

# Green Door Alliance



## A VISION FOR THE AGRICULTURE PRESERVE

The conservation of highest quality foodland close to urban Toronto provides a unique opportunity for diverse farming enterprises. During the present transition the tenants (new owners) have concentrated on cash cropping—wheat, beans and corn as they did on the rented land. Cash crop farming demands a large investment in land and machinery (\$150,000 tractors, \$350,000 combines) for a few farmers. Due to this sunk capital, evolution to small scale specialty farming will have to evolve over time.

Elsewhere, new trends and a renewed family farm ethic is evident. Organic food production is increasing at a rate of 25% per year. Direct farmer to consumer sales is popular. One only has to compare a fresh picked Ontario strawberry to the travel weary produce of Mexico. Small-scale(100 acre) farms are not obsolete near urban populations. With or without off farm income entrepreneurial opportunities abound, for example:

- Dairy produce—milk, butter, cheese, yogurt, and ice cream. The specialty cheese market has great potential, despite the high entry cost for quota. There are farm sons/daughters who will inherit quota. Goats and sheep's milk does not need quota. There are transport savings when near markets and opportunities for direct sales at a farmers market. There have been recent discussions on some relaxing of the quota restrictions to encourage cream shipments for cheese production.
- There is a vast unmet market for spring lamb. Toronto's growing ethnic population (Italians, Greeks, Bulgarians, Turks, Iranians, etc, etc) like to celebrate Easter, weddings, and birthdays with spring lamb. A local farmer operated cooperative abattoir could develop and facilitate this enterprise. Lamb can not readily be factory produced like chicken, pork and beef. There is a market for thousands of spring lambs each year. The entry level cost is reasonable— one ewe produces 1.4 lambs each year for up to 10 years.
- There is a market for processed meat: sausage, smoked ham, kabasa, bacon, pepperoni, etc. produced on family farms to ethnic recipes.
- The U-Pick market has not been fully exploited. Apart from strawberries and raspberries there are other small fruits, apples, pears and plums; and vegetables, asparagus, cabbage, cauliflower and broccoli. Durham farmers are exporting brassica produce to the US and South and Central America.

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Some farms may go organic—all can promote farm fresh, direct farmer to consumer sales. Free range farming has considerable appeal to modern consumers.

- A more entrepreneurial enterprise would be the co-operative production, processing and marketing of organic soya bean produce (oil, tofu, sauce, meal) under the *Green Door* label.
- A farmer's market has potential, providing fruits, vegetables, meats whatever is in season..
- Free- range chicken, pork and beef are in demand, bring a premium price and ideally are raised in small quantities on family farms. There is also specialty markets for venison, quail, pheasant and rabbit.
- There is potential to manage garden allotments. Rental of one acre plots to nearby urbanites who want to engage in gardening for profit and enjoyment.
- Tree farms can provide u-cut Xmas trees and nursery stock of ornamental and shade trees and shrubs.
- Farm produce sales can be combined with family recreation: apple pressing, apple butter rendering, fresh juice for hard and soft cider, hay rides, petting zoos, —a country experience for the whole family (reference Cudleys)
- Horticulture is a growing business. Ideally operated close to city markets.
- Infrastructure needs include a fruit and vegetable quick freezing plant, storage and marketing, possibly organic under the Green Door label.

It is possible that some farms will be sold at a handsome profit to wealthy Toronto Executives as 100 acre building lots. This can not be outlawed. It does provide a retirement dowry for elderly farmers, not quite as lucrative as a sale for urbanization but reasonable. It also provides land rental opportunities. It keeps the land green and available to agriculture.

This list is not exclusive or inclusive. It only illustrates a potential alternative to industrial cash crop farming. There is a misconception that 'modern' farming must be capital intensive expensive machinery and factory buildings for producing grains for animal and human feed and industrial pork, chicken and beef. This is viable for a few farmers in Western Ontario and Canada, the mid US and parts of South America. It is not the best use of near urban Class I foodland in the GTA.

My research of some years past found that the average German farm is 22 acres. Most were part time ventures. A German hog farmer with 30 sows on a small farm also has a job in a Ruhr steel mill. A neighbour on ten acres produces cherries for a local Kirsch distillery. Recently I studied Netherlands agriculture/land use policy. The Dutch are busy consolidating one and two acre separations into bigger (5 and 10 acre) farms. As our population grows and intensifies our land use model may more closely resemble the European than the American.

Do not denigrate the part time (hobby) farmer. A 37 hour work week as a mechanic, clerk or executive leaves plenty of time for a family farm enterprise and helps carry the mortgage, while producing wealth for the farmer, support for the economy and healthy food for urban neighbours.

Lorne Almack, for the Green Door Alliance, May 2004