

BUY LOCAL, COUNCIL PLEADS

By WAYNE CAMPBELL

PelhamNEWS/Staff

Pelham town council wants the provincial government to think about farmers when it thinks about Ontario's **green-belt**.

It also wants all Ontario municipalities to adopt a "buy local produce" policy.

In a strongly worded resolution – adopted by council unanimously at its meeting last week – the town called on the provincial government to provide help to the agricultural community "to cope with all forces" affecting the industry.

The resolution, prepared by Ward 3 Coun. John Durley, is the town's response to an Ontario government move to offer municipalities "a means to recommend expansion of existing **greenbelt** boundaries."

Pelham is directly affected by the **greenbelt**, which stretches from north of the town down through it to Foss Road, surrounding Fenwick and Ridgeville and touching the urban limits of Fonthill.

The resolution points out that one purpose of the **green-belt** legislation "is to protect productive agricultural lands."

It goes on to say "the production of crops within Ontario is essential to maintain sustainability, not only of food supplies but also employment opportunities."

The closure of processing plants such as CanGro in Niagara-on-the-Lake "have dealt a serious blow to the farm community of southern Ontario,"

council says in its resolution.

Pelham farmers who grow cherries, pears, strawberries, peaches and other fruits and vegetables are directly affected by the closure.

"Current legislation appears to fall short of assisting the agricultural community to produce crops and remain financially viable," says town council.

The town recommends provincial ministries involved in **greenbelt** legislation help the agricultural community cope with all forces. These include market, human resources, growing, processing and transporting.

This will enable the farm industry "to continue to provide food to help meet the needs" of Ontario residents.

Pelham council also wants other municipalities across Ontario to follow the example of Niagara Region and adopt a buy local produce policy.

Such a move will "provide a much-needed strengthening of the market for local produce" and "moral and fiscal support to agricultural producers."

The resolution will go to Premier Dalton McGuinty, opposition leaders, ministries of municipal affairs and housing and agriculture, food and rural affairs, local MPPs and all Ontario municipalities.

Reflecting on the resolution, Durley said the sight of up to 400 hectares of fruit trees being pulled out is tragic.

"Once they're gone, they're gone forever," he said. "If we can't produce food for ourselves, we're in trouble."

He referred to seven issues raised in an agricultural action plan prepared by Niagara Region in 2006, "all indicators were that we were headed for trouble" and now is the time to act.

Ward 3 Coun. Peter Papp said he would like "to ramp things up even more," urging all Pelham residents to adopt a buy local produce policy as well as local businesses.

Ward 2 Coun. Dave Emmons said it's easy for senior levels of government to reserve great areas for agriculture but they don't have anything in place to help. "When it comes to support for the farmer, he's out of luck. We have to support our local farmer."

Ward 2 Coun. Sharon Cook, who seconded the resolution, said "she was shocked" to see peach trees being pulled out in Niagara-on-the-Lake. The general public doesn't realize it takes seven to 10 years to replant an orchard and make it productive again.

"When you pull out trees you leave a giant hole" in agricultural production, she said.

"We have to encourage farmers to hang on," she said which in the reason for promoting buy local produce policies.

"Hopefully the government is listening," Cook said. "We're very passionate about our farmers."

