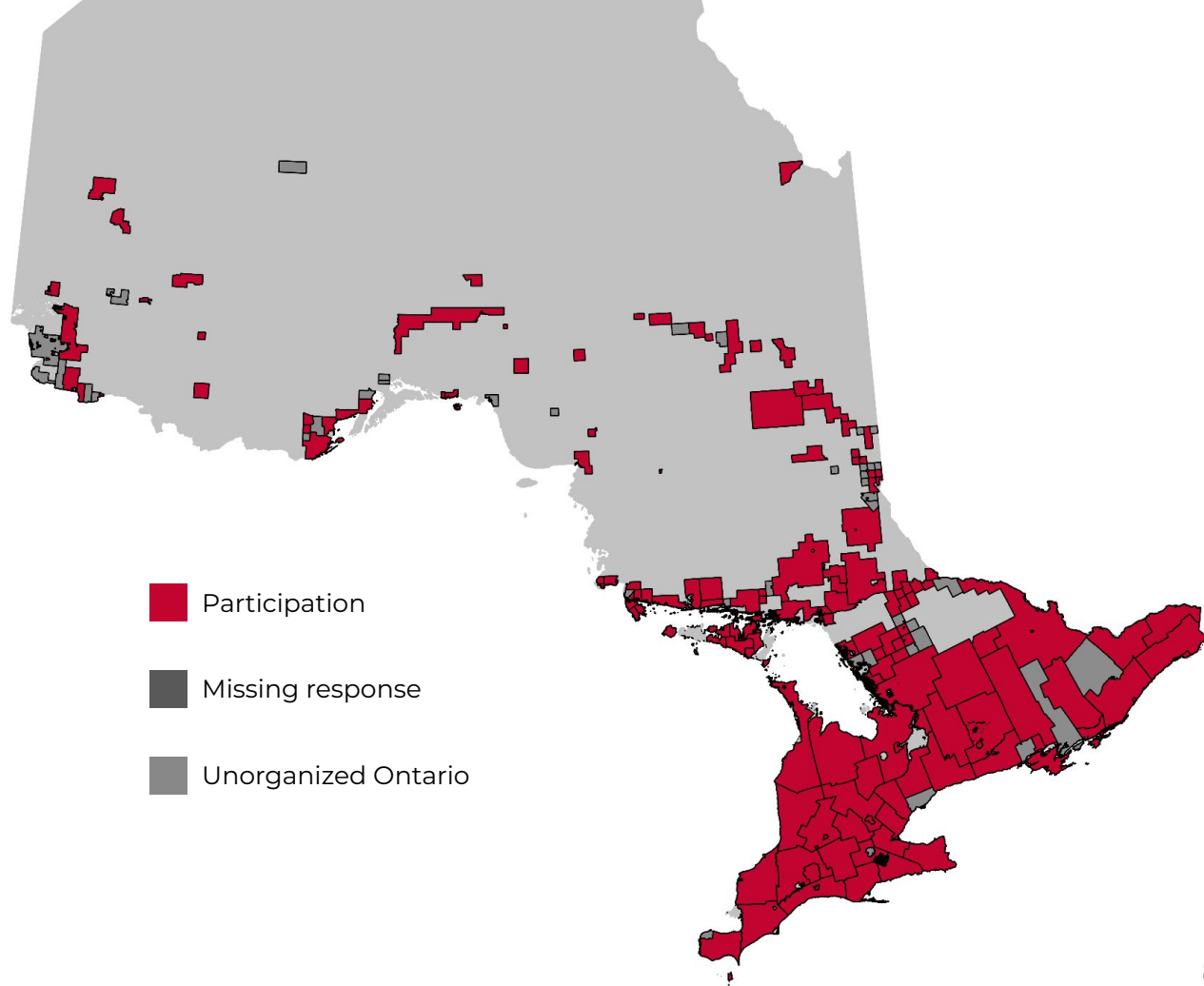
This study includes three types of data collection that will be considered in conjunction with a review of municipal documents (e.g., official plans, budgets, etc.):

1. A survey sent to elected officials,
2. A survey sent to the most senior planner (or similar), and
3. A semi-structured interview with a member of the planning department (upper- and single-tier municipalities only).



## WHO WE HEARD FROM

Upper- and single-tier  
response map  
10/31/2022



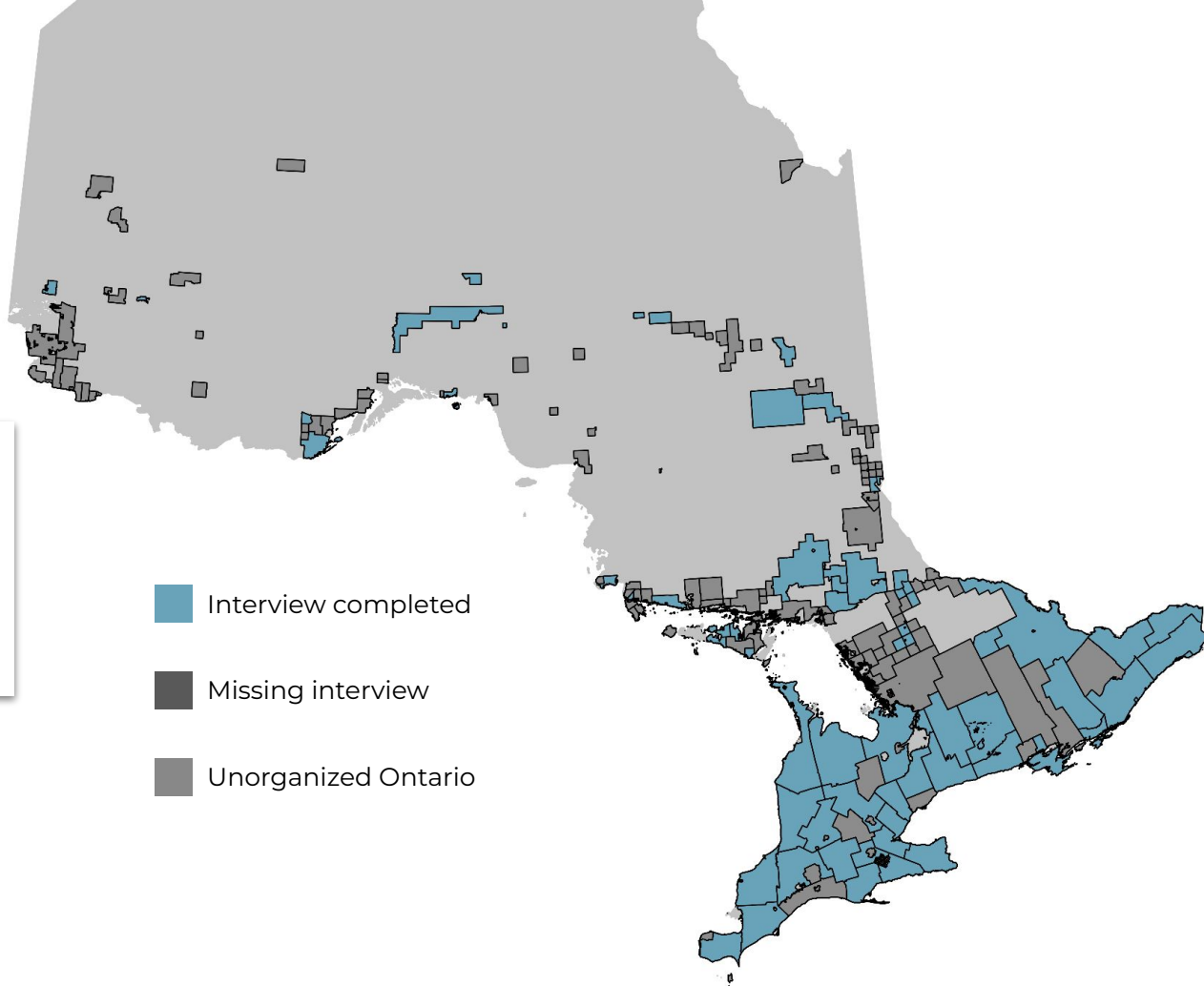


## WHO WE HEARD FROM

Upper- and single-tier  
interview response  
map 10/31/2022

### Who we interviewed:

- 22 Upper-tiers
- 42 Single-tiers
- 4 Planning Boards



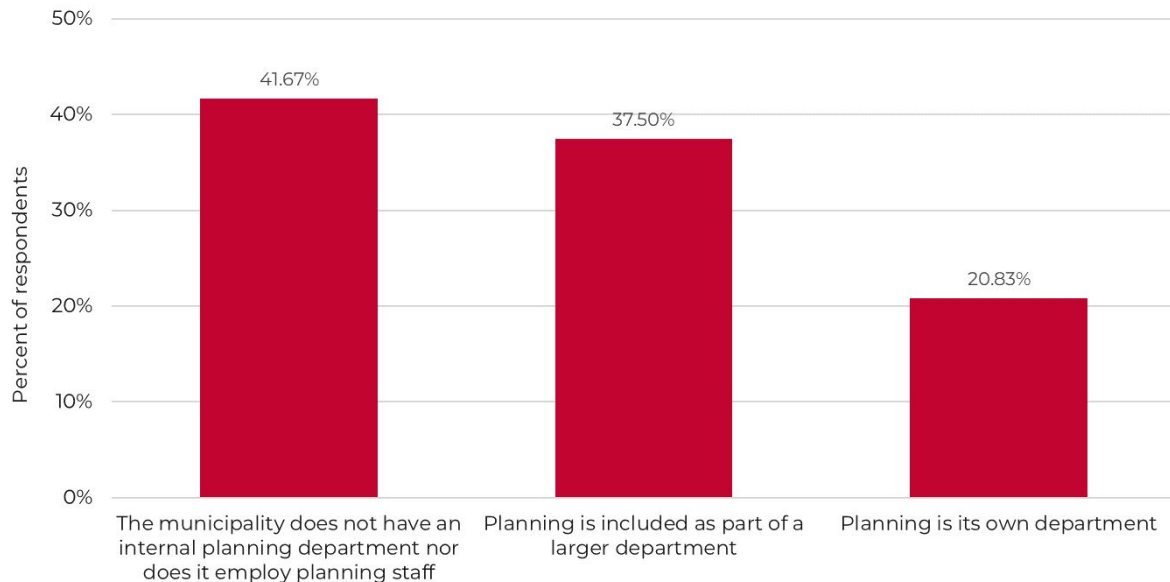
## PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Northern Ontario

### How are planning services being provided?

- In-house planner
- Consultant providing planning services
- Planning board
- Agreement with a nearby municipality
- Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH)
- A combination of the above

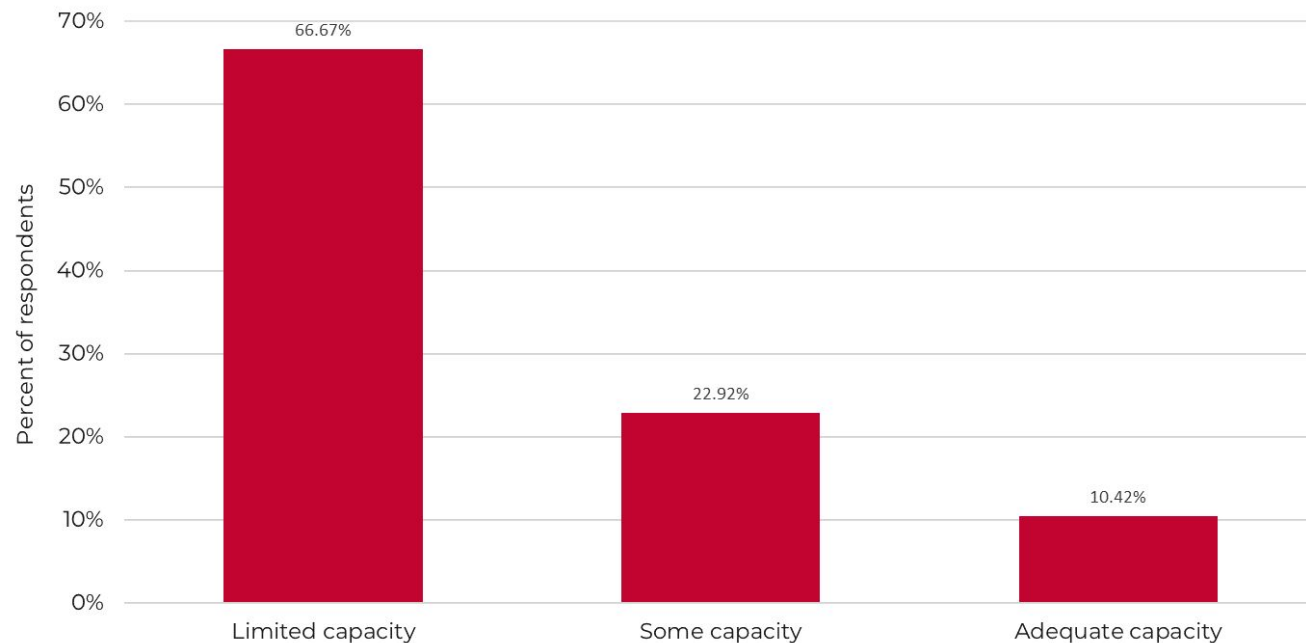
Which of the following best describes your municipality's delivery of planning service? (n=48)



## PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Northern Ontario

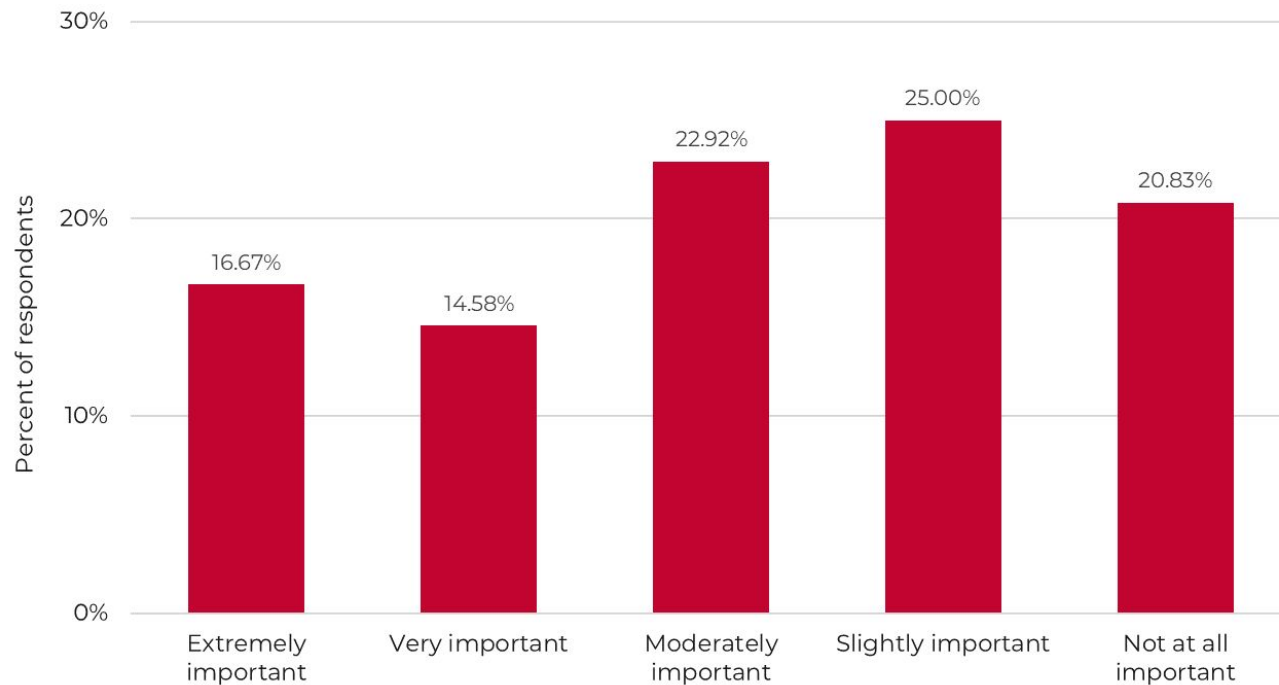
How would you rate your municipality's capacity to respond to and support the agri-food system? (n=48)



## PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Northern Ontario

**From your perspective, how important is the agricultural sector as a contributor to your jurisdiction's local economy?**  
(n=48)





## PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Northern Ontario

**Does your municipality have/deliver any of the following?  
(n=48)**

- **Water quality programs**
- **Buy local programs**
- **Economic Development initiatives related to growing/supporting the agricultural sector**
- Agritourism/food and farm tours
- Climate change strategy
- Agricultural workforce development/labour initiatives
- Food strategies
- Agricultural advisory committee
- Biodiversity strategy

## PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

What we are hearing



### Wearing many hats

“ I am the CAO clerk, so **I wear a lot of hats**. We are a very small municipality, rural municipality. [...] So my role is **I do a bit of planning** I'm I am the zoning administrator. I do you know, **whatever economic development opportunities come up**. **I oversee the staff** of, we got we have three in the office, two in the works, roads department, two landfill attendants. You know that kind of a structure. Pretty sparse.

“ I handle the planning, I'm chief building official. Also the building inspector, I handle bylaws, I handle property standard, among many, many other duties as assigned.

## PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

What we are hearing

### Knowledge of agri-food systems

- “ if the inquiry pertains to agriculture, definitely we don't have any **capacity in that field**. If it pertains to, like zoning requirements and things of that nature, yeah, we have limited capacity.
- “ I think it's **mostly in the knowledge around agricultural systems**. I'm **not a farmer**. I **didn't grow up in the farming families**. So for me to make inquiries, even to understand some of the things that takes some time and effort. [...] it's **just a lack of, limited knowledge of you know how farming works, and all the rules that are in place** for them.
- “ We don't have a lot of agricultural applications, so then we don't become experts at it. [...] **This is all kind of learning as we go kind of thing**. I guess we don't know what we don't know.



## PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

What we are hearing

### Role of Council

“ I think, and **it's tough because, you know, our council, it's very much a pro development council.** They see residential development as economic development. **So one of our biggest challenges as a planning department has been trying to limit sort of rural residential development.**

“ **They know that this is our biggest growing area** in [municipality]. It's really hard to attract businesses to set up out here because we're very rural. We have no city center. We have nothing, it rural as rural can be. So it's hard to get businesses out here. So really, **because of our rural demographics, the farming industry, the farming businesses make the most sense [...]** I think [council] are really supportive of it.





## PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

What we are hearing

### Provincial policy and support

- “ ... when it comes to interpretation of provincial regulations [...] I'd say that's **the only thing that we're looking for is that they [provincial ministries] take a firm stance and roll and interpreting their own acts and regulations.**
- “ We would like the province to recognize (and we we've been harping on this for years and years and years) **[agricultural planning] is not one size fits all** [...] we understand completely the importance of agricultural land and designation of agricultural land and we don't want to see any erosion of that. **What we want is simply greater freedom to allow municipalities to make those decisions rather than being limited by the PPS.**



## PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

What we are hearing

### Promoting/ activating agri-food systems

“ It's trying to capture sort of the other modes of food production and food processing that are coming online [...] we need sort of a broader spectrum, I guess, because we aren't a big agricultural areas. But **there are still plenty of opportunities for food production and food processing for the local area that we have.**

“ I think, perhaps, maybe some in the past people never really thought about it. [Agriculture] was just something that was there. But **I think we've come to the point where we need to start pushing it and supporting it and promoting it a lot more.** So that's where our economic development planning comes in.



## PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

What we are hearing

### Promoting/ activating agri-food systems

“...we've kind of started off, we have called **curated packages** where we sell a picnic basket that's full of the local product from [municipality name] and **we promote - this is a nice hike, come pick up this basket and do this hike and have a picnic and all this great foods that we have here.**

“So we've leased out land in the past on a short term rental, where they [farmers] can basically come in and just cut, we've outlined **areas where they can and cannot** cut due to servicing that's in the area. It's not zoned appropriately for that. But, you know, **we want to do everything we can to see our agricultural sector successful.**





## Thank you.

We would like to thank the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, and the Greenbelt Foundation for supporting this project.

Additionally, we would like to thank all of the planners and elected officials who have or will contributed their perspective, experience, and knowledge to this project.

To learn more or continue the discussion visit [Dr. Wayne Caldwell's resource website.](#)