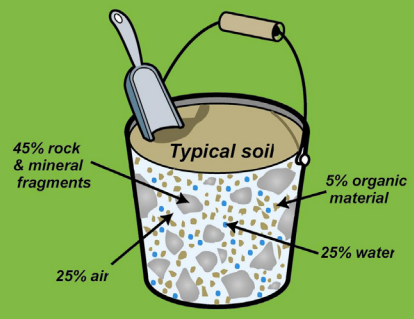
The Plains

A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

As glaciers moved across the land, rock and sediment were eroded, carried, and blended to create a mixture of boulders, sand, and clay known as till. As the glaciers receded, tills were revealed in depths to tens of metres.

Over time, percolating water, chemical reactions, and biological activity created soil horizons within the till. Plants decayed to form an organic or humus-rich layer of top soil. Humus adds valuable nutrients to the weathered till to produce excellent soil for agriculture.

Till is the predominant parent or starting material for soil in the GTA.



MEASURING UP

The Canada Land Inventory ranks agricultural potential using soil depth, drainage, water-holding capacity, and fertility as well as slope of the land, climate, length of growing season, and susceptibility to erosion. Based on this classification only 5% of Canada is prime agricultural land. Class 1 to 3 soils are considered to be prime agricultural land and almost 80% of the GTA was originally covered by soils of these classes.

SUMPTUOUS SOILS

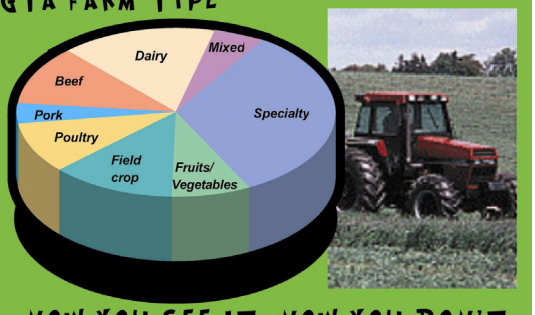
OOEY GOOEY MUCK

Organic soils, like those in the Holland Marsh north of Newmarket, consist of decayed plant matter that accumulated in wetlands that were previously glacial meltwater ponds or channels. When cleared of their natural vegetation, these mucky black soils are used to grow specialty crops such as vegetables. Should they be cleared for agriculture or retained as wetlands to filter water and provide wildlife habitat?

YOU THOUGHT CARS WERE IMPORTANT

Agriculture is second only to the auto industry in Ontario's economy. In the GTA alone, agriculture is a $1.3 billion industry with farm receipts totalling about $600 million and indirect sales generating another $700 million annually (1996 Census).

GTA FARM TYPE

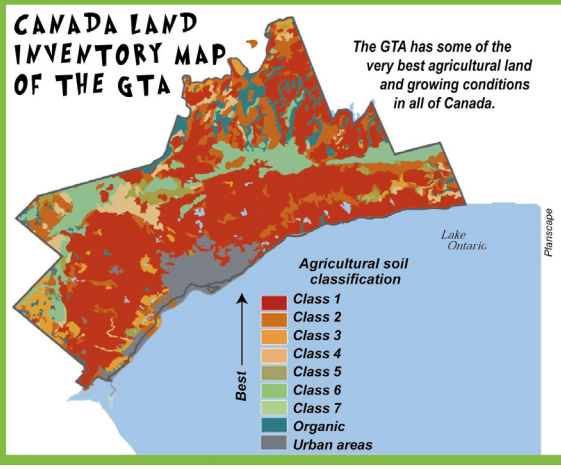


NOW YOU SEE IT, NOW YOU DON'T

Prime agricultural lands are a vital and nonrenewable resource, yet much of Canada's best agricultural land surrounds our urban areas. In the GTA this has led to the loss of about 50% of the Class 1 agricultural lands. By 2021, with the GTA expected to grow by another 2 million people (to 7 million in total), approximately 600 000 acres or 35% of the GTA's 1.7 million acres will be urbanized.

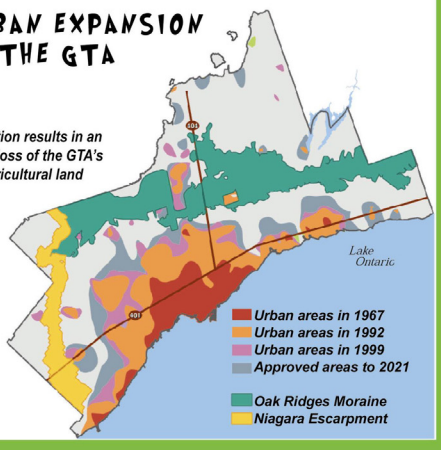
CANADA LAND INVENTORY MAP OF THE GTA

The GTA has some of the very best agricultural land and growing conditions in all of Canada.



URBAN EXPANSION IN THE GTA

Urbanization results in an ongoing loss of the GTA's prime agricultural land



The Plains

KWL Chart

What you know	What you want to know	What you learned