



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Lawlor and Members of Council

FROM: Erin Kaiser, Manager of Economic Development and Innovation

DATE: March 31, 2026

MEMO NO.: CSE-2026-002

SUBJECT: Agricultural Roundtable - 2025 Annual Summary

PURPOSE OF THE MEMORANDUM:

The purpose of this Memorandum is to provide Council with the Halton Hills Agricultural Roundtable 2025 Annual Summary. The Memorandum provides highlights of the discussions, successes and key themes emerging from the Halton Hills Agricultural Roundtable. The Roundtable is focused on supporting a thriving local agricultural sector, identifying ongoing opportunities and challenges, and discussing areas for future consideration in order to help ensure the long-term economic viability and sustainability of agriculture in Halton Hills.

BACKGROUND:

As noted in Report No. ADMIN-2024-007 (dated April 3, 2024) regarding the Strategic Plan Implementation Framework and the Mayor's Priorities, beyond the Framework outlined in the latter report to ensure the effective implementation of Council's Strategic Plan, and recognizing that at its December 13, 2023 meeting, Council approved Resolution No. 2023-0251 which, in part, directed staff to review and develop policies that recognize and enhance the role of the farming community in maintaining key natural heritage features, good farming practices, climate change, and viability of farming - discussions were taking place to discuss the establishment of an Agricultural Roundtable. With its subsequent establishment, the Roundtable's mandate aligned with Council's Strategic Plan, particularly the theme of a Thriving Economy.

The Roundtable provides a valuable forum for discussion on matters impacting agriculture, including economic development, agri-tourism, environmental stewardship, infrastructure, and land use planning. It also facilitates two-way communication

between the agricultural community and the municipality, and provides input into key Town initiatives such as the Official Plan Review and Economic Development Strategy. The Roundtable's meetings have seen very actively attended, and comprehensive and valuable discussions have taken place with ideas exchanged.

Membership consists of representatives from a range of agricultural sectors, including primary agriculture, agri-food, and agri-tourism, along with the Mayor, members of Council and Town staff. The current membership is as follows:

Town Members:

- Chair: Councillor Brass
- Vice Chair: Councillor Somerville
- Ex-officio: Mayor Lawlor
- Councillor Kindbom
- Chris Mills, CAO
- Damian Szybalski, Commissioner of Community Services
- Erin Kaiser, Manager of Economic Development and Innovation
- Bronwyn Parker, Director of Planning Policy and Development
- Melissa Ricci, Senior Planner Policy
- Keith Hamilton, Planner Policy

Members:

- Jay Akras, Ovino
- John Ezard, Ezard Farms
- Peter Fraser, Wheelbarrow Orchards
- Geoff Maltby, Cody's Cows
- Robert McClure, Halton Region Federation of Agriculture (HRFA) Representative and Clurehaven Farms
- Allan Ehrlick, HRFA Representative
- Nancy Comber, HRFA Representative (Alt)
- Matt Setzkorn, Andrew's Farm Market & Winery
- Jorge Urbano, Fallbrook Farms
- Paul West, Solar Direct/Micro-Farming

To support and supplement the Roundtable's discussions and the exchange of information and best practices, guest speakers have been invited to the meetings, including:

- Melanie Frazer, President & CEO, Halton Hills Chamber of Commerce
- Declan Barber, Farm Credit Canada (FCC)
- Mike Carter, First Green Energy Ltd.
- Councillor Jane Fogal, Town of Halton Hills
- Michelle Bourdeau, Manager of Environment and Climate, Town of Halton Hills

COMMENTS:

The Agricultural Roundtable met four times throughout its inaugural year (2025) and its members were deeply engaged in discussions covering a variety of topics affecting the local agricultural sector. Meetings took place on November 7, 2024; April 4, 2025; June 24, 2025; and October 9, 2025. Meetings have continued into 2026. Based on very engaging discussions throughout 2025, several key themes emerged, including:

1. Economic Viability and Sector Development

Members of the Roundtable emphasized the importance of strengthening the economic viability of local agricultural operations. Discussions focused on:

- Enhancing connections between agriculture and the broader food and beverage sector;
- Supporting agri-tourism and diversification opportunities;
- Attracting investment and enabling value-added agricultural activities;
- Leveraging programs such as the Community Improvement Plan (CIP) and Business Concierge services;
- Leveraging the upcoming update of the Economic Development Strategy; and
- Improving access to funding, certifications, and training opportunities to help local producers access markets and scale operations.

2. Data, Communication and Awareness

A recurring theme identified was the need for improved local agricultural data collection and analysis. Members identified gaps in available data and emphasized the importance of:

- Developing a clearer understanding of the local agricultural system;
- Increasing awareness of agriculture's economic and environmental contributions; and
- Enhancing communication between farmers, businesses and the municipality.

3. Policy, Planning and Regulatory Environment

The Roundtable provided input on several key planning and policy-related matters, particularly through the Official Plan Review project. Key feedback included:

- Balancing natural heritage protection with agricultural operations;
- Addressing challenges related to Conservation Authority regulations and mapping accuracy;
- Supporting on-farm diversification and innovation;
- Managing non-agricultural uses and land use compatibility; and
- Streamlined approval processes, particularly for smaller agricultural operations.

4. Infrastructure and Operational Challenges

Infrastructure was identified as an issue that significantly affects farm operations and long-term planning, including:

- Transportation and traffic congestion;
- Drainage, runoff and soil management;
- Access to utilities such as water and electricity; and
- Impacts of road salt and illegal dumping.

5. Labour, Education, and Capacity Gaps

There was interest in expanding educational opportunities and improving access to agricultural expertise and advisory/support services. Members noted challenges related to:

- Access to skilled and affordable labour;
- Workforce training and development; and
- Reduced agricultural support services following termination of Halton Region's agricultural services and support functions.

6. Emerging Opportunities and Innovation

The importance of innovation in maintaining a resilient agricultural sector was highlighted through discussions on emerging trends and opportunities, including:

- Agrivoltaics and renewable energy integration;
- New financing and mentorship programs through Farm Credit Canada;
- Technological innovation in farming practices; and
- Climate change adaptation and environmental sustainability.

7. External Pressures and Risks

Members also discussed broader external factors impacting agriculture that highlighted the need for continued and enhanced local/Town supports, such as:

- Tariffs and global economic conditions;
- Growth pressures and urban expansion; and
- Rising costs.

NEXT STEPS:

To support the initiatives and priorities identified through the Agricultural Roundtable and to advance Council's Strategic Plan priority of a Thriving Economy, Council approved a new staff position in the 2026 Budget. This dedicated resource will strengthen and expand services to the agricultural business community, including through the development of an annual workplan with the Agricultural Roundtable and by providing subject matter expertise to inform the upcoming Economic Development Strategy and other applicable Town initiatives.

The Agricultural Roundtable has continued to meet in 2026, with a meeting held in March and additional meetings scheduled for June and September. These meetings will maintain momentum on key discussion items and provide ongoing input into Town initiatives. The September meeting will focus on the development of a workplan to help guide the Roundtable's future priorities and activities.

The current term of the Agricultural Roundtable will conclude with the end of the current Council term. The Roundtable will be re-established in the next term of Council, subject to Council approval.

CONCLUSION:

The Agricultural Roundtable has provided (and continues to provide) very valuable insight into the needs, challenges and opportunities within Halton Hills' agricultural sector. Discussions over the past year highlight the importance of continued collaboration and targeted supports required to ensure the long-term economic viability and enhancement of the agri-food sector in Halton Hills.

The active participation of all Agricultural Roundtable members and their valuable feedback and discussions are very much appreciated.

Reviewed and approved by,

Tony Boutassis, Director of Economic Development

Damian Szybalski, Commissioner of Community Services

Chris Mills, Chief Administrative Officer