



PLAN Policy Network - Meeting Summary

Date: January 16, 2025

Key Information:

Policies for Land Use, Agriculture, and Nature (PLAN) Policy Network is a collaborative initiative led by CAPI focused on addressing pressing land use challenges and unlocking new opportunities within Canada's agricultural sector. The network brings together practitioners, policymakers, and experts to exchange knowledge, develop innovative solutions, and shape policies that support sustainable land use, agricultural productivity, and biodiversity conservation.

The fourth meeting of the PLAN Policy Network focused on land use challenges and opportunities in Canada's agricultural sector, with perspectives shared from Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec. Several key themes emerged, highlighting the complex issues facing agricultural land preservation across the country.

Farmland loss due to urban expansion is a significant concern across provinces. In Ontario alone, over 2 million acres of farmland have been lost in the past 25 years. Prime agricultural land near urban centers faces the most intense development pressure, often being the most productive for agriculture. Population growth and housing demands are driving farmland conversion, especially in areas surrounding major cities.

Provinces have implemented various policy tools to protect farmland, with mixed results. Ontario's Greenbelt Plan has helped limit farmland loss within protected areas, while BC's Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) aims to preserve farmland but faces enforcement challenges. Quebec's farmland protection law restricts non-agricultural uses but still allows speculation. These policies face ongoing pressure from development interests and are not always consistently enforced.

Economic pressures and land speculation pose additional challenges. Rising land values, especially near urban areas, make it difficult for new farmers to enter the industry. Non-agricultural investors are purchasing farmland, driving up prices and sometimes leaving land idle. Some retiring farmers rely on selling land for development to fund retirement, creating tension with preservation goals.

Governance and capacity issues further complicate farmland protection efforts. Municipalities often lack expertise in agricultural planning and face pressure to expand development for tax revenue. Provincial and local policies are not always well-aligned to protect farmland effectively. Limited enforcement capacity at provincial levels hampers the effectiveness of existing protections.

Emerging issues and trends are also impacting agricultural land use. Climate change impacts like flooding and wildfires are affecting agricultural land and food security. Renewable energy projects and other infrastructure needs are creating new demands on agricultural land. At the same time, there is growing interest in local food production and preserving farmland for food security reasons.

Several potential solutions and opportunities were discussed to address these challenges. These include improved land use planning that better integrates agricultural needs with other development priorities, enhanced public education on the importance of farmland preservation and local food systems, and innovative models like land trusts to keep farmland affordable and in production. Strengthened policies to limit non-agricultural ownership on farmland, better data collection and monitoring of land use changes, and increased support for new farmer entry and farm succession planning were also proposed.

Preserving agricultural land while meeting other societal needs remains a complex challenge across Canada. While provinces have implemented various protective measures, urban expansion and economic pressures continue to threaten the agricultural land base. Addressing these issues will require ongoing policy innovation, improved planning processes, and broader public engagement to balance competing land use priorities.