

**MEDIA BRIEFING**

# ***Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act, 2026***



**Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness**

April 22, 2026





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## Need for Action

The government is protecting Ontario by building a strong, innovative and globally competitive agri-food sector that will lead the G7 in quality and resilience.

Ontario is the number one agri-food exporting province in Canada and has been dependent on the U.S. as its top export and import partner.

In 2024, the agri-food sector contributed \$52 billion to Ontario's GDP, supported 1 in 9 jobs in the province and generated more than \$28 billion in international exports.

The government is taking action to increase the resilience and competitiveness of the province's agri-food sector and unlock its greater economic potential.



## **Overview: *Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act, 2026***

The Ontario government is strengthening Ontario's agri-food system by introducing the *Protecting Ontario's Food Independence Act, 2026*.

The policy and legislative actions being proposed include measures to restrict foreign acquisition of Ontario farmland by introducing the *Farmland Security Act*, increase legislative efficiency, fairness and transparency for farmers and agribusinesses, and increase agricultural productive capacity by expanding access to Crown land in the Clay Belt region of northern Ontario.

In addition, the government is making updates to reduce red tape, streamline administrative processes and promote Ontario agri-food capacity through a series of proposed changes, such as consolidating agriculture tribunals, updating the *Ontario Food Terminal Act*, the *Veterinary Professionals Act* and the *Milk Act* to better meet the sector's needs.

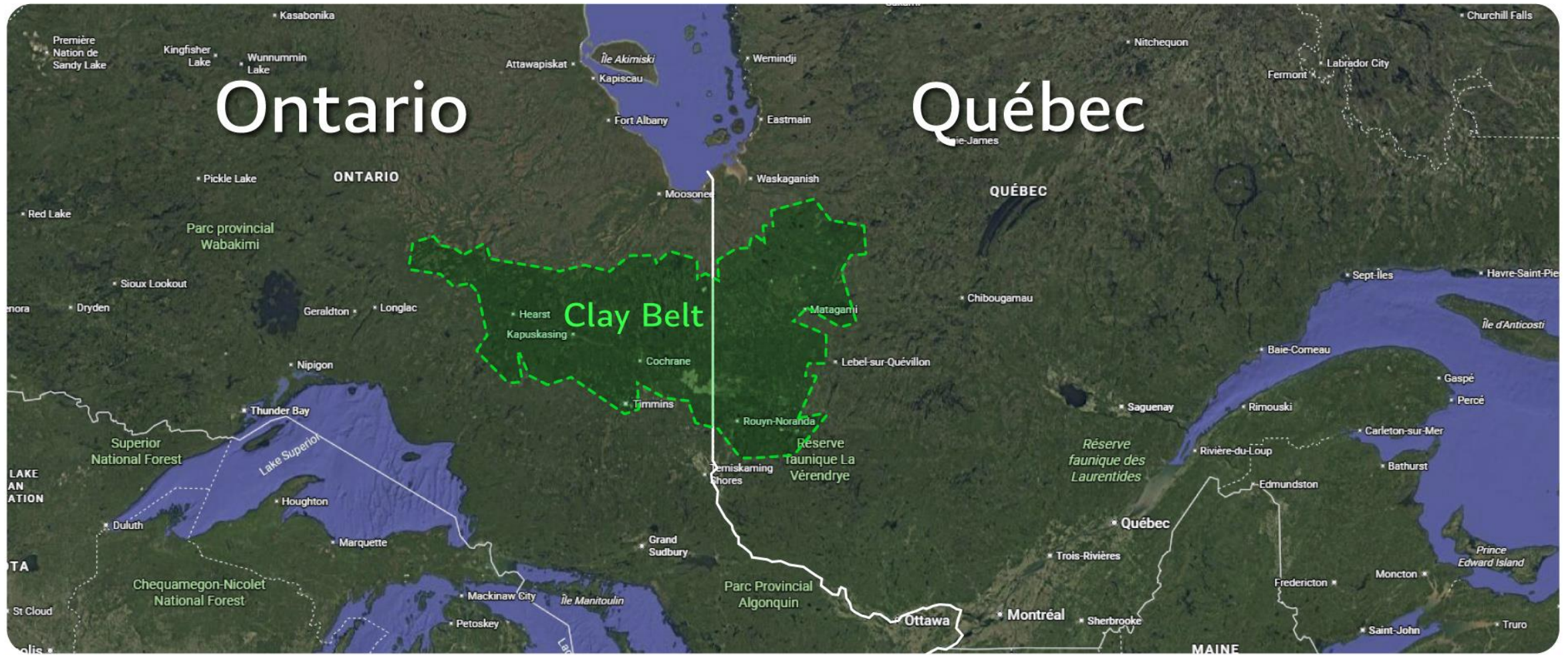
# Protecting Ontario Agriculture

Initiative	Current State	Future State
<b>Protect Ontario Farmland From Being Acquired by Foreign Interests</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rising geopolitical and market pressures increase concerns over control of Ontario's farmland, a limited and irreplaceable resource that is important to the province's economic and social well-being.</li><li>• Farmland protection is vital to ensuring a sustainable agricultural and agribusiness sector, local food production, and strong rural communities.</li><li>• Five provinces (Alberta, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, Quebec and Saskatchewan) currently have legislation in place restricting the amount of farmland non-Canadian individuals or entities can acquire.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduce new legislation, the <i>Farmland Security Act</i>, that would restrict foreign acquisition of Ontario farmland and consult on regulations to operationalize the new Act.</li><li>• Further public consultation would ensure all perspectives are considered in regulation-drafting and operationalizing the Act.</li><li>• Once in effect, a streamlined process would guide those acquiring farmland to confirm compliance with the Act prior to the acquisition being completed.</li><li>• Ontario farmland would be kept under domestic ownership to protect food production and the long-term sustainability of the agri-food industry.</li></ul>

# Protecting Ontario Agriculture

Initiative	Current State	Future State
<p><b>Enhance Crown land access and expand agricultural production in northern Ontario's Great Clay Belt</b></p>	<p>Northern Ontario's agricultural sector faces significant challenges accessing suitable lands, which hinders economic development, reduces competitiveness and limits opportunities for expansion.</p> <p>The disposition of Crown land is managed through a structured framework designed to ensure responsible land use, environmental protection and respect for Aboriginal and treaty rights. This process determines whether an applicant may obtain authority to use and occupy Crown land.</p> <p>The current Crown land disposition framework can be aligned to better support agricultural development, while considering other land uses and interests such as forestry and mining and respecting Indigenous communities' exercise of Aboriginal and treaty rights.</p> <p>The Clay Belt spans 180,000 square kilometres across the Ontario-Quebec border and contains extensive areas of potentially fertile soils that are well-suited to agriculture, including forage, field crops, and livestock production, with appropriate drainage and management.</p> <p>While land on the Quebec side of the border has seen substantial development for agricultural purposes, land on the Ontario side remains comparatively less utilized for agriculture.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential agricultural uses could include forage and feed production, livestock operations, cash crops, and specialty crops suited to northern climates.</li> <li>• Key milestones could include:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Completing analysis of the existing disposition process, looking for immediate and low-risk improvements.</li> <li>○ Completing assessment of existing encumbrances associated with high potential agricultural areas (e.g., mining claims, forest licences, existing land use, land claims).</li> <li>○ Exploring opportunities to amend Crown land use direction to support agriculture in the Clay Belt.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

# Protecting Ontario Agriculture – Expanding Northern Economic Opportunities



Satellite view of the Clay Belt region of northern Ontario and Quebec  
Source: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

# Protect Ontario's Agri-food Sector - Grow Ontario Strategy

Initiative	Current State	Future State
<p><b>Grow Ontario Strategy Review</b></p>	<p>The Grow Ontario Strategy, released in November 2022, outlines actions to build consumer confidence, support farmers and processors, increase yields, promote innovation and Ontario-grown food, grow the agri-food talent pool and strengthen the food supply chain.</p> <p>The strategy is on track to meet its long-term targets, including increasing the consumption and production of food grown and prepared in Ontario by 30 per cent by 2032, and increase exports annually by 8 per cent in the same timeframe.</p> <p>Progress includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By 2024 the sector saw a 20% increase in farm sales.</li> <li>• By 2024, the sector had already seen a 15 per cent increase in employment.</li> <li>• By March 2025, ministry-funded research had led to a total of 174 new patents and IP-related licenses.</li> <li>• By 2024, exports had increased, on average, by 13 per cent annually</li> <li>• Ontario's agriculture sector has faced increased pressures (e.g., input costs, labour availability) and has seen new emerging vulnerabilities, particularly in areas such as trade, which were not specifically reflected in the 2022 Grow Ontario Strategy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct a review and consult on the Grow Ontario Strategy with the goal of refreshed approaches to meet existing long-term targets by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ addressing new sector pressures</li> <li>○ ensuring the goals and actions build resiliency and further encourage buying local</li> <li>○ helping to further protect the sector</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Protect Ontario's Food Independence Act, if passed, would be a key part of the strategic foundation that would underpin a strengthened Grow Ontario Strategy: a next-phase strategic approach that responds to today's challenges while positioning the sector for long-term growth.</li> <li>• As part of the review, these will account for key sector priorities including leveraging local products to replace imports, increasing interprovincial trade, addressing labour shortages and boosting value-added agri-food processing.</li> </ul>

# Increasing Sector Resilience, Growing Opportunity & Enhancing Quality

Initiative	Current State	Future State
<b>Merge Agricultural Adjudicative Agencies</b>	<p>The Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs Appeal Tribunal (AFRAAT) and the Normal Farm Practices Protection Board (NFPPB) perform similar functions under different legislation creating duplication and inefficiency.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The government is proposing legislative amendments to merge the AFRAAT and NFPPB into one tribunal under a new name, the Agriculture and Agri-Food Protection Tribunal (AAPT).</li> <li>• One tribunal for all agriculture-related disputes would reduce administrative overhead and offer a more streamlined client experience.</li> </ul>
<b>Update the <i>Protecting Farmers from Non-Payment Act (Regulating Agricultural Product Dealers and Storage Operators), 2023</i></b>	<p>There are limitations in the <i>Protecting Farmers from Non-Payment Act (Regulating Agricultural Product Dealers and Storage Operators), 2023</i> that impact clarity for stakeholders. For example, lack of clarity exists around enforcement tools, including when and how freeze orders and administrative penalties orders are to be issued.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The government is proposing amendments to the <i>Protecting Farmers from Non-Payment Act (Regulating Agricultural Product Dealers and Storage Operators), 2023</i> that would provide the necessary authority to enhance clarity, making compliance with the Act and regulations easier for regulated parties in the grain and beef cattle sectors.</li> </ul>

# Increasing Sector Resilience, Growing Opportunity & Enhancing Quality

Initiative	Current State	Future State
<p><b>Amend the Ontario Food Terminal Act</b></p>	<p>The Ontario Food Terminal Board acquires, operates and oversees Ontario's central wholesale fruit and produce market. The <i>Ontario Food Terminal Act</i> (OFTA) would require updates to clarify the role and operational options for the Board.</p> <p>For example, the Act does not currently state specifically that the Ontario Food Terminal Board is a <i>Crown Agency</i> and does not contain modern liability protections for board members and staff.</p> <p>The Act also does not clearly provide the option to set up a capital fund. Taken together, these gaps create challenges for long-term infrastructure planning, financial efficiency, and governance alignment with comparable public bodies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The government is proposing amendments to the <i>Ontario Food Terminal Act</i>, including updating sections to enable the Ontario Food Terminal Board to establish a capital fund to better address the potential need for infrastructure updates, e.g. updating the terminal's farmer's market.</li> <li>• These changes would promote the stability of the local food system by strengthening the foundation for full operational bandwidth for the Terminal.</li> <li>• The proposed amendments would also clarify the Crown agency status of the Board and liability rules for Board members and Terminal staff to allow the Ontario Food Terminal Board to operate reliably.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Amend the Beef Cattle Marketing Act</b></p>	<p>Currently, only farmers who actually sell their cattle are required to pay a mandatory 'licence fee', which is a relatively small amount paid to the Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO) per head of cattle to fund activities that benefit the entire sector.</p> <p>Farmers who process their own cattle, or have someone else process cattle for them, are currently not required to pay this "check-off" fee.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposed amendments to the <i>Beef Cattle Marketing Act</i> would expand fee collection to producers not currently captured in legislation and also remove outdated and duplicative requirements for buyers to register with the Ministry if they purchase cattle.</li> <li>• With the proposed legislative change, producers contribute equally through the mandatory fee.</li> <li>• The increased licence fees collected would be used by the Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO) to increase marketing activities to benefit the whole industry. The proposal would expand collection of \$7-per-animal licence fees to include transactions where cattle are transferred for slaughter or processed without sale.</li> </ul>

# Increasing Sector Resilience, Growing Opportunity & Enhancing Quality

Initiative	Current State	Future State
<p><b>Clarify Dairy End-Use Pricing</b></p>	<p>The Dairy Farmers of Ontario (DFO) is the sole seller of milk in Ontario by law. Some dairy processors purchase dairy ingredients from other processors who have bought milk from the DFO.</p> <p>National requirements mandate that all dairy ingredients – not just milk – need to be priced according to their end use (e.g., cheese, ice cream). The DFO does not currently have the enforcement regime to ensure compliance with the federal policy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposed changes would enable future regulatory amendments to give the DFO the ability to enforce the national policy. It would do this by giving the DFO the power to check the records of any dairy processor to assess the final end use of the milk ingredients they have purchased.</li> <li>• Enables future regulatory amendments that would extend DFO's authority to cover the production and marketing of all milk products (i.e., ingredients such as milk protein powders), not just milk. They would also provide authority to enforce pricing obligations for all processors making a dairy product.</li> <li>• Consistently applied end-use pricing obligations ensure that all dairy processors are billed equitably for their milk products, based on the same pricing structure.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Update the <i>Milk Act</i> and the <i>Food Safety and Quality Act</i></b></p>	<p>The Ontario Farm Products Marketing Commission (OFPMC) has food safety regulation-making responsibility for cow and goat milk and milk products under the <i>Milk Act</i>. Oversight for milk from other species is under general food safety legislation administered by the Ministry of Health.</p> <p>The <i>Milk Act</i> does not cover all milking species and does not allow for modern and flexible tools that are found in the <i>Food Safety and Quality Act, 2001</i> (FSQA) (e.g., progressive compliance tools).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The food safety and quality aspects of all milk products from all dairy species would be regulated under the FSQA.</li> <li>• Supports consistent food safety framework for all milking species, which will enhance consumer trust in the safety and quality of milk and milk products.</li> <li>• These proposed statutory changes are a necessary step prior to regulatory consultations.</li> </ul>

# Increasing Sector Resilience, Growing Opportunity & Enhancing Quality

Initiative	Current State	Future State
<p><b>Align Legacy Livestock and Poultry Statutes with Current Practices</b></p>	<p>There are three separate Acts that cover livestock and poultry roaming outside farm property, being boarded, and/or injured/killed by dogs.</p> <p>These Acts are outdated. For example, dated language such as definitions of an innkeeper and carriage, inconsistencies with other OMAFA legislation and use of newspapers only for communication.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult on whether the <i>Protection of Livestock and Poultry from Dogs Act</i>, the <i>Pounds Act</i> and the <i>Innkeepers Act</i> align with current practices and to update outdated language.</li> <li>• Modernized Acts would align legislation with current practices leading to clarity for farmers and efficiencies for municipalities. No impact on consumer prices or jobs are expected.</li> <li>• Pending the outcomes of consultations, propose legislative amendments to align with current practices and ensure an accessible legislative framework related to livestock and poultry roaming off-farm, being boarded, or being injured/killed by dogs. Consultation will inform whether changes need to be made to all three Act or if any can be repealed and or merged.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Amend the <i>Veterinary Professionals Act (VPA)</i></b></p>	<p>The VPA was created in 2024 but is not in effect yet because the regulations still need to be completed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update the VPA to enable modern models of animal care delivery, strengthening the ability to develop rules to effectively regulate the veterinary profession in the public interest.</li> <li>• New authorities would allow for the development of exemptions to enable regulating different kinds of service delivery models.</li> <li>• These proposed statutory changes are a necessary step prior to regulatory consultations.</li> </ul>

# Increasing Sector Resilience, Growing Opportunity & Enhancing Quality

Initiative	Current State	Future State
<b>Review of Plant Health Requirements</b>	<p>The Plant Diseases Act, which governs the management of plant diseases, lacks enforcement, monitoring and response tools to manage plant health risks in situations where individuals refuse to voluntarily implement best management practices, which puts the broader sector at risk. Regulations do not reflect current disease and pest threats.</p> <p>Plant health risks in Ontario have increased due to international trade in agri-food products, changing weather patterns and changes in pest and disease surveillance by trading partners which can increase costs of production, reduce product quality and yield and potential loss of markets.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult on tools to strengthen prevention, detection and response to plant health risks to protect cost of production, product yield, quality and market access.</li> <li>• Pending the outcomes of consultations, updated industry and/or government actions and tools to better manage plant health risks.</li> <li>• Stakeholder feedback could include designated pests, tools to help better manage plant health risks, compensation, particularly if the province applies specific mitigation measures, such as destruction orders.</li> </ul>

# Increasing Sector Resilience, Growing Opportunity & Enhancing Quality

Initiative	Current State	Future State
<p><b>Consult on the Agricultural Drainage Infrastructure Program</b></p>	<p>The Agricultural Drainage Infrastructure Program (ADIP) improves the productivity of agricultural lands by providing grants to landowners for certain costs related to municipal drains.</p> <p>However, ADIP was not originally designed to address growing challenges such as flooding and increased maintenance costs, which are increasingly impacting Ontario's agriculture sector.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult on potential enhancements to the Agricultural Drainage Infrastructure Program to improve the program's operational efficiency, improve agricultural productivity and reduce long-term costs.</li> <li>• Program enhancements would look to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ support building climate resilient drainage infrastructure</li> <li>○ improving the responsiveness of the program</li> <li>○ create operational efficiencies that reduce risk of flooding, long-term costs for public and landowners, and protecting government investments in drainage infrastructure.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Looking Ahead

Ontario's agri-food sector is a cornerstone of the provincial economy, and it is a critical contributor to food security at home and abroad.

Amid tariffs and global economic uncertainty, the government is taking action to protect Ontario by building the most competitive, resilient and self-reliant economy in the G7.

We envision Ontario as a global agri-food leader, where local food is supported and promoted, and the province is an export powerhouse built on a reputation for quality, reliability and competitiveness.