

# **Balancing On-Farm Diversification and Agricultural Land Preservation in Ontario 2021 and Beyond:**

**Assessing effectiveness and identifying best practices for the implementation of the OMAFRA Guidelines**

**OPPI 21 CONFERENCE**

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 13TH, 2021**

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# OUTLINE



1. Context for the Research
2. Research Problem and Objectives
3. Methods
4. Results
5. Example of Successful OFDU
6. Key Overarching Research Findings
7. Recommendations
8. Next Steps
9. Conclusion
10. Questions



# CONTEXT

## Farmland Preservation in Ontario, Canada

- Less than **5%** of Canada's land base is made up of prime agricultural land
- **52%** of prime agricultural land in Canada is located in Ontario
- Farmland in Ontario has decreased by **39.33%** from 1951 to 2011
- Of the **49,600** farms in Ontario, **98%** of them are family-owned
- The numbers of **small** and **medium-sized farms** are **decreasing** while the number of large farms is increasing.
- "It is not enough to preserve farmland; society must also preserve the farmer."



# POLICY CONTEXT

## OMAFRA Guidelines

Guidelines  
Permitted  
in Ontario  
Agricultural

- PPS (2020) and the OMAFRA Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Prime Agricultural Areas (2016) allow for **on-farm diversified uses** (OFDUs) in *prime agricultural areas*
- **On-farm diversified uses:**
  - 1) Located on a farm
  - 2) Secondary to the principal agricultural use of the property
  - 3) Limited in area (2% of a farm parcel to a maximum of 1 ha)
  - 4) Includes, but is not limited to, home occupations, home industries, agri- tourism uses and uses that produce value-added agricultural products
  - 5) Shall be compatible with, and shall not hinder, surrounding agricultural operations





# PLAN

CANADA

FALL/WINTER 2021



**WALTERS DINNER THEATRE,**  
**Oxford County**



**CIRCUS IN THE TREES,**  
**Norfolk County**



**WINDMILL LAKE WAKE & ECO-PARK,**  
**Huron County**



# RESEARCH PROBLEM

- On-farm diversification can have many benefits, but ensuring a **balance between farmland preservation, agricultural viability, and economic development** is key
- Challenges: size, scale, compatibility with surrounding farms, maintaining character of a farm, cumulative effects, and more
- Municipalities are tasked with implementing the OMAFRA Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Prime Agricultural Areas into **local policy**
- Research will ensure the policy framework for OFDUs is **supportive in balancing goals** of farmland protection, agricultural viability, and economic development.
- Research will assess the **benefits and costs of policy** for farmers and municipalities.
- Research will **identify and evaluate best practices** for planners to achieve policy objectives for OFDUs and **identify policy barriers** that limit the establishment or expansion of OFDU activity.



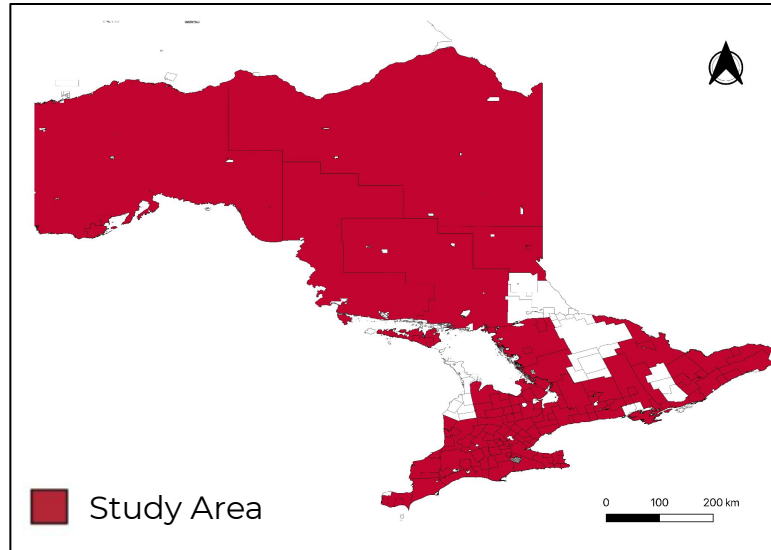
# CONTEXT

## Research Objectives

1. To **evaluate the effectiveness of policy** that allows for agriculture-related and OFDUs within Ontario (at individual farm, municipal, and provincial levels).
2. To **identify existing policies and strategies** used to encourage agriculture-related and OFDUs (at a County and Regional level).
3. To evaluate the specific **policy effects on farmers**.
4. To **identify best practices** for policy and strategies for agriculture-related and OFDUs based on evidence collected (evidence-based policy for municipalities, the Province, and agriculture).

# METHODS

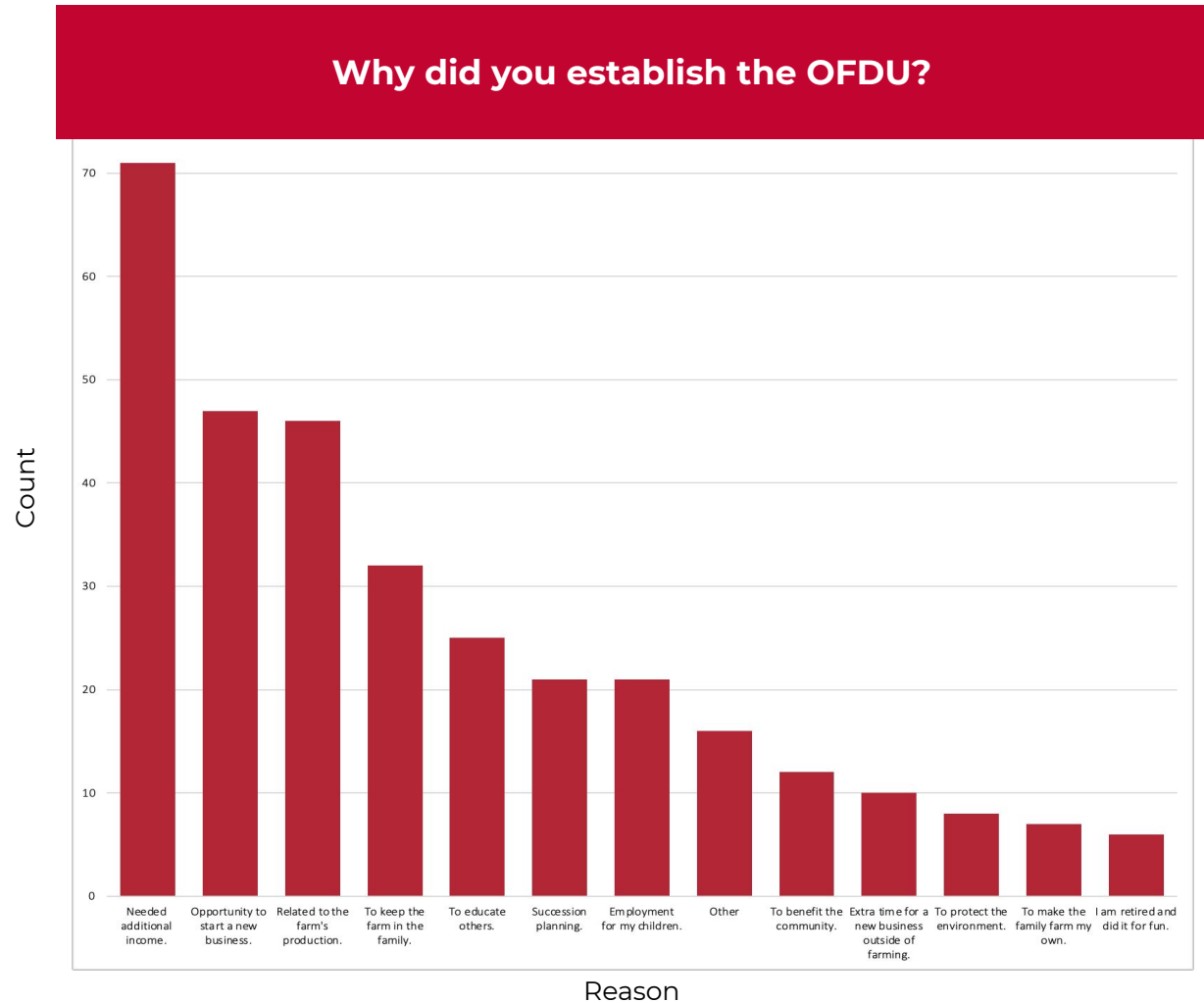
- Survey to municipal planning departments and farmers
  - **37** upper/single- tier municipalities & planning boards
  - **146** farmers
- Interviews with planners (**31**) and farmers (**40**)
- **3** Focus groups with provincial/municipal planners and farmers





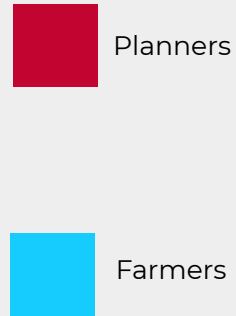
# SURVEY RESULTS

Farmers

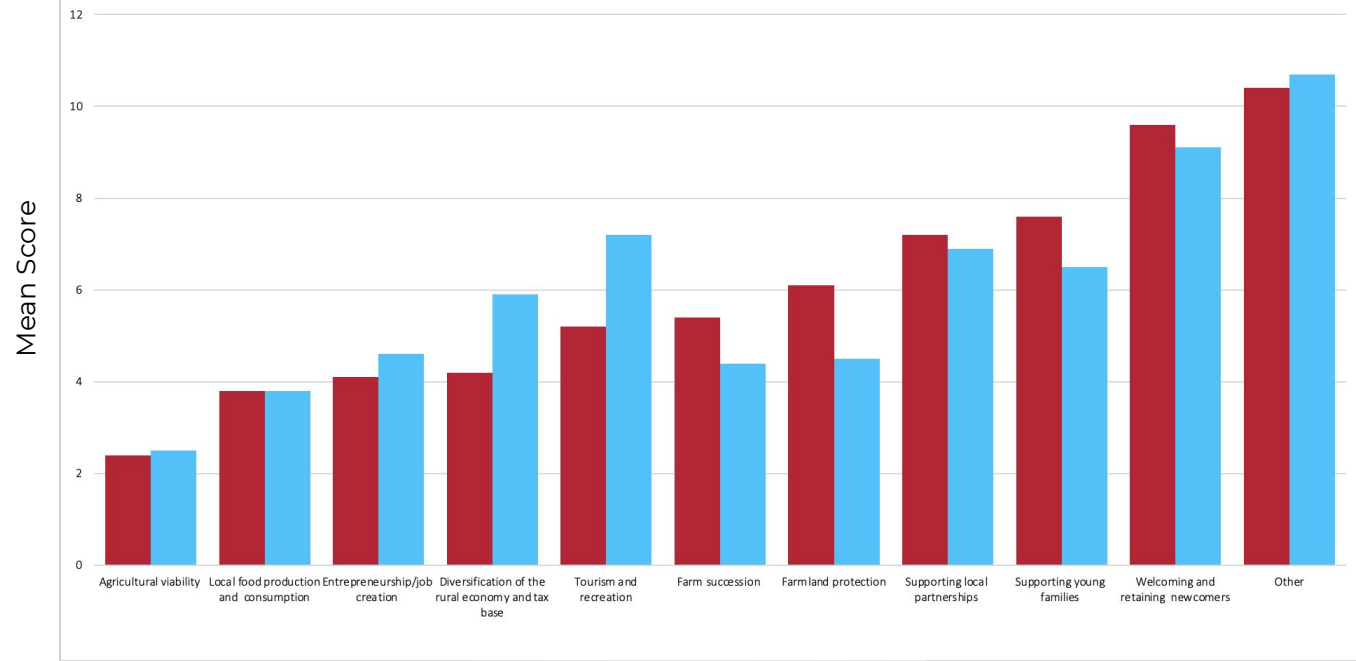


# SURVEY RESULTS

Planners & Farmers



On a scale from 1-11, rank the following contributions of OFDUS based on their level of importance (1 being most important and 11 being least).

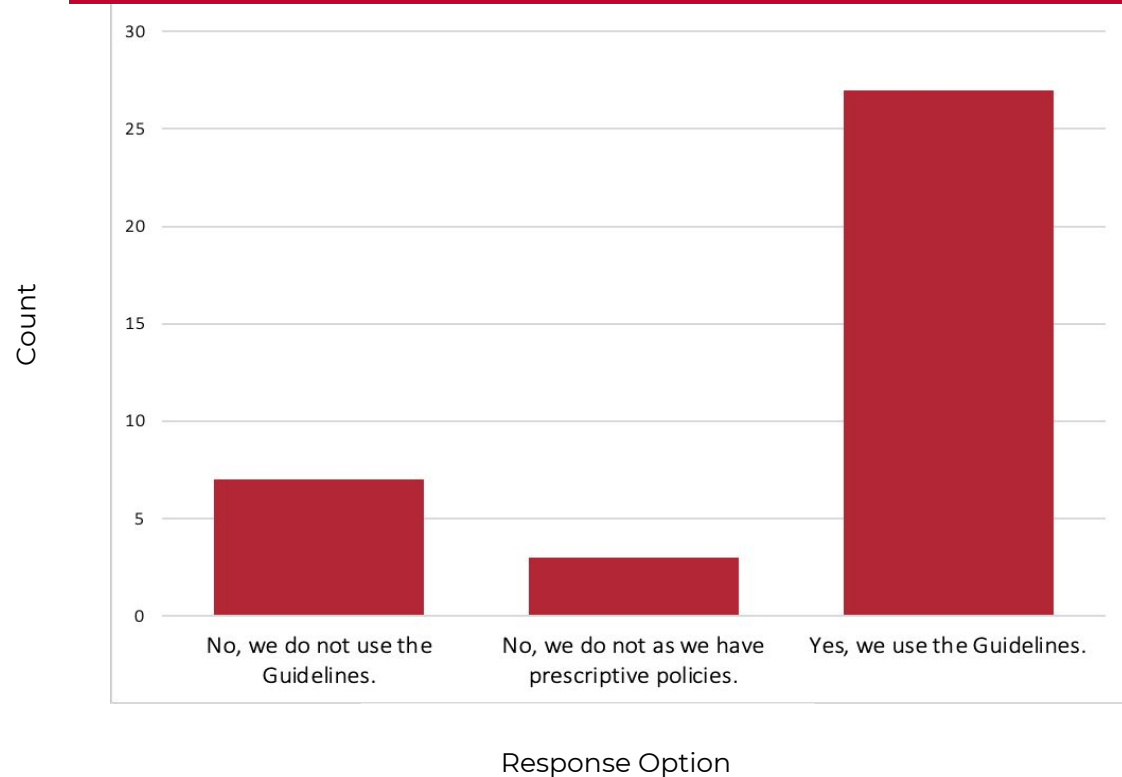


Contributions of OFDUs

# SURVEY RESULTS

## Planners

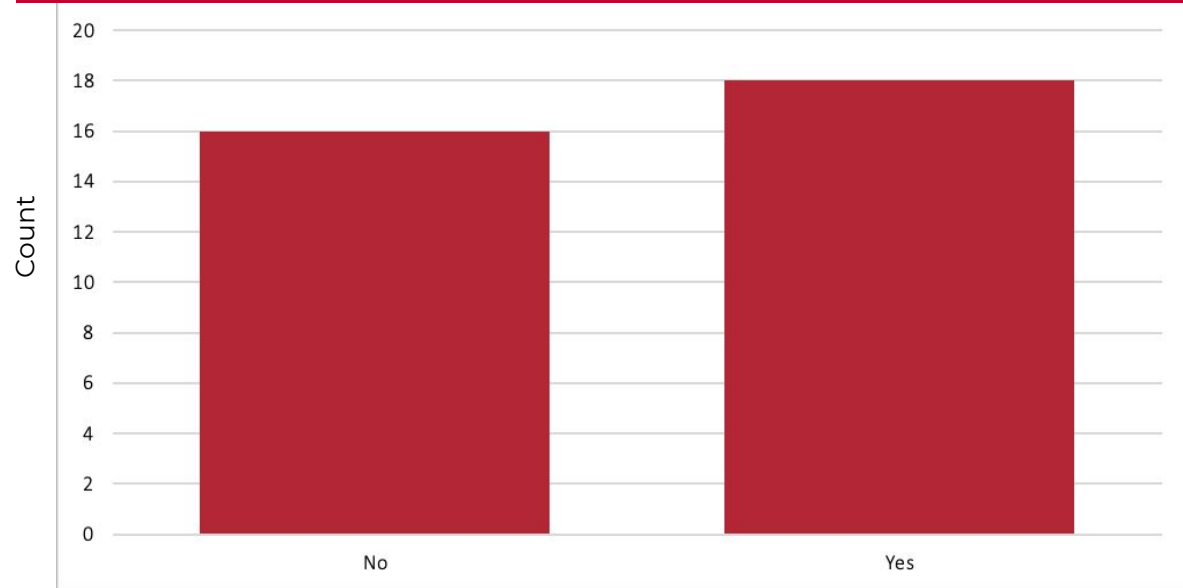
Does your municipality use the Guidelines when new OFDUs are proposed?



# SURVEY RESULTS

Planners

**Do you think the Guidelines' recommendation of a 'size and scale' maximum of "2% of farmlands to a max. of 1 ha" is an appropriate size for all OFDUs (to protect farmland and enable economic opportunities)?**



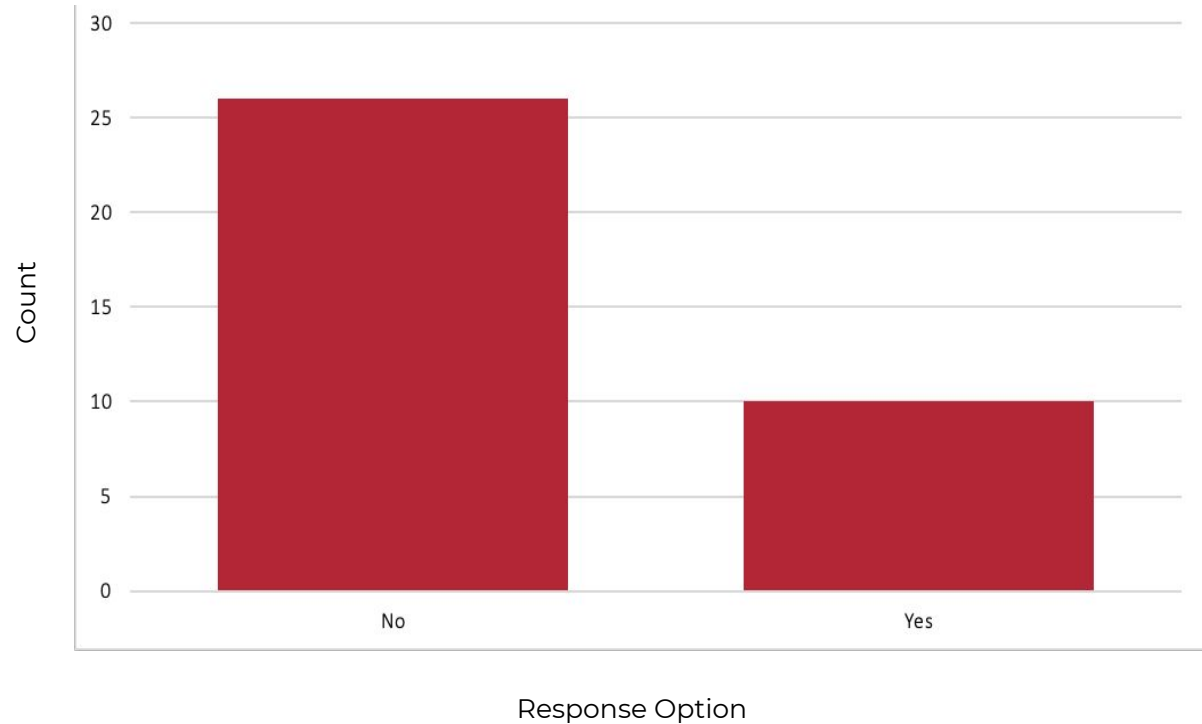
Response Option



# SURVEY RESULTS

Planners

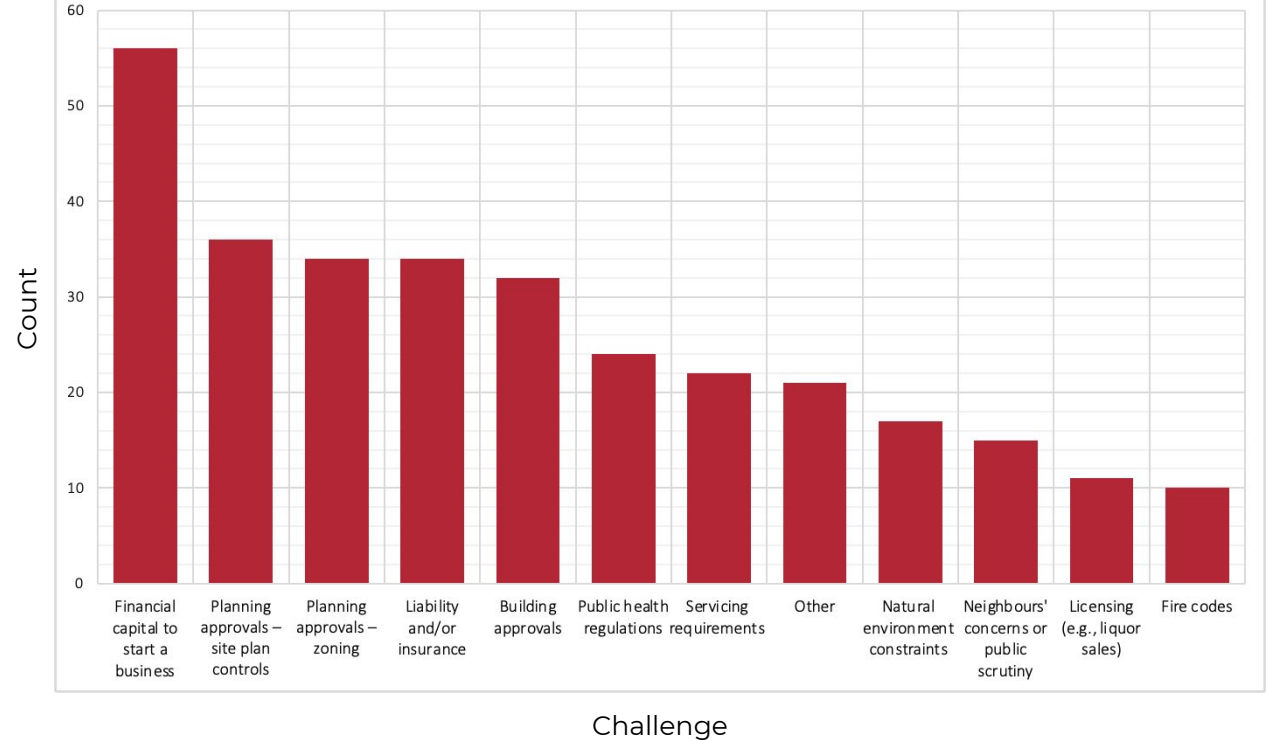
**Does your municipality have any policies to promote the reuse of existing buildings and structures?**



# SURVEY RESULTS

Farmers

What challenges did you experience when establishing or expanding the OFDU?



# INTERVIEW RESULTS

**Farmer P37:** “We went to the political level and had **public meetings** about [the zoning by-law amendment]. It was excruciatingly difficult. **I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy.**”

**Farmer P05:** “... Because the whole farm is zoned as that “agricultural plus” designation, we're able to do those events without having to get any specific permits. **That designation allows us to go forward without too much hassle.** I think it'd be really hard to do it if we were not designated that way.”

**Farmer P15:** “So we did a rezoning application to allow for many of the things that we do here on the farm... the cafe, the bakery, events, and things like that. ... because **a lot of the activities we do aren't 'traditional agriculture.'** ... **Our goal would be to have 'right-of-use,'** because many farms want to do diversified uses, but they either don't have the time or the finances to rezone and fight the township. So instead they either get **discouraged, they do it without approval, or they just don't do it at all.**”

# INTERVIEW RESULTS

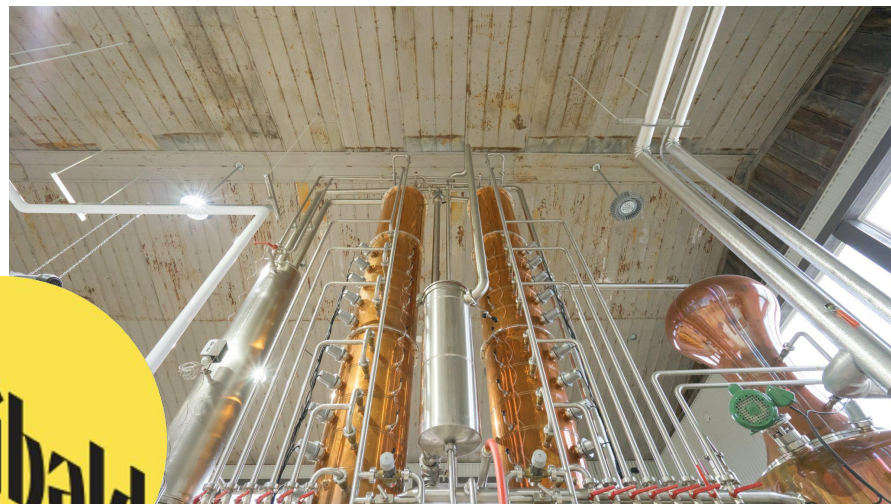


**Farmer P37:** “Right now, all throughout the pandemic the rhetoric is ‘buy local, stay local, support local businesses.’ .... Even the municipal governments are supporting those programs, but they forget to tell building, by-law, and planning that this [on-farm diversification] is an important thing. **There's no discussion between the departments.**”

The [economic development committee] brought... **planners and departments to our farm to show them what could happen** [with on-farm diversification]. At the same point, I would walk down the hall to the planning department who seemed to be doing everything to stop us, because they didn't want to “set a precedent.” They kept saying... “if we allow you, we have to allow everyone.” This is an argument that is so flawed in so many ways. **If you allow me, then you've got this is how it's done. And you've got a pathway for the next [farmers] to come.** I want to be that person — I will help you write the bylaws. I'll help you write the plan to make this happen.

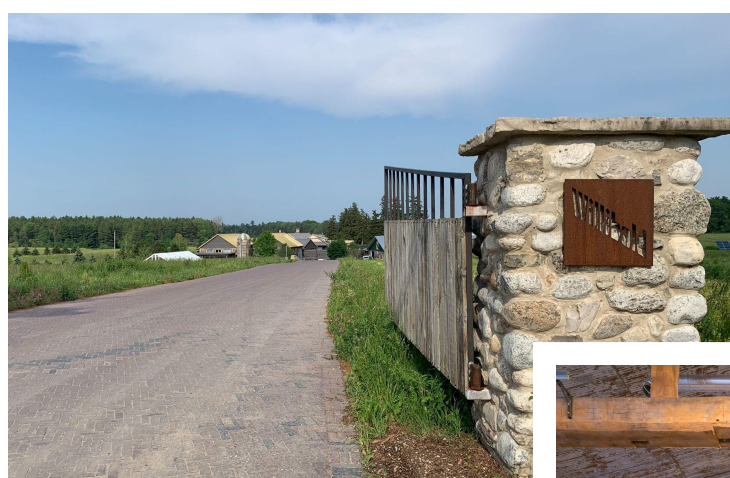
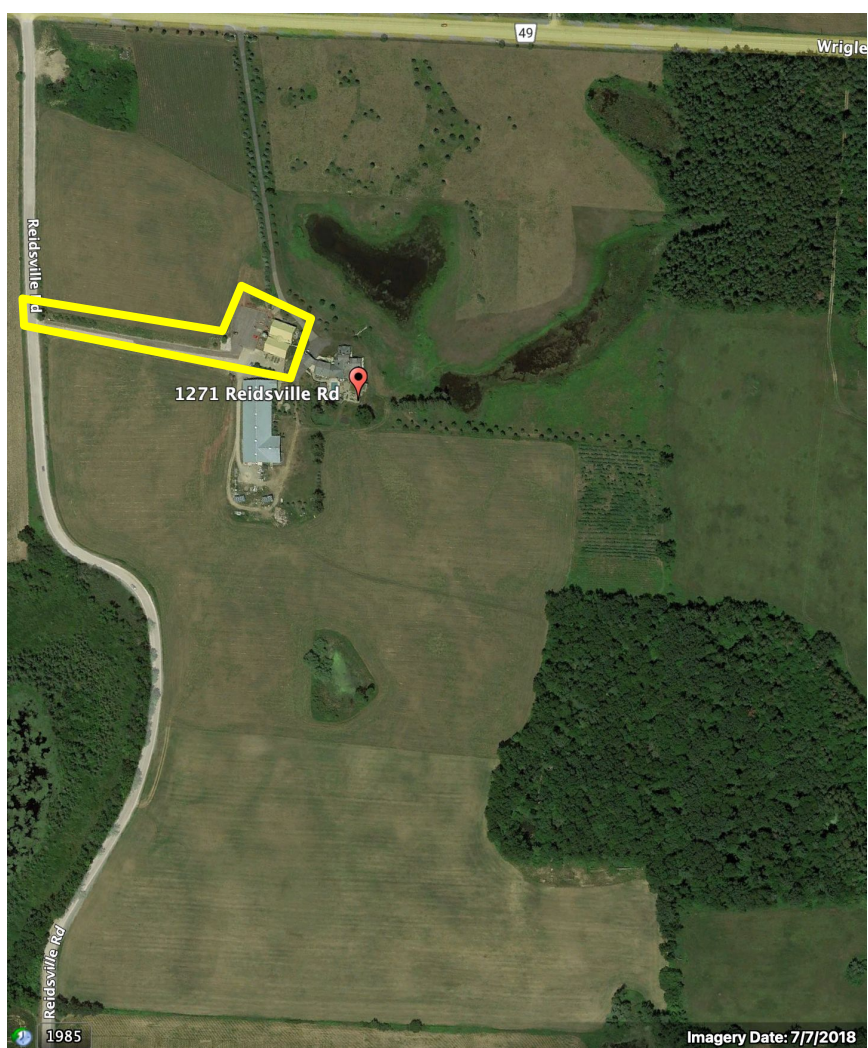
So they have this idea that until it's done by a number of people, it can't be done, but then you can't do it until it's done by a number of people — so it is a catch-22. So we, we've been pushing hard for many years and continue to because it's so important. We feel it's too important. And we've seen the industry thrive. And we've seen people make a living on their farm and **not just make a living but thrive.** And, you know, this is, in my opinion, one of the only ways **to truly preserve the family farm.”**





**Willibald Farm Distillery & Brewery**  
**Township of North Dumfries, Ontario**





**Willibald Farm Distillery & Brewery**  
**Township of North Dumfries, Ontario**



# KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

What We Know So  
Far

- The Guidelines are a valuable and useful tool but are currently underutilized by municipal counterparts.
- **More outreach, education, training and sharing of best practices are required.**
- Updates are required on the Guidelines:
  - **Confusion** between Ag-Related & On-Farm Diversified uses
  - “Farm first” and “size and scale” are the **key principles** municipalities must prioritize
  - More **guidance** on event venues and cumulative uses
- Municipal strategies and policies including the following are useful:
  - **As-of-right** policies and provisions in zoning by-laws
  - Simplified or scaled back **site plan control** processes
  - **Exempted or limited fees** for farmers, where possible
  - **Design** guidelines




## RECOMMENDATIONS

### A Snapshot



1. Municipalities, the provincial government, and the agricultural community should **recognize the value in the OMAFRA Guidelines** as a useful tool.
2. Province to work with municipalities to utilize, interpret, and implement the guidelines into local level policy and **provide training to municipalities.**
3. Design specifications, both put out by the province and municipalities, to **ensure that the character of a farm** is maintained.
4. Municipalities (all departments) and farmers are encouraged to have **pre-submission consultation meetings** with all fees, timelines, and requirements laid out. It should be used as an opportunity for open discussion.
5. **Fees and requirements** should be scaled back for farmers (i.e. development charges, engineered drawings, studies, application fees, site plan control, etc.).
6. **Enhanced working relationships** between municipalities, OMAFRA, and various farm organizations to provide resources to **support OFDUs.**
7. Farmers are encouraged to **maintain positive neighbourly relations** to ensure most successful outcomes for both farm operations and on-farm diversified businesses.





## NEXT STEPS

- **Focus groups** with farmers (Fall 2021)
- **Synthesize feedback** from participants and edit recommendations
- **Presentations** (Fall 2021) including:
  - Ontario Professional Planners Institute
  - Niagara Escarpment Commission
  - Golden Horseshoe Food and Farming Alliance
  - Ontario Federation of Agriculture
  - Farm Fresh Ontario
- **Report to OMAFRA** (early Winter 2022)
- Various publications and presentations (Winter 2022)

# THANK YOU

We would like to thank the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance for supporting this project.

Additionally, we would like to thank all of the planners and farmers who contributed their perspective, experience, and knowledge to this project.

To learn more or continue the discussion, please contact:

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# QUESTIONS, DISCUSSION, & FEEDBACK