

# Abstract

The growing public interest in local, organic food production and concern around environmental degradation has turned proximity to small-scale, organic farms into a value-adding amenity for residential development. As a result, agriculture-suburbs (or agriburbs) have emerged which incorporate residential, natural open space, and agricultural land uses in suburban development. These developments have been introduced into housing markets in the United States of America since the 1990s and more recently in Canada. The Greater Golden Horseshoe region in southern Ontario, Canada, contains a large amount of valuable agricultural land as well as intense growth pressure from its urban centres. The goal of agriburban developments, to balance conservation and development, is echoed in the provincial and regional policies that govern land use planning in this region.

This research examined previous case studies of agriburbs and reviewed land use policies for the Greater Golden Horseshoe to consider the implications of agriburban development for planning sustainable communities in this region. Conventional suburban development and new urbanist suburban development were also examined for comparison. An existing framework of sustainability assessment criteria was used to compare agriburban development with conventional and new urbanist suburbs. In parallel to this comparison, an inductive analysis was conducted of the Provincial Policy Statement, the Greenbelt Plan, and the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

The findings of this research indicate that none of the three approaches are completely effective at providing an appropriate mix and range of housing. Additionally, the benefits offered to residents by new urbanist neighbourhoods are perceived by the general public to be outweighed by the detriments of higher density. The result is that the majority of homebuyers prefer conventional suburbs. Finally, this research indicates that the dual objective of conservation and development is self-contradictory at the site-level and is more effectively addressed at the regional level described in the provincial and regional land use policies. These policies require that planning matters related to population growth, natural heritage and resources, and housing to be approached in a coordinated and integrated manner. Agriburbs produce inefficient development while impacting a greater amount of land and resources than other suburban developments. This approach does not support the policy objectives of developing sustainable communities in the Greater Golden Horseshoe. However, there may be specific locations along the fringe of agricultural land preserves where the implementation of agriburbs could reduce land use conflicts between intense residential development and large-scale agriculture operations.

Areas for future research include site-specific policies for the appropriate application of agriburbs, incentives for suburban developers to incorporate affordable housing, and education to address the contradictory desires of homebuyers and to increase the desirability of new urbanist suburbs.