

A VISION FOR AN AGRICULTURE AND FOOD HUB IN THE ROUGE NATIONAL URBAN PARK

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WHY CONNECT RURAL AGRICULTURE AND URBAN FOOD:

Migration of our population from rural to urban areas over the past 60 years has severed most personal connections between consumers and farmers. Soon there will be an opportunity to recreate these valuable links. Extensive agricultural lands (conveniently located within the GTA) are to be preserved for sustainable agriculture in the new Rouge National Urban Park. This land could be used to establish a variety of working demonstration and research farms. Our youth and public may soon have opportunities to experience agriculture and observe how their local good sustainable food is produced.

VISION FOR A WORLD-CLASS FOOD HUB:

Visitors will be guided through a safe and enjoyable investigation of the traditions, science, and commerce of agriculture. The experiences will include modern and heritage farming, various food preservation and preparation techniques, and clarify the responsibilities of food and land stewardship.

Students and the public will learn the connections between:

- Food economics and environmental sustainability
- Agricultural practices and healthy well-being
- Rural producers and urban consumers
- Large scale agribusiness and small scale local food production

This will enable our youth and urbanites to become tomorrow's informed stewards of agriculture and our precious natural resources.

HOW TO ACHIEVE A REMARKABLE FACILITY:

Attract knowledgeable farmers with long-term leases and rate reductions for providing environmental and visitor services. They will create a variety of productive demonstration farms using our past, current, and future perceptions of food security and sustainable agriculture representing models of best practices.

Provide agricultural experiences that are engaging, authentic, and memorable in order that visitors can take away a meaningful understanding that there is much more to farming and food than throwing seeds onto dirt, (or merely opening a package).

Educate youth and the public about food and agriculture issues. With less than 3% of our population directly producing our food, democracy requires a broad understanding in order to assure that sustainable food policies are implemented.

Build an Agriculture and Food Hub with a wide variety of demonstration farms near the Agriculture Node of the Rouge National Urban Park. This can become a gathering place for many learning activities. **Activities would include:**

- Thriving grain, animal, vegetable and fruit farms
- Gardens for community, ethnic, cultural and FarmStart learning
- Local farmers' market, distribution and processing facilities
- Aboriginal agriculture (pre-missionary, post missionary and contemporary)
- Demonstration pioneer, heritage, and future farms
- Life-skills gardens for mental healing, physical therapy, seniors, and youth
- Specialty seed and animal breeding, and bio-energy facilities
- Urban Garden compost and transplant suppliers.

Collaborate with various schools, foundations, institutions and associations on many fascinating educational and research **projects that could include:**

- High School, College and University training and research facilities
- Season Extension with root-cellars, hoop-houses, tunnels, and greenhouses



- Warm-climate crop trials and evaluations
- Best Practices for specialty grains, pulse, fiber and animals
- Soil Remediation studies and Urban Waste composting
- Artisanal and food processing mentorship
- Beehive, nut-tree, forest gardening and permaculture demonstrations.

Tourism is not only an excellent way to create vibrant economic activity; it also encourages us to celebrate our own cultures. A tourism friendly farm community within the GTA will add yet another reason for many from around the world to visit Canada's largest city and its adjacent Rouge National Urban Park.

Continuous Change has always been the nature of food and agricultural best practices. By having a place where forward thinking food production methods can be tried and proven, we can become prepared with effective alternatives when, inevitably, agriculture will need to make significant changes due to high oil prices, climatic change, and/or the prohibition of key chemicals.

Career Opportunities will be easily seen and experienced. As the average age of farmers nears 60, it is becoming imperative to provide urban youth, new Canadians, and second career learners with positive agricultural experiences that expose them to appealing agricultural careers. They will need affordable space and effective mentoring to rapidly assimilate their new professions.

MANY WILL EAGERLY PARTICIPATE:



A key indicator for a successful Urban Park is widespread participation in a comprehensive assortment of innovative programs. There will always be numerous ways to engage the public in experiencing more of their food system. **Some popular undertakings could be:**

CREATING

- **Initiate** profitable biodiverse opportunities for the current leaseholders
- **Plant** wide windbreaks for wild-life, pollinator and visitor corridors
- **Construct** season extension and winter storage facilities
- **Introduce** shelf-life, nutrition, and sensory improvements
- **Assemble** a food and agriculture resource database
- **Design** fashionable clothing that uses local farm-grown fibers

EDUCATING

- **Inform** visitors how agriculture can contribute to environmental diversity
- **Learn** from historical aboriginal and pioneer agricultural methods
- **Preserve** food by: pickling, curing, drying, canning, freezing and vacuum
- **Conduct** cooking experiments for recipes, training and experiencing
- **Teach** bookkeeping, accounting and business planning systems

INNOVATING

- **Develop** viable production protocols transferable to the far north
- **Trial** new crop and animal breeding, and develop alternate food markets
- **Establish** soil carbon sequestering projects and land stewardship programs
- **Create** and build mid-scale labour-saving tools and implements
- **Improve** efficient energy production and energy use
- **Plan** and incorporate effective transportation and distribution systems

PROMOTING

- **Prepare** informative signage, web resources, maps and brochures
- **Promote** marketing to food service, retail, and direct to customers
- **Encourage** and initiate urban and communal food projects
- **Narrate** stories in publications, TV, radio and social media
- **Launch** entertaining and informative theater and video performances
- **Organize** and promote fundraising events