

2018 Rural Ontario Summit

Building a Stronger Rural Ontario

Summary report



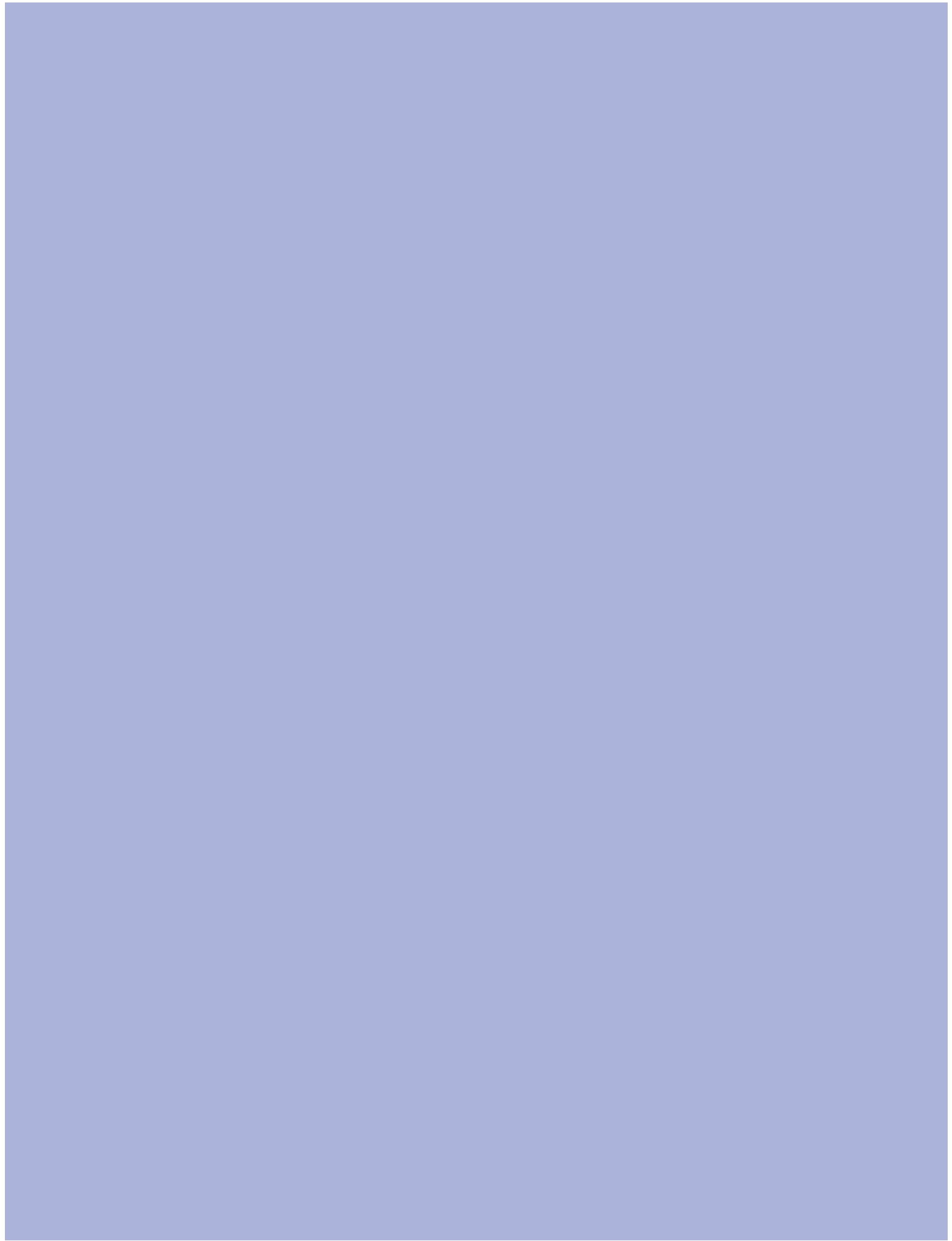




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Introduction: Building a Stronger Rural Ontario

OMAFRA's third Rural Ontario Summit built on the successes of the 2014 summit in Cobourg and the 2016 summit in Stratford. Held every two years, the goals of these events are to bring together rural stakeholders, discuss key issues, learn from each other and share ideas about opportunities for growth.

This year's summit brought more than 100 people to the rural community of Newcastle, while almost 100 more registered for the online livestream.

As always, the gathering drew attendees from across the rural spectrum. Farmers participated alongside mayors, wardens, councilors and economic development officers. Representatives from academic institutions connected with members of Indigenous communities and not-for-profit organizations. Former federal and provincial ministers were also in attendance.

The lineup of speakers included three provincial cabinet ministers and two parliamentary assistants, reflecting the importance the Ontario government places on rural issues.

The day's agenda was informed by insights gained from a series of six rural roundtables held in Napanee, Timmins, Ayr, Innisfil, Peterborough (Douro-Dummer) and Port Hope. During these pre-summit sessions, the government heard from a variety of rural stakeholders about emerging trends, issues and opportunities.

Building on those conversations, the 2018 summit focused on creating a stronger rural Ontario for the benefit of the entire province — covering what has been achieved to date, what still needs to be addressed and how to go about doing so.

The event featured talks, questions and answers and facilitated discussions, as well as plenty of opportunities for attendees in the room and online to ask questions and participate in polls using the online tool "Sli.do". The breakfast, lunch and reception menus boasted plenty of local fare, and throughout the day, Twitter lit up with the hashtag #ROS18.

Ontario's rural communities are an essential part of our cultural and economic fabric. One-fifth of Ontarians live in small towns and rural regions, while the agri-food sector represents the province's largest economic driver. By investing in rural residents — including youth, seniors, newcomers, immigrants and Indigenous people — the Government of Ontario is investing in the future prosperity of the province.

The Rural Summits help ensure those rural voices are heard, so that provincial programs and policies meet the needs of all Ontario residents and support thriving communities across the province.

Rural Ontario Summit 2018



Date: February 15, 2018

Location: Newcastle Village Community Hall, 20 King Avenue West, Newcastle, ON



Opening Remarks

The Honourable Jeff Leal, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

Minister Leal began by thanking the community of Newcastle for hosting the summit and acknowledged the event was held on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island.

The Province has made significant progress in building up the economic vitality of rural communities since the first Rural Ontario Summit in 2014. To illustrate that progress, a video was screened highlighting several communities that have used government funding to support remote nursing stations, boost tourism by restoring historic sites, pilot community transportation programs, support after-school programming for children, and more. This video can be viewed here:

<https://youtu.be/Fhhc0rtANA8>

“We’ve been listening and working with you to make a real difference in rural Ontario,” Minister Leal said. He described the three priorities that underpin the government’s plan to help build a strong rural Ontario:

- Building capacity for economic development
- Investing in infrastructure
- Accelerating economic development in the agri-food sector

While all Ontarians share key priorities — quality health care, a good education and a strong economy — the tools for achieving them in Toronto are not necessarily the same as those required in Belleville, Kapuskasing or Welland. Minister Leal listed many ways the Ontario Government is working to support the specific needs of rural communities.



These include:

- A new \$26 million Main Street Revitalization Initiative to help rural communities attract investments and jobs and enhance capabilities through greater access to digital tools like e-commerce
- \$300 million in investments each year by 2019 via the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, including \$200 million in predictable, formula-based funding that helps connect communities and create jobs
- Investments in broadband, allowing businesses to run operations remotely and families to stay connected
- Committing up to \$272 million for infrastructure projects through the federal/provincial Small Communities Fund, enabling communities with populations under 100,000 to upgrade water mains, sewage systems, sidewalks and more
- \$5 million in investments each year through the Rural Economic Development (RED) program to help rural communities, Indigenous communities and organizations, and not-for-profit organizations remove barriers to economic development.

The Minister emphasized his government's commitment to ensuring every resident in the province has access to appropriate health care when they need it and access to post-secondary education based on their ability to learn, not their ability to pay.

He also emphasized the need for collaboration between the Province, municipalities, businesses and community organizations. "We must work together to create a rural Ontario for everyone," he said. In that vein, Minister Leal encouraged participants to draw as many lessons as they could from the speakers, facilitators and fellow participants at the summit.

"I truly appreciate your enthusiasm and commitment to helping guide the future of economic development in rural Ontario...I am positive that the economic future of rural Ontario is going to be one of opportunity — unlimited opportunity." – Minister Jeff Leal

Stronger Communities, Better Jobs

The Honourable Steven Del Duca,
Minister of Economic Development
and Growth

Minister Del Duca spoke about the need to create growth and opportunity, while making sure rural communities still feel like home. The government, he said, is working to build a province that is compassionate, competitive and strong by creating active and engaged communities where kids can grow up and start families of their own.

Ontario is well-positioned to achieve those goals. Unemployment has been below the national average for 33 months. We have a competitive tax structure and a highly trained workforce. Meanwhile, the Ontario government has eliminated capital tax, reduced the small business tax rate to 3.5 per cent and cut unnecessary red tape.

The province is seeing great returns on those investments — whether it's through the Business Growth Initiative, the Jobs and Prosperity Fund, the Eastern Ontario and Southwestern Ontario Development Funds, or other programs. For every dollar invested companies have invested \$11.

Minister Del Duca recognized that some communities have been affected by recent increases in the minimum wage. In response, he stressed that the government is working hard with rural businesses to ensure they continue to grow and remain competitive. The key is balance. There is no magic wand. Ensuring economic development and growth takes good planning, relentless hard work and collaboration.

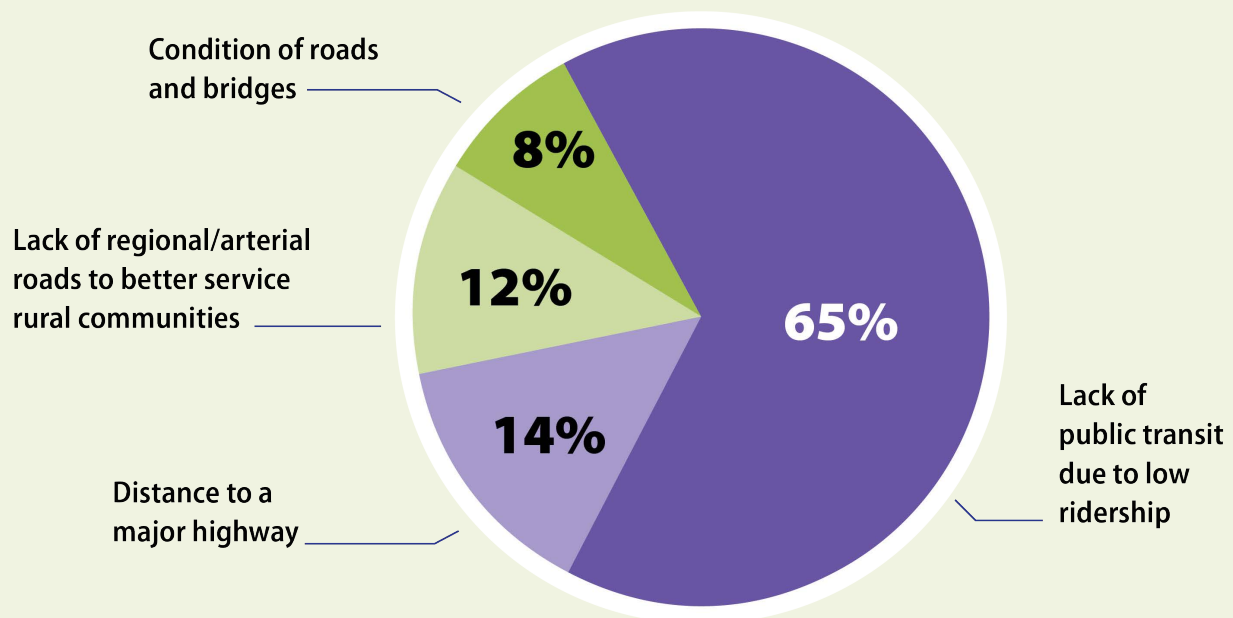
Striking the right balance isn't simple, the Minister noted, but when you get it right, the economy grows and quality of life improves.





Participant survey

What is the biggest barrier to connecting your community with neighbouring communities?



Keynote Address: Rural Experiences — Learn, Build, Thrive

Danielle Rocheleau, Vice President,
Laridae Communications Inc.

Danielle Rocheleau knows all about youth out-migration: a familiar phenomenon in rural Ontario. In her address, Ms. Rocheleau discussed her experience growing up in Timmins, how a scarcity of opportunities compelled her to move away, what brought her to Peterborough, Ontario, and how rural Ontario can build stronger communities with opportunities for everyone.

Her background includes experience as a small business owner and a driving force behind the Greater Peterborough Innovation Cluster. Today, her consulting firm offers strategic planning, communications and branding services to communities, organizations and businesses.





Over the years, Ms. Rocheleau has learned a lot about rural community development. Based on that experience, she shared three key factors for creating lasting change:

1. **Planning.** A to-do list isn't enough. Ms. Rocheleau emphasized the importance of real strategy, informed decisions, achievable plans, community engagement, thinking outside the box and building the differentiators that make a community unique.
2. **Collaboration.** Deliberate collaborations are key to reaching goals faster, said Ms. Rocheleau. That means leveraging local strengths by pursuing strategic partnerships with different sectors, First Nations, researchers and more.
3. **Flexibility.** Whether it's empowering employees to work from home or shifting manufacturing from auto parts to renewables, companies and communities need to adapt their traditional view of how business is done and what the younger generation expects from a job.

Rural Ontario Leaders Awards Presentation

Durham MPP Granville Anderson presented the first-ever Rural Ontario Leaders Awards, recognizing contributions that have helped to build a stronger rural Ontario by fostering a competitive business environment, boosting economic development and improving the quality of life for its residents.



Individual Award

Dr. Gezahn Wordofa — Founder, Multicultural Association of Perth-Huron (Stratford)

Originally from South Sudan, Dr. Wordofa works to settle and support other newcomers to rural Ontario and promotes cross-cultural awareness.



Individual Youth Award

Grant Sparling — VP and General Manager, Cowbell Brewing Company (Blyth)

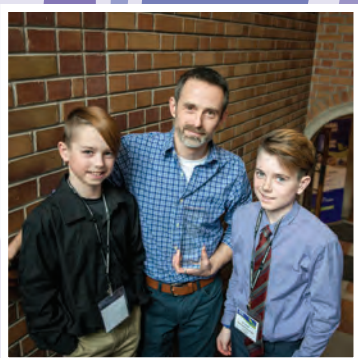
Through Cowbell's rural-first mandate, Grant Sparling is prioritizing community economic development and creating local jobs.



Community Award

Eabametoong First Nation — Fort Hope Farm (Thunder Bay)

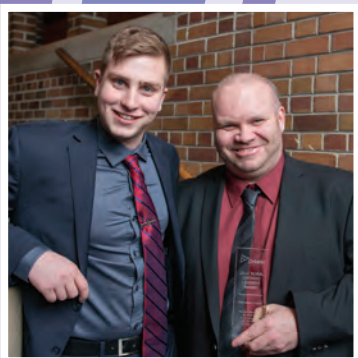
The people behind Fort Hope Farm have transformed a small garden into a seven-acre farm that provides fresh, healthy food and new economic opportunities to the community.



Not-for Profit Award

New Vision Unlimited — The HUB (Huntsville)

New Vision Unlimited pioneers innovative community development programs like The HUB: a 120-member space that supports local entrepreneurs and social innovation.



Business Award

Freshwater Cuisine (Kenora)

Partnering with local First Nation fishers, Freshwater Cuisine is devoted to the development and marketing of innovative freshwater fish products.



Connecting Communities, Boosting Economies

Video message from the
Honourable Kathryn McGarry,
Minister of Transportation

Via video message, Minister Kathryn McGarry talked about the importance of roads, bridges and highways for rural communities and the need for ongoing infrastructure support from the Province — particularly in municipalities that lack a tax base large enough to fund transit systems.

As examples, she pointed to recent investments like \$2.5 billion to repair and expand highways and bridges, \$30 million for the 2018–2019 Connecting Links program and \$4.1 billion in gas tax revenue for municipalities to expand, improve and maintain public transit.



Hon. Kathryn McGarry
Minister of Transportation

Facilitated discussion

Following Minister McGarry's message, Minister Leal and MPP Lou Rinaldi, Parliamentary Assistant (PA) to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, answered questions from summit participants.

How is the government working with rural communities to ensure they stay connected?

Minister Leal recognized that reliable broadband access is essential to boosting economic development in rural Ontario. According to the Minister, the provincial government has expanded broadband to over 90 per cent of rural communities in Eastern Ontario in partnership with the federal government and private providers.

What role will infrastructure play in the future of rural Ontario?

Infrastructure is crucial, said PA Rinaldi, with things like roads, bridges, water systems and telecommunication networks forming the backbone of a well-functioning economy and prosperous society. In particular, he stressed the importance of expanding rail transit.

Minister Leal added that an economy predicated on trade — like Canada's — needs to be able to get goods and services to market. To facilitate that, the government is tripling investments through the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund to \$300 million by 2019.

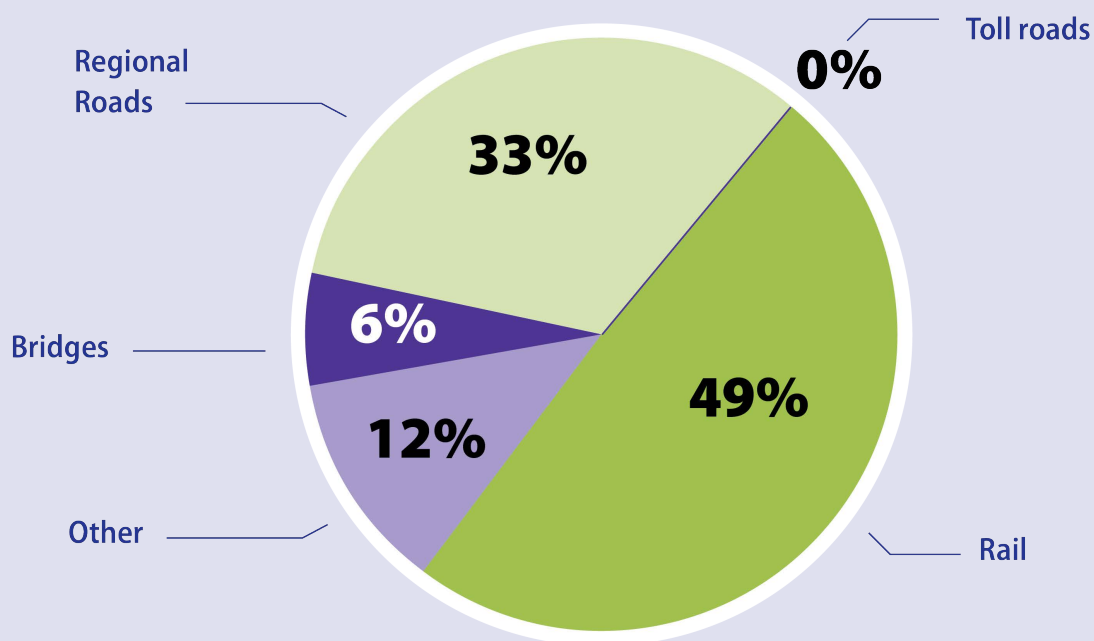
How is government supporting agriculture?

Agri-food in Ontario is a \$37-billion sector encompassing more than 200 commodities and almost 50,000 farms, said Minister Leal. The government is investing in agri-food research and innovation, including a renewed \$713 million partnership with the University of Guelph. The government has also been working to expand into international markets such as China, India and Vietnam and keeping borders open with the U.S.A. and Mexico. Meanwhile, the new federal/provincial Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP) will build on the successes of *Growing Forward 2*, which wraps up this spring.



Participant survey

If you had to limit it to only one, what type of transportation infrastructure does your community need to best boost economic development?



Building Healthier Rural Communities — Opportunities and Challenges

MPP Ted McMeekin, Parliamentary Assistant to the Premier

Parliamentary Assistant (PA) Ted McMeekin, who was appointed by the Premier to develop a report on rural poverty, shared his recent experiences touring the province to get a better understanding of the unique challenges facing rural Ontario. Transportation was the most frequently mentioned issue. “It’s no good to tell somebody to get work if they can’t get there,” he said. Other commonly cited concerns included isolation, food sovereignty and precarious employment.

Facilitated discussion

After PA McMeekin’s remarks, Minister Leal joined him on stage for a Q&A session with the summit attendees.

What is the government doing to improve the health and economic success of rural communities?

One important way the government is boosting the health of rural Ontario, said Minister Leal, is through strategic funding programs like *Growing Forward 2*. Minister Leal mentioned examples like Blyth’s Cowbell Brewery and Beau’s Brewery in Vankleek Hill, who are leveraging that funding to become economic engines in their communities. Meanwhile, community hubs are addressing isolation by offering services and meeting places.

Investing in the talents and skills of rural Ontarians is also key. To give youth more opportunities, Minister Leal pointed to Ontario’s new tuition framework, which provides free college or university tuition for children from households that earn less than \$50,000.

Questions regarding the lack of affordable housing were also posed. In response, PA McMeekin spoke about the need to creatively partner with the private sector to build more community-based housing and seniors’ housing.

Another participant raised the issue of supporting women in business. Minister Leal discussed how the government is exploring potential policy frameworks to remove barriers, such as providing new daycare spaces. PA McMeekin identified equal access to capital as an important issue and mentioned the need to apply a gender lens when making decisions.



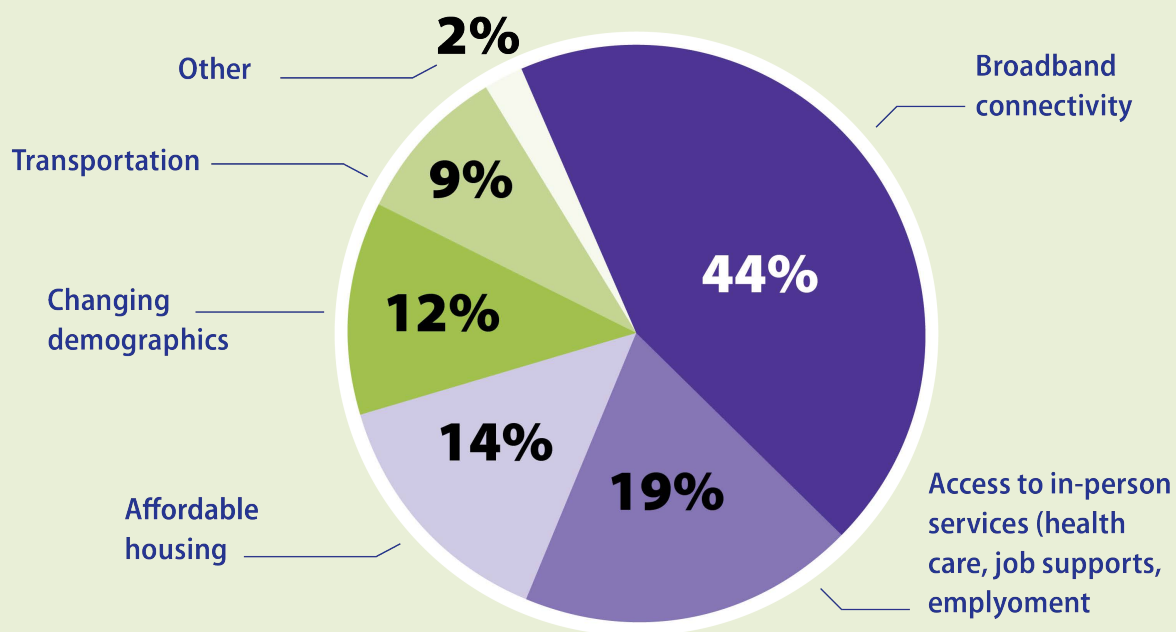
How can we ensure fertile farmland is protected from urban sprawl and infrastructure projects?

Both PA McMeekin and Minister Leal agreed that the provincial government has a solemn obligation to protect Ontario's farmland for both environmental and economic reasons. To help safeguard that land, the government is developing a new soil map to facilitate better land use planning. Minister Leal also discussed the importance of working with developers to do more urban infilling and getting better value out of existing infrastructure.



Participant survey

What is the single most important factor that government should take into consideration when planning for future service delivery in rural communities?



Looking Ahead

Ontario's rural communities are pivotal to the success of this province. Strong rural communities help create good jobs, attract investment and promote new economic opportunities for their residents.

The Government of Ontario is committed to creating conditions where rural municipalities, businesses and regional economies can grow and thrive. To do that, it is fostering an open dialogue with rural stakeholders across the province — and your ideas, challenges and unique perspectives are an integral part of the conversation.

Find out more at www.ontario.ca/rural



