



# NATIONAL FARMERS UNION

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## NFU publishes *Farms, Farmers and Agriculture in Ontario: an overview of the situation in 2011*

Saskatoon, Sask. - On May 31, the National Farmers Union released *Farms, Farmers and Agriculture in Ontario: an overview of the situation in 2011*, a report that employs a series of annotated graphs to illustrate the current and emerging situation of Ontario farms and farmers. Data for the report was drawn primarily from various Statistics Canada reports, including the 2006 Census of Agriculture. This document does not propose specific solutions, but is meant instead to provide food for thought by offering a high-level overview of the situation in Ontario. It invites readers to consider how today's situation is linked to federal and provincial agriculture policies and trade policies, both past and present. The NFU also encourages readers of this report to make use of its previous briefs for analysis, and to make recommendations for improving the policy environment for family farming in Ontario and Canada as a whole.

To outline a few of the report's key observations: *Farms, Farmers and Agriculture in Ontario* shows that in the past 30 years Ontario has lost about half of its many mid-sized farms, which still make up the majority of farms. However, there are about six times as many of the few very large farms. It also shows that over the past 13 years, the highest-revenue Ontario farms have provided a smaller proportion of the total value of agricultural production in the province, yet these same farms have received more than their share of program payments. The report shows that in spite of rising food prices in the grocery store, the prices farmers get have remained low and relatively constant. Ontario farm families depend heavily on off-farm employment for survival, and farmers' debt load is steadily increasing. Recent years have seen a strong policy emphasis on trade and access to export markets. The report shows that indeed, agri-food exports from Ontario have risen dramatically. But, the report also shows that the province imports more than it exports in all main products except for live animals. For fruit and vegetables, processing capacity has dropped significantly. As a result, even less of the fruit Ontario consumers buy is produced within the province, in spite of having some of the best fruit-growing land in Canada.

The NFU believes that the current situation as documented in this report does not reflect the aspirations Canadians and citizens of Ontario have in regard to farms, farm families, and the source of their food. Fairness, sustainability, more farms and farmers, and better capacity to actually feed ourselves are called for. "By looking at this report, it is clear that the present policy emphasis on trade and export markets is not benefitting family farmers. As exports rise, farm incomes drop, farm debt rises, farmers get older and disappear and as a province we become less able to feed the people of Ontario," stated NFU Region 3 Coordinator Joe Dama.

As farmers complete their 2011 Census of Agriculture forms, *Farms, Farmers and Agriculture in Ontario: an overview of the situation in 2011* provides proof that the data collected can be used by farmers to help them see, understand and assess the impacts of policy upon their daily reality. "In thinking upon the information in this report demonstrating where we are and where we've come from, the challenge for us as family farmers and the eaters who support us, is to continue to define the food system we want and to push for policies and actions that support our vision of thriving family farms, strong rural communities, and healthy food for all," concluded NFU Board Member Ann Slater.

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To view the report, please go to the following link:

[http://www.nfu.ca/briefs/2011/farm\\_ontario.pdf](http://www.nfu.ca/briefs/2011/farm_ontario.pdf)

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