



Ian Adams/Metroland

Jo-Anne (left) and Murray Morrison share a toast with Bernard Pope, chairperson of the Ontario Farmland Trust, after the Morrisons signed an easement agreement with the organization to protect their property as farmland in perpetuity.

Family puts farmland into land trust

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A family farm in Nottawa will be preserved as agricultural land - forever.

The Morrison family, who have farmed a 217-acre parcel south of Collingwood since 1985, has dedicated an easement to the Ontario Farmland Trust.

The easement covers a 175-acre area at the back of the Morrisons' property, including a forested section that's intersected by the Pretty River, and runs east to the Barrie-Collingwood Railway right-of-way.

"We are passionate about agriculture, about producing food and feeding the world; that led us to look at in the future, what's going to happen to our land. We thought about leaving a legacy in agriculture," said family patriarch Murray Morrison. "We see agriculture on this land for many, many years to come."

The family was joined by friends, local politicians, and representatives of the trust on Oct. 14 to officially celebrate the easement.

Kathryn Enders, the executive director of the trust, said the easement is a voluntary and legally-binding agreement that grants the trust a covenant on the property - while maintaining the owner's rights to continuing farming.

"It's the strongest tool we have right now to protect a farm forever," she said.

If and when the property is sold in the future, the Ontario Farmland Trust remains on the title as having an interest in the land, and there are restrictive clauses to prevent the land from being turned into housing, or used for aggregate production.

The trust has been around since 2004,

and has been protecting farmland through easement agreements since 2009. It has easements on 12 farms in Ontario - including three others in Simcoe County - protecting more than 1,200 acres.

There are 11,000 acres in Ontario that fall under the protection of a land trust. The Ontario Farmland Trust specifically is dedicated to protecting agricultural property. According to the trust, approximately 350 acres of productive farmland in Ontario is lost to development every day.

"We want to protect as much as possible across Ontario," Enders said. "One way you can do that is through policy, but land-use policy can change, so an easement agreement is the most permanent tool we have to protect a farm."

Morrison said the family was spurred to put an easement on the land after watching the development that has taken place around them.

"We can see the houses going up, and we feel that we have an issue with good, productive farmland being paved over, so we wanted to preserve it," he said. "We were happy to work with the Ontario Farmland Trust to achieve that goal."

Coincidentally, the property's previous owner had plans to develop the land prior to the Morrisons purchasing it. The family ran a pick-your-own strawberry business on the land for 25 years, and currently farms pumpkins, corn, wheat, and soybeans. "It made the most sense for agriculture to operate back there," Morrison said. "Down the road, I'm not sure agriculture can operate out of the front with the highway, with the encumbrances there are, but behind the river, I think we can have agriculture for a long period."

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