

Forward. Together.



THE ONTARIO LIBERAL PLAN FOR RURAL ONTARIO



O N T A R I O

The Ontario Liberal Plan for Rural Ontario

KEEPING OUR RURAL COMMUNITIES STRONG is key to keeping our economy strong and moving Ontario forward.

Our rural communities face challenges — but with every challenge comes opportunity — that’s why Ontario Liberals are working hard to support our smaller communities and helping to build a prosperous future.

The Ontario Liberal Plan for rural Ontario will continue to support both our rural communities and our hard-working farmers because we know that strong farms, high-quality, fresh local foods and vibrant rural communities, are good for all of Ontario.

Ontario Liberals have a strong record of working together to bring prosperity to rural Ontario — we’ve done this through record support for our communities, repairing crumbling infrastructure with investments in our roads, bridges, water, waste water systems and community centres.

Ontario Liberals know that supporting our rural communities also means supporting the people who do business here — especially farmers. The creation of a permanent Risk Management Program for farmers is the biggest commitment to our family farms in over 25 years.

We have showcased and increased the amount of local food available at grocery stores, farmers' markets, schools, hospitals. We've also built the foundation for one of the biggest food processing markets in all of North America.

In Ontario, the average age of a farmer is 54 years old. We want more young farmers to be able to step up. We've made it easier for farmers and their families to plan for the future by exempting them from the land transfer tax, and supporting them when it's time to hand over the farm to the next generation.

The Hudak PCs and the Horwath NDP have no plan to address the fundamental challenges facing rural Ontario. The NDP would introduce a crushing \$9 billion in job-killing taxes that would be particularly harmful to rural areas, where many communities are seeing a recovery that has just begun. And as for the Hudak PCs, their past record is the best indicator of what to expect if they get elected. As a minister in the Mike Harris government, Tim Hudak helped the PCs download \$3 billion in costs onto cities and towns, causing property tax hikes and massive cuts to public services.

Ontario Liberals know that rural communities face unique challenges. That's why we committed to uploading Ontario Works (welfare), land ambulances, public housing and other elements of our social safety net that were always a provincial responsibility until the PCs took power and put the burden on rural Ontario. When the upload is complete, about \$2.7 billion in costs will be taken off of municipal budgets.

While the last PC government cancelled funding that supported the health and vitality of our rural communities — funding meant for local roads, parks, snow plowing, garbage pickup, and community centres — Ontario Liberals will honour our commitment to municipalities, and undo years of damage caused by the PCs by continuing the upload.

The Hudak PCs have a \$14 billion hole in their platform — that means deep cuts that will put our economy, education and health care at risk in rural Ontario and across the province.

Ontario Liberals know the key to rural Ontario's future won't be found by looking backward. It will be in moving forward, together.

Building More Education Opportunities For Rural Ontario

ONTARIO LIBERALS KNOW HOW IMPORTANT SCHOOLS ARE to our rural communities. They ensure a strong foundation for learning and secure a prosperous future for our children.

Our rural schools face challenges such as declining enrolment and higher costs for materials and resources. Over the last eight years, Ontario Liberals have shown a commitment to ensuring that students in rural Ontario have an equal opportunity for an excellent education through programs like full-day kindergarten, with 50,000 kids attending full-day kindergarten this year.

Ontario Liberals will ensure that any rural family that wants their child to attend full-day kindergarten will have that option by September 2014. For these children, the opportunity to learn will be matched by the freedom their parents will have to get a full-time job or further their careers through education. Families will also save thousands of dollars in child care costs per year.

Public education came under attack by the last PC government, with schools closed and teachers fired. The results were predictable: high dropout rates and lower test scores.

Ontario Liberals believe a strong Ontario needs strong Ontario schools. Working together, we'll deliver the best public education system possible to rural families.

Since we took office, we've reduced class sizes, hired thousands of new teachers, increased the graduation rate from 68% to 81% — a rise of 13 percentage points — and we increased test scores by 15 percentage points.

We've provided our rural schools with grants that help boards meet their additional costs due to the size and location of their schools. We've increased annual funding for our rural school boards by more than \$1 billion — an increase of 61% per student.

Prepare Young People for the Future

IN THE 21ST CENTURY, companies move to the places in the world that have the best-educated workers. Seventy percent of the jobs created in the future will need workers with a high level of skill and education. So investing in education and training makes good economic sense.

But it's more than that. Education is also a great social and economic equalizer that can help families build a better future for their children and grandchildren.

Ontarians know this. That's why more students in Ontario are getting a postsecondary education than in any other province.

To encourage and prepare more young people who want to enter the food and agri-business, we'll provide incentives for new farmers, and create a Specialist High Skills Major in Food Processing in Ontario high schools.

Ontario Liberals are the only party that is absolutely committed to building the most educated workforce in the world — from full-day kindergarten to university, college and apprenticeships.

We want more and more of our young people to go on to pursue a postsecondary education. So we introduced new Distance and Commuting Grants of up to \$500 per term to help college and university students from rural and remote areas with transportation costs.

And now we're introducing a new, 30 per cent postsecondary undergraduate tuition grant. That means — every year — the families of five out of six full-time undergraduate students will save \$1600 per student in university and \$730 per student in college.

To make sure there's a space for every student who is willing and qualified, we'll create 60,000 more spaces in addition to the 200,000 new spaces we already created, to help more students get a great education close to home.

Making Rural Ontario an Even Healthier Place to Grow up and Grow Old

ONTARIO LIBERALS UNDERSTAND that often, the best health care is health care that is close to home. That's why we've invested in rebuilding health care services in rural Ontario.

Since 2003, we've revitalized 20 rural hospitals, created 70 Family Health Teams and revamped the flawed under-serviced area program to ensure that physicians have the right incentives to work in rural Ontario rather than urban communities.

Ontario Liberals believe that all Ontarians should have access to quality health care no matter where they live. But there's no doubt: people living in rural communities face some unique challenges. That's why we invested more than \$68 million since 2003 exclusively to meet the needs of small and rural hospitals.

We also created an expert health panel to advise the government on rural and northern Ontario's health care challenges. We are committed to developing a provincial framework to support health care in rural communities based on the panel's findings.

Health Care Anytime, Anywhere

ONTARIO LIBERALS KNOW that whenever possible, the need for travel for health care visits must be minimized. So, to help support Ontarians in our rural and remote communities, we've invested in home-based dialysis services and North America's leading tele-medicine program. We've increased home care by 64% so more Ontarians can get access to the service they need at home rather than in a hospital.

We'll build on these successes to ensure that frail seniors and others with complex chronic conditions get access to world-leading tele-medicine services including tele-homecare. This will reduce the need for travel and improve access to services for families in rural Ontario.

More Family Health Care

ACCESS TO FAMILY CARE should be available to all who need it. Since 2003, we've made real progress in rebuilding family health care across the province. Now 1.3 million more Ontarians have access

to a family doctor and 94% of Ontarians have family care — one of the highest rates in Canada.

We know that there are still some rural Ontario communities that struggle to access needed family care services. Ontario Liberals know there is more to do.

We'll invest in new family health services in Ontario to ensure that rural communities have access to the family care they need.

Clean, Healthy Growth and Smart Resource Conservation

IN TODAY'S ECONOMY, we need to rely on more than just our traditional strengths and advantages to stay competitive in the global market. We need to revitalize our rural communities by creating, and keeping a highly skilled, well-trained workforce.

Ontario Liberals know that access to high-speed internet is vital for rural communities. Not only does it help us stay connected with family and friends, it supports our local businesses and economies. That's why over the last four years, we've invested more than \$31 million to expand broadband to one million rural Ontario families and businesses.

Ontario is home to one of North America's largest food and beverage processing sectors, with more than half of it located across rural Ontario.

Ontario Liberals recognize the diverse and growing market opportunity the food and beverage processing industry presents. That's why we made support for it a priority under the Rural Economic Development program. Over the past four years, we've supported agri-food businesses that have created and kept more than 15,000 jobs and generated nearly \$500 million in economic activity across the province.

Through the Rural Economic Development program, we'll increase support for food processors, to help provide better markets for Ontario food, and to increase the number of jobs in this important sector.

Bringing More Ontario Food to the Masses

A STRONG FOOD PROCESSING SECTOR is not only good for rural Ontario - it's good for the entire province.

Now more than ever, processors are looking to buy the things they need for their business locally. That means more local food is being purchased from farmers, and more locally processed foods are available for Ontarians at their local supermarket.

We'll help secure new markets for Ontario food and create new manufacturing opportunities. These include: meeting the demands for ethnically diverse food markets, regional food specialties, and supporting livestock processing.

Harnessing the Power of our Natural Resources

RURAL ONTARIO HAS BEEN AT THE FOREFRONT as Ontario becomes an international leader in clean-energy ideas, technologies and jobs. More than 20,000 farmers have applied for MicroFIT contracts — with almost 11,000 already turning on cleaner sources of power like wind and solar.

Clean energy is helping to improve the viability of our agriculture sector, easing financial pressures and helping farmers spend more time on the farm.

We'll boost our support for farmers to build and operate bio-digesters that will not only produce energy, but also cut waste disposal costs and provide additional income for farmers.

There are many other opportunities to promote new innovation opportunities for farmers.

We'll create a new Bio-Economy Fund that will help farmers open up new markets in biofuels and other value-added sectors. This support will help secure better prices for farmers, and create new clean-manufacturing jobs in the province, building on the 50,000 jobs already being created under the *Green Energy Act*.

We're committed to MicroFIT. And we'll make sure the program continues — because we know that the number of jobs will only go up, and the price of renewable energy will only come down.

The Hudak PCs and Horwath NDP are stuck in the past. If this were 1911, they'd be fighting for the horse and buggy. In 2011, they're fighting for gas guzzlers and coal. The world has moved on, but they haven't.

The Ontario Liberal Plan has placed Ontario at the head of the pack, seizing the day on clean innovation. We don't believe in waiting to be led. We believe in Ontario's ability to lead the world. We're the only party committed to delivering 50,000 clean-energy jobs for Ontario families — many of those jobs in rural Ontario communities.

Driving Environmental Stewardship

FARMERS ARE ON THE FRONT LINES when it comes to taking care of our natural environment.

Ontario Liberals have worked closely with farmers on innovative solutions to protect the environment, like our new program to protect the endangered bobolink. We'll help craft environmental solutions by farmers, for farmers.

We'll create a new stewardship program to help farmers protect the environmental resources — we all rely on. And we'll establish a Premier's Award of Excellence for environmental stewardship,

to recognize farmers who are leading the way on environmental protection.

New Infrastructure for New Jobs

WE KNOW YOU CAN'T HAVE A 21ST CENTURY ECONOMY without 21st century infrastructure.

Following years of neglect by the PCs and the NDP, Ontario Liberals have worked hard to rebuild Ontario's aging infrastructure. Together with hard-working Ontarians, we've invested more in rural Ontario than any other government in history — more than \$1.4 billion — to repair and build our roads, bridges, water and waste water facilities, and community centres.

Now that we're back on track, we need to keep moving forward, together.

Our new long-term infrastructure plan, *Building Together*, will create more jobs for our tradespeople, strengthen the economy and help communities large and small to develop and prosper as they meet the needs of Ontario families.

We'll continue to make improvements to rural infrastructure and public services, especially in areas such as municipal drainage infrastructure.

We'll work with municipalities to create a new, permanent fund for municipal roads and bridges. This comes out of our work with municipalities on the provincial-municipal Roads and Bridges Review. We invite the federal government to play its part and participate in this fund as well.

Helping Rural Families Thrive

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS we can do to support rural Ontario is to invest in the future of our farm families — giving them the tools and the resources they need to stay on the land. The Risk Management Program gives farmers the predictability, bankability and stability they need to focus on what they do best — provide our families with the good things that grow in Ontario.

Ontario farmers provide Ontarians with the safest and most nutritious food in the world.

We'll help tell this story to the world through a promotional campaign to increase brand recognition of Ontario food.

We've invested \$80 million in programming to support local foods — encouraging consumers to “choose Ontario foods first.” We'll continue our commitment to promote local foods through key initiatives, such as The Foodland Ontario program, The Ontario Farmers' Markets Strategy, and ongoing collaboration with

Ontario's retail and food service sectors, to promote local producers, processors, and their products.

Give Ontarians Better Food Choices

WE'LL DO OUR PART to help Ontarians get healthy local food.

We'll introduce a Local Food Act that will celebrate, support and promote local food.

We'll increase support for food processors, to help provide better markets for Ontario food, and to increase the number of jobs in this important sector.

New Incentives for Job Creators

WE RECOGNIZE THE VALUE AND UNIQUE NATURE of rural economies across Ontario. Through the Eastern Ontario Development Fund, we've helped create and retain over 10,000 jobs in that part of the province.

We'll make the Eastern Ontario Development Fund permanent, and create a new Southwestern Ontario Economic Development Fund to help those communities attract the jobs of tomorrow.

To help our small businesses continue to invest and create jobs, we've reduced the tax rate from 5.5% to 4.5%. And we'll further reduce that to 4%.

A Strong Voice for Rural Ontario Within Canada

“The leadership shown today by the McGuinty government sets a new standard in the province and ensures the sustainability of our family farms.”

DON KENNY, CHAIR, GRAIN FARMERS OF ONTARIO, MARCH 29, 2011

Ontario's farmers put healthy, locally grown food on Ontarians' tables and the agri-food sector creates jobs in our communities and strengthens our economy. The Ontario Liberal 2011 budget took a significant step towards strengthening and expanding risk management for Ontario farmers to help provide predictability, bankability, and stability. The cost will be shared between the province and farmers.

Ontario Liberals have stood up with Ontario farmers to call on the federal government to come to the table and support our made-in-Ontario Risk Management Program.

We'll continue to urge the federal government to come to the table and take on its traditional funding in these important programs.

Ontario Liberals have a strong record of defending supply management — it helps keep rural Ontario strong, and supports our farmers and food processors. It provides opportunities for growth, and contributes to a strong economy.

We'll also continue to support supply management in international trade talks and fight for its place in Canadian farming.

Making Government Work for Farmers

WORKING TOGETHER WITH FARMERS and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, we've reduced the red tape for farmers by 28%.

“It is truly a demonstration of how positive change can take place quickly when industry and government work together with a common purpose.”

**BETTE JEAN CREWS, PRESIDENT, ONTARIO FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE,
AUGUST 26, 2011**

While together we've accomplished a great deal, there is still more to do.

Bringing Farmers to the Table

WE'LL PROVIDE FARMERS WITH A ONE-WINDOW APPROACH to dealing with government, making it easier to do business with government.

We'll ensure that new regulations do not create any unnecessary red-tape for our farmers and their businesses.

Over the last eight years, Ontarians have come to count on rural Ontario, our farmers and food processors. Working hard together, we've turned the page on the cuts and chaos of the last PC government. And Ontario Liberals want to keep building a strong and prosperous rural Ontario — one that will continue to feed and support families for generations to come. That's our way. That's the Ontario way.

theOntarioWay.ca



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