

**Ministry of
Agriculture, Food
and Rural Affairs**

**Ministère de l'Agriculture,
de l'Alimentation et des
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Food Safety and Environmental Policy Branch, Policy Division

To: All municipalities in Ontario (head of Planning Dept. and/or Clerks Office)

Subject: Implementing Provincial Policy and Guidance on Permitted Uses in Prime Agricultural Areas

Dear Municipal Planners,

I am writing to you today to remind you of the Provincial policies and guidelines on the many economic diversification opportunities on farms that help maintain prime agricultural areas, while supporting a thriving agri-food sector and rural Ontario. Policies in the current [Provincial Policy Statement, 2020](#) (PPS) permit agricultural, agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses in prime agricultural areas, subject to certain criteria (see Attachment 1). While the PPS is currently under review, policies related to permitted uses are proposed to remain largely the same in the proposed [Provincial Planning Statement](#).

The supporting [Guidelines on Permitted Uses in Ontario's Prime Agriculture Areas](#) were developed by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) following extensive consultation with municipalities and other stakeholders. The Guidelines are intended to help municipalities and farmers interpret provincial policies by recommending best practices (e.g., area limits for on-farm diversified uses). Each farm is unique, and many farms support several different types of permitted uses. For example, if all the provincial criteria in Attachment 1 are met:



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Good things grow in Ontario
À bonne terre, bons produits

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- A market or shop that sells farm/food products from the surrounding area would be considered an agriculture-related use.
- Corn mazes, if harvested, could also be considered an agriculture-related use.
- A cider mill is considered an agriculture-related use
- Existing laneways shared between agricultural uses and on-farm diversified use should continue to be considered an agricultural use
- A bakery or bistro is considered an on-farm diversified use
- While parking is generally considered an on-farm diversified use, a field which is regularly used for agricultural purposes but once or rarely for parking is likely still considered an agricultural use.

While municipalities may have more specific requirements than the province, they need to achieve the same objectives as the provincial guidelines.

It is important to look at each farm operation individually and consider if the use is temporary or permanent. Attachment 2 provides more examples of a diverse farm operation and highlights key considerations.

When developing official plan policies or considering approving a proposed use, municipalities are encouraged to refer to the Guidelines to consider best practices. It is important to reinforce that municipalities have the flexibility to set their own criteria, as long as policies set out in the PPS are met.

To support farm viability and a robust rural economy, we encourage municipalities to have simple and timely planning approvals for uses that are clearly compatible and appropriate in prime agricultural areas.

OMAFRA staff provide training and support [events](#) on this topic. If you have any questions or would like to take part in training planned for fall 2023, please reach out to the [OMAFRA Rural Planner covering your municipality](#). OMAFRA's Agricultural Information Contact Centre at 1-877-424-1300 is also available to assist or put callers in touch with one of our experts.

I appreciate all you do to support agri-food entrepreneurship in your municipality.

Sincerely,



Andrea Martin
Director, Food Safety and Environmental Policy Branch
Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs

Attachment 1: Provincial Policy Statement Criteria for Permitted Uses in Prime Agricultural Areas

From Table 1 of the Guidelines on Permitted Uses

Type of Use	Criteria as Provided by PPS Policies and Definitions
Agricultural	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The growing of crops, raising of livestock and raising of other animals for food, fur or fibre2. Includes associated on-farm buildings and structures, including but not limited to livestock facilities, manure storages value-retaining facilities, and accommodation for full-time farm labour when the size and nature of the operation requires additional employment3. All types, sizes and intensities of <i>agricultural uses</i> shall be promoted and protected in accordance with provincial standards4. <i>Normal farm practices</i> shall be promoted and protected in accordance with provincial standards
Agriculture-Related	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Farm-related commercial and farm-related industrial uses2. Shall be compatible with and shall not hinder surrounding agricultural operations3. Directly related to farm operations in the area4. Supports agriculture5. Provides direct products and/or services to farm operations as a primary activity6. Benefits from being in close proximity to farm operations
On-Farm Diversified	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Located on a farm2. Secondary to the principal <i>agricultural use</i> of the property3. Limited in area4. Includes, but is not limited to, home occupations, home industries, <i>agri-tourism uses</i> and uses that produce value-added agricultural products5. Shall be compatible with, and shall not hinder, surrounding agricultural operations

Attachment 2: Example of Multiple Permitted Uses on a Farm Property From Appendix 3 of the Guidelines on Permitted Uses

Table 6. Components of multiple permitted uses on 19 ha farm

m ²	Area of the <i>On-Farm Diversified Use</i>
314	Half of the 627 m ² building
366	Half of the 40-spot parking (19 @ 18 m ² ; 1 @ 24 m ²)
400	Half of the 800 m ² landscaped area
0	Existing laneway
1,080	Total area of the existing <i>on-farm diversified uses</i>

Note: areas shared between the *agriculture-related* and *on-farm diversified uses* (building, parking, landscaped area) were allocated 50:50

This 19 ha farm comprises:

Agriculture uses: apple orchards, shed for farm machinery, farmhouse

Agriculture-related uses: cider mill, farm shop selling value-added farm products from the area, laneway, parking, landscaped area

On-farm diversified uses: bakery, bistro (light meals), farm shop selling farm/food products not from the area plus non-agricultural-related goods, parking, landscaped area.

The *on-farm diversified uses* portion of the building is well within the recommended building size cap.



Figure 8. Example of multiple permitted uses on 19 ha farm.

Key Considerations in Prime Agricultural Areas:

- Agricultural uses are promoted and protected (all types, sizes and intensities).

- Agriculture-related and on-farm diversified uses need to be compatible with surrounding agricultural operations (e.g., nearby agricultural uses are not impaired or inconvenienced, the agricultural and rural character is maintained)
- Only on-farm diversified uses need to be limited in area. The Guidelines recommend a flexible approach:
 - Only counting the footprint of the on-farm diversified uses on the property (not agricultural or agriculture-related uses). That means counting only the portion of the parking, landscaped area, playgrounds, retail areas, etc. that is attributable to the on-farm diversified use.
 - Not including existing laneways shared between agricultural and on-farm diversified uses.
 - Including, but discounting, the area of existing buildings or structures reused for on-farm diversified uses.
 - Accounting for temporary uses differently than permanent uses.

Please refer to the [Guidelines](#) for a fulsome discussion of considerations.