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# INTRODUCTION

## *Purpose and Background*

The purpose of this plan is threefold. By identifying current trends and conditions that impact the viability of agriculture and loss of farmland, the intent of this plan is to:

1. **Inform Ontario County government and create general awareness for community leaders and the general public** about:
  - the significance of agriculture
  - stresses on area farming from public policies, conditions within the agriculture industry, and the non-farm public
  - economic potential for expanded agricultural activity
2. **Identify agricultural resources in need of protection and present appropriate farmland protection techniques.**
3. **Present options to strengthen the economic vitality of agriculture and retain productive farmland.**

## *Benefits of Agriculture to Ontario County*

Although most residents of Ontario County are largely unfamiliar with agricultural practices and concerns, we all benefit from having agriculture in Ontario County. A strong and sustainable agricultural industry provides many economic and quality of life benefits to residents and local communities, including:

- \$252 million annually to the local economy (based on 1997 data)
- thousands of full and part-time employment opportunities
- a net tax surplus for local economies
- recreational and tourism opportunities
- readily available produce that is locally grown and fresh
- protection of environmental quality and natural resources
- scenic open space and working landscapes
- food and habitat for wildlife
- quality of life/rural character that attracts other employers

## *What is Agriculture in Ontario County?*

Although it may seem like a simple question, defining agriculture in Ontario County is more complex than it may appear on the surface. The agriculture industry is actually much more diverse and far-reaching than most people realize. Technically speaking, the Census defines a farm as “any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were sold or normally would have been sold during the census year”.

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It's important to keep in mind that there are a wide range of agricultural services and products, such as landscaping and horticultural businesses, golf course/turf management operations, flowers/florists, arborists, etc.

Below is a generalized list of products and services related to agriculture:

### **Traditional Products**

Ontario County farms produce a wide variety of traditional agricultural products: nursery and greenhouse plants, sheep, wool, pigs, beef cattle, vegetables (tomato, potato, onion, beans, carrots, cabbage, lettuce, radishes, turnips, cucumbers, pumpkins, etc.) wood products, oats, grain, seeds, turfgrass, nursery and greenhouse plants, wheat, nuts, berries (strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, etc.) poultry, eggs, dairy products (milk, cheese, sour cream, butter, yogurt, etc.), horse operations, fruit (grapes, apples, plums, cherries, peaches, etc.) sunflowers, maple syrup, honey, etc.

### **Specialty Items**

In addition to traditional products, more and more farms are also processing their products into consumer ready specialty items such as wine, salsas, jams, jellies, relishes, etc., as well as making various craft items.

### **Tourism/Recreational Aspects**

Many farms also host recreational and tourist sidelines including: primitive camping, U-pick, boat/canoe rentals, hay rides, nature walks, riding arenas, farm vacations, hunting, petting zoos, sleigh rides, orchard tours, snowmobile trails, farm museums, cut your own Christmas trees, fishing, swimming, boarding pleasure horses, etc.