

The Farm Hunt -- Part 2

It took my husband and I more than 3 years to finally find a farm to call our own. Though I got frustrated with the price range of what we wanted being just out of reach...or good deals being snapped up before we could even get an offer written...the search was positively glorious and we spent many amazing hours touring the countryside outside the GTA.

Ideally we wanted a York or Durham Region farm (as close to Uxbridge as possible), but our financial reality had us exploring heading north up to the Brock area of Durham and even venturing over into the Kawarthas and Simcoe.

My husband and I had very different ideas of what we were looking for in a farm. Luke and I both wanted one thing. Workable Land. Small details like a livable house (he would have made an offer on the blue house being held up by dirt with crazy slanted floors just because there were 130 workable acres) or distance from Toronto, were unimportant to him. He wanted as many cows as possible eating as much forage as we could buy, period.

I, of course, had far grander aspirations. First off, I wanted a charming suitable home with all of the amenities, like running water, electricity and a functioning furnace. Believe it or not, we looked at quite a few places missing one or more or even all three of these! Also, I wanted the land to be romantic. Just a piece of flat land that a tractor could work easily wasn't my dream. I wanted beautiful trees, maybe some rolling hills, and a stream. And of course, paramount was a horse barn for my three four-legged equine friends.

Of course when working with a spouse, compromise is the name of the game, so I tried to be "flexible" in my requirements.

One really lovely place we explored and really considered was in the Northern Region of



Going to the Farm Side

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Brock, just northeast of Cannington. It was a lovely little farm house on 50 acres with a stream at the back of the property and a nice barn with some paddocks set up. A perfectly lovely young couple was living there and they were "embracing" the pioneer way of life. No hydro. A few solar panels ran what they needed, but essentially they were living as our ancestors of yesteryear.

And Most... Toronto... We almost bought this place, but my day job is at Yonge and Bloom in Toronto and, after trying the commute (2 hours is no traffic one way), I put the kybosh on that place (and breathed a sigh of relief

that we wouldn't have to figure out a way to get on the hydro grid).

The Cannington area abounds with really lovely century homes and you can see the pride of ownership in many of them. We seriously considered a really beautiful place just west of Cannington with 50 acres, a meandering stream, and a heated workshop with horse stable. Almost perfect...almost...except the well for the home was on the neighbor's property. That was a deal breaker for us. Not owning the source of your water could lead to expensive future problems.

We saw another interesting place in Beaverton with an actual airplane hangar and a century home that had been restored with exquisite wood working detail. It was just slightly above our price range and also a little too far from Toronto.

When we finally did find the place of our dreams, it seemed too good to be true... it was on 130 acres with a beautiful lane up the middle of the property lined with old oaks, a gorgeous babbling brook through the front of the land and a house I just adored.

On Concession 9 in Brock, this place had a big white Viceroy-type home with a fireplace feature that spanned all three floors, and big picture windows providing views of the brook and tree line beyond. I was in love with the romantic land and house and my husband was salivating over the 130 workable acres.

Though we promptly put a good offer in, it was conditional on the sale of our Musselman's Lake home, so we lost out. The owners took an offer from a farmer who was going in firm, even though he was offering \$50,000 less. I was heart-broken and very, very frustrated. But this was our first lesson... if you want to "steal" a farm; you have to be unencumbered by any conditions on your offer.

The next place I really fell in love with was in Baldwin and used to be the residence of Stephen Leacock (the really famous Canadian author). Boasting rolling hills, a quaint bungalow, romantic enclaves amongst the trees and a truly quaint and rustic horse barn, this was it. It was also close enough to Highway 48 and the 404 that the commute might actually be reasonable!!

And it sold before we could even get an offer written. Argh.

So our first farm ended up NOT being one we purchased, but one with an open-ended lease in Mount Albert. We now had a strategy. We were going to be the folks with no conditions who could leap in and buy the good deal. We were going to see the farms as soon as they came on the market. Oh yes... we had a strategy... By hook or by crook, I was going to become a Country Girl.

The CFFO Responds to the Premier's Challenge

Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne challenged the Ontario Agri-Food Sector to generate 120,000 jobs and double the rate of growth in the industry. As a grassroots organization, the CFFO has spent some time consulting with its members on potential ways to respond to the challenge. The CFFO believes that there are several key initiatives that can help the sector grow successfully.

The first part of the challenge is to generate additional jobs. An honest assessment of primary agriculture points towards the need for the processing and further processing sectors to generate the vast majority of jobs. There may be areas of growth in some sectors such as greenhouse expansion, but agriculture is looking towards technology to improve efficiency, allowing fewer farmers to do more. This is hardly a new phenomenon, as ever since some clever fellow invented the wheel, there has been the need for fewer farmers to work the same land.

Where primary agriculture has the potential to lead the way is in productivity improvement. For the CFFO, this means first and foremost a more strategic approach to water management throughout the province. We believe that an integrated system of irrigation, drainage and storage can have economic, environmental and social benefits. Many Ontario farmers have already invested in drainage, but the adoption of the other two practices is more limited. The industry can improve both the amount it produces and the stability of its output with a more strategic approach to water use. However, there is little value in flooding our markets without a growing processing sector or new export opportunities abroad.

The CFFO also believes that government can play a key role in gathering market intelligence for our farmers and food processors. There are multiple avenues to be pursued in this area. With the growing number of free trade agreements that the federal government is pursuing, there is value in OMAF knowing what opportunities exist in these markets for our home industries. Furthermore, there is value in OMAF gathering information for new food companies, both foreign and domestic, to set up shop in Ontario.

The Premier has challenged the agri-food sector to generate new jobs and increase its productivity. Primary agriculture has the potential to produce more, but we need a strong and growing food processing sector and new markets for our food products to prevent price crashes arising from over-production. Meeting this challenge requires a strategy that encompasses the entire sector if it is going to succeed.



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