

Monday March 28, 2022

The Honourable Lisa Thompson
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
1 Stone Road West
Guelph, Ontario N1G 4Y2
minister.omafra@ontario.ca

Dear Minister Thompson,

We write to you as a group of concerned food scholars from across Canada to express our opposition to the proposed land transfer to enable the construction of the new Eastern Ontario Correctional Complex. The lands under question, part of the former Kemptville College farm property, have a rich history of agriculture, education and agrotourism, and served as an important hub for the Eastern Ontario farming community. This move will result in the destruction of high-quality farmland along with heritage farm buildings. At a time when we are facing a crisis of farm renewal – losing farmland, food system infrastructure and farmers every day, it is unconscionable to allow this transfer to take place. As the minister responsible, we urge you to stop the transfer of this property from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to the Ministry of the Solicitor General and consider alternative uses for this land that would have a far better contribution to the surrounding food systems and communities.

The 182 acres are predominantly class 2 and 3 soils and occupy a prominent location at the south entrance of Kemptville. The decision to destroy this farmland could not come at a worse time, as Ontario is facing a farm renewal crisis. The latest Census of Agriculture paints a troubling picture: between 2011-2016 (the latest data available) Ontario lost 2,350 farms and over 4,000 farm operators. According to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, 175 acres of farmland is lost every day to urban development. The average age of farmers in Ontario is now just over 55 – as these farmers look to retire new entrants face significant financial hurdles preventing them from taking over. Only 1 in 12 farms in Canada has a succession plan in place, making it unlikely that most of today's farms will remain in production in the decades to come. We need to take advantage of every opportunity to preserve and protect the farmlands we have left.

Ontario is also facing a climate crisis. The lands being considered for the Eastern Ontario Correctional Complex provide habitat to range of beneficial plant and animal species and contribute to the climate resilience of the region through carbon sequestration. Approving this land transfer goes against the findings of a 2014 report by former federal Minister of Agriculture Lyle Vanclief, commissioned by the Ontario government, which recommended the Kemptville College farm property be preserved in its entirety and transferred to the municipality. Portions of the property were sold to the municipality of North Grenville and transformed into an Education and Community Centre, the remaining lands should follow suit in a manner that contributes to surrounding food systems and communities. As the Minister responsible for fostering the sustainability and growth of the agri-food sector and Ontario's capacity to produce food locally, you must show leadership by protecting this site, rather than furthering the destruction of valuable farmlands and farm buildings.

The decision to build a 235-bed prison in Kemptville was made without any meaningful consultation or discussion with the local municipality or residents. While the Ministry of the Solicitor General suggests

the construction of the prison will bring economic growth to the region, they have yet to present any evidence to support this claim. Since the announcement many local residents have voiced their opposition to the plan. Rather than building new sites of confinement, the Ontario government should be working to address the many issues within existing prisons and focus on policies that invest in community supports and services in order to limit the demand for prisons in the future. Building more capacity to incarcerate people is not only costly, it is an incredibly ineffective way to make communities safer.

Finally, these lands are part of the unceded, and unsundered territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe peoples. Any decision to transfer or develop these lands must, at a bare minimum, involve meaningful engagement and partnership with Indigenous peoples. The proposal to construct a new prison is particularly distressing given the disproportionate number of Indigenous peoples incarcerated in Ontario prisons. There are any number of exciting possibilities for these lands; it's hard to think of a worse use than building a prison. The lands and buildings of the former Kemptville College farm should contribute to the well-being of residents, the agri-food sector and the broader environment, not further harm, destruction and confinement.

We, the undersigned, ask you to refuse the land transfer and instead explore alternative uses for the property in collaboration with the local community, agri-food sector and Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation.

Signed

Amanda Wilson, Assistant Professor, Saint Paul University

Alison Blay-Palmer, Professor, Wilfrid Laurier University

André Magnan, Associate Professor, University of Regina

Mustafa Koc, Professor, Ryerson University

Jo Sharma, Director, Feeding City research lab, University of Toronto

Harriet Friedmann, Professor Emerita, University of Toronto

Barbara Parker, Associate Professor, Lakehead University

Michael Classens Assistant Professor, University of Toronto

Anelyse Weiler, Assistant Professor, University of Victoria

Irena Knezevic, Associate Professor, Carleton University

Charles Levkoe, Canada Research Chair in Equitable and Sustainable Food Systems, Associate Professor, Lakehead University

Ryan Phillips, Lecturer, X University

Liz Miltenburg, Research Project Manager, University of Waterloo

Mary Stockdale, Adjunct Professor, UBC, Okanagan campus

Monika Korzun, PostDoctoral Fellow, Saint Paul University

Charlotte Spring, PostDoctoral Fellow, Wilfrid Laurier University

Fiona Lucas, retired historian of Canadian foodways

Christine Mills, PhD Candidate, Queen's University

Susanna Klassen PhD Candidate, University of British Columbia

Tonya Smith, UBC Phd Candidate

Jennifer Shutek, Ph.D. candidate, NYU

Michelle Ryan, PhD Candidate, University of Ottawa

Rachel Portinga, PhD Candidate, Lakehead University

Sarah Marquis PhD Candidate, University of Ottawa

Mike Lawler PhD Student, University of Toronto

Maegan Krajewski, Graduate Student, University of Regina

Courtney Strutt, Lakehead University

Scott Uzelman

Don Black, Retired

Brewste Kneen, Retired

Vanessa Foran

Melissa Goldstein

K.E.Graves

Kelsey Agnew