

AGRICULTURAL COMPENSATION

# Let's give

# FARMERS

BY JEFF STAGER  
FOR THE RECORD

Despite this last gasp of winter, the farm planting season is at hand — and it's time to look at link between agriculture and the environment that benefits us all.

The world is recognizing the vital link agriculture plays in maintaining the Earth's environment — and that's just as true in Waterloo Region as it is across the planet.

Farmers, it is becoming apparent, do much more than put food on the table — and should be compensated for all the services they provide.

Agriculture is, largely, a simple matter of chemistry — specifically photosynthesis. It is what happens as crops grow. If water and carbon dioxide are combined with energy from sunlight, the result will be energy stored as sugar plus oxygen. A field of corn converts two per cent of the sun's energy to chemical energy, or sugar.

Agriculture is the one of the few industries that is a net energy producer.

Locally — using information contained in the Region of Waterloo's Statistical Profile of Agriculture and its Growing Food and Economy — we grow 60,000 acres of corn on the 228,000 acres of farmland in the region.

What isn't reported is that each acre of corn isolates 8.8 tonnes of carbon dioxide — the yearly output from one typical car — and releases oxygen.

Each acre of corn brings in a gross payment of between \$450 and \$550, depending on trading fluctuations at the Chicago Board of Trade. (Incidentally, the price of corn is only two to five per cent of the cost of a box of cornflakes).

But there is more to talk about than "food and fibre" when we consider agriculture in Waterloo Region.

The food-producing acreage in the region accounts for just 1.7 per cent of the province's entire inventory of 13,500,000 acres of Class A farmland. It sounds like a lot, but it's just one-quarter of one per cent of Canada's land mass.

According to Statistics Canada, in a 1999 report, "On a clear day, over one-third of Canada's best agricultural land can be seen from the top of Toronto's CN Tower."

Sadly, every year the planet loses an area the size of Scotland to erosion and urban sprawl. At the same time we add 70 million people to the planet's population. The new paradigm looks like this, using phrases such as "multi-functionality" and "environmental goods and services."

Multi-functionality has its roots in the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and was further refined by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development in 1998: "Beyond its primary function of producing food and fibre, agricultural activity can also shape the landscape, provide environmental benefits such as land conservation, the sustainable management of renewable natural resources and the preservation of biodiversity, and contribute to the socio-economic viability of many rural areas.

"Agriculture is multi-functional when it has one or several functions in addition to its primary role of producing food and fibre," declared the world's agriculture ministers.

Multi-functionality means agricultural producers grow more than food and fibre. It's time to compensate them for these environmental goods and services, and regional leaders can show the way

# their due

Multi-functionality is intended to call attention to the positive "goods" that agriculture can produce beyond the food and fibre that farmers sell in the marketplace. Environmental benefits usually include contributions to biological diversity, clean water and air, bio-energy and improved soils. Other multi-functional products include regional or national food security, landscape values, food quality/food safety, recreational activities, and improvements in farm animal welfare/wildlife species preservation.

Environmental goods and services involve the delivery of multi-functionality. These goods and services are the actions and products derived from human activity rather than benefits obtained directly from the natural environment. This is what farmers can do.

These are critical to modern economies and human quality of life — and there is a need to provide a market mechanism to value these environmental goods and services that farmers have been providing to ensure the maintenance now and for future generations of these public benefits on private land.

The concept of paying agricultural producers for rendering environmental goods and services bridges the environmental demands of Canadians and the policy requirements of the industry to foster a socially and economically viable agriculture industry and sustainable rural communities. Farmers do a good job now, but the caprice of international trade talks limits what could be done.

The word environment is showing up on the agendas of all levels of government, and farmers are encouraging that federal and provincial initiatives be reflected in local municipal official policy plans.

The levers the municipalities control are assessment-based. Given all that agriculture provides, prime farmland in the region should have zero assessment. Also, this land should be zoned as parkland, and the present cost-per-acre for parkland from a municipal budget should be given to the landowner as more environmental demands are met.

The appropriate transfers between the various levels of government in the region should be done. An agricultural committee of council should be struck to deal with these new issues.

The Region of Waterloo has been a leader in the province in many aspects of preserving farmland for the good of society. Waterloo has one of the lowest rates of rural severances in the province, and was a leader in the creation of the Rural Water Quality program.

It is time for regional leaders to show the way again.

• Jeff Stager farms in North Dumfries Township and is the immediate past-president of the Waterloo Federation of Agriculture.



# Wealth of mega-cities spawns modern-day slums

BY NICOLAS RETSINAS

The world has reached a point of hyper-urbanization: 2007 marks the first year when more than half the global population is "urban," not "rural."

Indeed, this is the era of the "mega-city" — metropolises of 10 million-plus. In 1950, only Tokyo and New York met that threshold. Today there are 20 mega-cities, including Mexico City, Karachi, Manila, Dhaka, Lagos, Jakarta and Chongqing.

This type of drastic population shift isn't without precedent. During the Industrial Revolution, concentrations of people in U.S. and European cities were part and parcel of a factory economy.

But that economic and technological progress came with a price — decades of fetid slums, horrific child mortality, raging epidemic disease. This time around, with cities 10 times bigger and demand for workers uncertain, the costs could be exponentially larger.

An optimist might cheer urbanization as a sign of modernization; residents of developed countries are much

more likely to live in cities than their counterparts in still-developing nations (74 per cent versus 43 per cent).

The city, after all, is the hub of culture, a magnet that draws artists, writers, musicians — the place where creative spirits create. Great cities have ballet troupes, opera companies and orchestras. The city is, likewise, the hub of industry, generating the bulk of most countries' gross domestic product. Most important, the city is the hub of ideas. The mingling of people spurs the intellectual innovation that fuels thriving societies, at least in the developed world.

But urbanization historically also has spawned an impoverished underclass of the marginally employed, or unemployed, living in a cruel despair.

Think of Charles Dickens' London: Scrooge wanted to diminish the "surplus population." Or remember Karl Marx's ruminations on the "lumpen proletariat," doomed to subsistence.

Cholera, typhoid and influenza — all cut a swath through 19th- and early 20th-century urban populations. Yet in

time, those horrors abated as infrastructure — clean water, enclosed sewers, labour laws, public education and medical advances — was created. In time, the 19th-century cities morphed into exciting places.

Cities in North America and Europe still have dense clusters of the poor, to be sure. They live in cramped housing with few amenities, but they no longer starve or die from cholera. Immigrants, in particular, who crowd — legally and not — into these developed cities believe that however desperate their straits, their children will fare better.

The newly ascendant mega-cities in the developing world, though, can dishearten even the most persistent optimist. They are relentless agglomerations of people, drawn not so much by the promise of prosperity as by the hope of survival.

It is internal migrant populations that are pouring into most of these exploding urban areas. In China, for instance, 150 million people have left their

rural homes in the last 10 years, leaving a dearth of workers in the agricultural sector. Political and war refugees, too, flow in steadily. A fortunate few may realize a steady income, maybe even own property, but most live in slums whose filthy water, political chaos and nonexistent municipal infrastructure would startle Dickens and Marx.

The United Nations estimates that, today, 2.8 billion people live on less than \$2 a day. And it is this huge, desperate underclass that is filling these mega-cities. Children are more likely to roam in gangs than attend school. Cholera and typhoid — diseases listed as "rare" in Western textbooks — are endemic. Often there is no geographic core, just as there is no governmental core to oversee the chaos. Parts of these cities are modern, with the familiar skyscrapers, highways and BlackBerry-toting workers. Yet they are surrounded by rings of shocking poverty where millions live in hovels.

Without some concerted action from nations and international institutions,

these mega-cities will grow larger and more desperate. Philanthropy helps, but these developing countries need public policies that promote property ownership, increase access to credit and enhance government transparency.

There is no quick panacea to improving the lot of billions of people; it took more than 50 years to address the slums of the 19th century.

But there is an urgency to today's task. The slum dwellers of Lagos and Manila and Karachi are part of the global economy, bound to the rest of the world.

Their misery will spill beyond their borders, and if that happens, our urban age risks becoming a global nightmare.

• Nicolas Retsinas is the director of the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University and chair of the board of directors for Habitat for Humanity International.

• Special to the Los Angeles Times

# It's hard to guess how Quebec election will turn out

Quebec is having a general election. I'm not sure whether it's a national general election or a provincial general election, but it's an election for the national assembly.

It is a momentous occasion for Canada. By definition.

If the separatists/sovereignists/sovereignty associationists are in power, it is essential that they be defeated, for the good of the country. If they form the opposition, there they must remain, for the good of the country.

But no one outside of Quebec is supposed to meddle in the affairs of Quebec, because Quebec is — what? Ah, let's call them a people within a united Canada. It might not be illegal to interfere in the affairs of a distinct society but it is, at least, singularly rude.

Election day is 26 March. Journalists always like to say that a lot can happen between now and then. It gives us an excuse if any of our predictions go disastrously astray.

I was in Montreal when the election



WILLIAM CHRISTIAN

was called. Jean Charest summoned the National Assembly and his finance minister delivered a budget. He called an election the next day. The budget was like a drunken fairy godmother on a giving-away binge.

It wasn't just that there was something for anyone. There was anything anyone wanted for everyone. There was only the one small proviso. You had to vote him back into office to get it.

No one complained that to release his party's platform in this way cost hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayers' money and was a corrupt use of the resources of the state for partisan purposes.

All the research, all the briefing, all the costing and all the planning had

been done by the Finance Department.

An article in the Montreal Gazette reported that a conference of academics had pronounced Charest's administration the worst in the history of Quebec.

It wasn't that it had broken just about every election promise it made. It was poorly run as well. Six months ago there was talk of shoving Charest aside on the grounds that his replacement couldn't possibly be worse.

Then along came Andre Boisclair, the new leader of the Parti Québécois. Quebecers are socially quite liberal, and Boisclair's homosexuality didn't bother them, but he raised a few eyebrows when he admitted using cocaine during the time he was a PQ minister.

Boisclair's poor judgment was reinforced when he put in a guest appearance in a skit on a satirical TV show in parody of the movie Brokeback Mountain.

The movie is a sympathetic treat-

ment of gay cowboys, but this had been turned into an anti-George Bush jab. People wondered what he was doing there.

More important, members of his party wondered where he stood on the question of sovereignty. It was charm rather than policy that got him elected leader. His strategy seemed to be to let Charest's government drag itself down in its own unpopularity, and not spoil matters by saying anything.

His predecessor, Bernard Landry, was pushed out as leader both by the people who thought he didn't support sovereignty strongly enough, and those who thought he was sufficiently identified with it to prevent the PQ from winning the next election.

He couldn't tolerate Boisclair's weaseling on this central issue. Either declare for sovereignty, he fumed, or step aside.

Boisclair courageously countered by announcing that he will hold a "public consultation" after he is elected.

Yes, you heard him correctly, a "public consultation."

Current public opinion polls show the Liberals with a nine-point lead. When asked who would make the best leader, Charest (who many people think was a dreadful premier) leads Boisclair 31 per cent to 18 per cent.

It's unlikely, but not impossible, that Mario Dumont (25 per cent approval rating) and his ADQ party (with 25 per cent in the polls) might form a minority government. He's not a separatist; he not a federalist.

In spite of what people in English-speaking Canada think, Charest's not a federalist either. And Dumont has the advantage of not being Charest.

But these comments are just between us, because it would be wrong of me to comment of the internal affairs of a nation within a united Canada.

• William Christian teaches political science at the University of Guelph.