

OFA Commentary: May 18, 2017

## **Census data reflects changes in agriculture industry**

*By Rejean Pommerville, Director, Ontario Federation of Agriculture*

There were encouraging trends and very few surprises in the 2016 Census of Agriculture data released on May 10 by Statistics Canada. This recent wave of census results provides an interesting check in on what is trending up and down in the ag sector. The information serves mostly to confirm what we know is happening in the agricultural industry across Canada, and within Ontario.

Here are some of the more interesting observations of the state of our sector from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture's (OFA) perspective.

Stats Canada noted growth in the size of Ontario farms, corresponding with an overall drop in farm numbers. Preserving farmland is an important topic for OFA and we're encouraged to see a slow down on the rate of loss of agricultural land for the latest census period from 2011 to 2016. Ontario is losing the equivalent of 175 acres of farmland every day – which is still far too much – but has dropped significantly from the 350 acres a day that was being lost from 2006 to 2011.

The 2016 census was the first time farm operators were asked about succession planning, and 8.5% of Ontario farms reported having a plan in place – about the same as the national average.

While the overall age of the Canadian farm population continues to increase, it's encouraging to see the gains made in Ontario with nearly 30% of farms operated by women. The number of farmers under age 35 has also increased slightly to about 9.5% of all Ontario farmers.

Ontario continues to hold its strong position in the Canadian agriculture landscape – home to 25% of all farms that generate 20% of Canada's gross farm receipts. The average Ontario farm size increased slightly to 249 acres.

On a historical note, Ontario was part of the first census held in 1871. At that time, more than 172,000 farms worked 16.2 million acres of land. In 2016, Ontario has 49,600 farms working 12.3 million acres.

OFA thanks all Ontario farmers who participated in the census. It's an important snapshot of our industry, and provides information for our advocacy work. Watch for the next set of information from the 2016 Census of Agriculture to be released this fall.

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