

Environics Poll

Green is gold

In spite of the economic downturn, Ontarians see the value of the Greenbelt

Nine out of 10 Ontarians have identified the province's Greenbelt, as important to the future well-being of Ontario, according to a recent poll by the Toronto-based marketing research group Environics.

"What we find, over and over again, is that the public cares about the Greenbelt," says Burkhard Mausberg, president of the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation. "They see it as a visionary piece of legislation that is important to our children's future." After all, he points out, "We don't make more land."

Largest in the world

The Ontario Greenbelt—1.8 million acres (728,000 hectares) of protected green space surrounding the Greater Golden Horseshoe—is the largest in the world.

Hosting some 7,000 farms that produce about \$3,487 per acre, it could just as well be called the "Foodbelt," notes Mausberg, as it contributes more than \$4 billion annually in agriculture and food production alone. Meanwhile, its non-market benefits, such as water purification through aquifers (natural layers of water-bearing permeable rock) rather than municipal sewage treatment plants, are worth at least \$2.6 billion a year, according to a 2008 David Suzuki Foundation report, sponsored by the Greenbelt Foundation.

Economic contribution

York University environment professor Mark Winfield agrees that the Greenbelt contributes significantly to Ontario's economy.

"There is the direct economic value of tourism. [And] living within the Greenbelt makes the Golden Horseshoe a more attractive place, which is important in terms of the economic evolution of the province."

The results of the annual Environics poll, released three weeks ago, also indicate growing public support for increasing the amount of Greenbelt land, with 8 out of 10 people in favour of designating more land to the Greenbelt.

Mausberg reports that many countries are envious of Ontario's Greenbelt. "Ours has the greatest legislative protection." In some countries, land previously designated as Greenbelt are being taken back for development, he says, "piece by piece, like Swiss cheese."

At a time when Canada's record on the environment is not great, it's heartening, says Mausberg, that Ontario has a Greenbelt that is clearly "world-leading."

The Greenbelt: at our service

Valued at \$2.6 billion, the numerous eco-services provided by the Ontario Greenbelt include:

- waste treatment and water filtration via natural aquifers
- flood control
- climate stabilization through carbon storage
- wildlife-habitat preservation
- clean air.

Source: *Ontario's Wealth, Canada's Future: Appreciating the Value of the Greenbelt's Eco-Services*, David Suzuki Foundation, 2008.

Go to greenbelt.ca to read the complete Environics Poll.