



Canadian Solar Industries Association
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LRP I Backgrounder: Solar and Agricultural Land

How are prime agricultural areas protected?

Ontario's Large Renewable Procurement prohibits the development of ground-mounted solar projects on prime agricultural areas¹. While the development of renewable energy and the protection of prime agricultural areas are both priorities set out in Ontario's 2014 Provincial Policy Statement, development of ground-mounted solar projects can only take place on lands that are not designated for prime agricultural purposes.

In accordance with Ontario's 2014 Provincial Policy Statement, prime agricultural areas are areas where prime agricultural lands predominate and include areas of prime agricultural lands and associated Canada Land Inventory Class 4 through 7 lands, and additional areas where there is a local concentration of farms which exhibit characteristics of ongoing agriculture². For the purpose of this definition, prime agricultural land means specialty crop areas and/or Canada Land Inventory Class 1, 2, and 3 lands.

Prime agricultural areas may be identified by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs using guidelines developed by the Government of Ontario. A prime agricultural area may also be identified through an alternative agricultural land evaluation system approved by the provincial government. In order to protect prime agricultural areas for long-term agricultural uses, Ontario's municipalities must identify prime agricultural areas within their Official Plans.

Putting the issue in context

An estimated 5% of Ontario's total land area is suitable for agriculture³ representing approximately 85,000 km² of land⁴. With 280 MW of solar currently planned across both rounds of the Large Renewable Procurement, approximately 11 km² of land is required⁵. Since ground mounted solar projects are not permitted on prime agricultural areas, the development of solar projects does not pose a risk to Ontario's agricultural sector.

¹ **Large Renewable Procurement.** (<http://www.ieso.ca/Pages/Participate/Generation-Procurement/Large-Renewable-Procurement/default.aspx>)

² **Provincial Policy Statement, 2014.** (<http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page10679.aspx>)

³ **Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Put farmland first to preserve province's productivity (2013)** (<http://www.ofa.on.ca/media/news/put-farmland-first-to-preserve-province%E2%80%99s-productivity>)

⁴ **Statistics Canada, Land and freshwater area, by province and territory.** (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/phys01-eng.htm>)

⁵ Assuming 10 acres per megawatt of solar.



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Can ground-mounted solar projects be located on lands that are currently farmed?

In some situations, a property that is currently being farmed may be used for a ground-mounted solar project, provided the property is not designated as a prime agricultural area in the municipality's Official Plan.

What if the municipality has not designated prime agricultural areas in their Official Plan?

Most municipalities in Ontario have designated prime agricultural areas in their Official Plans. However, if a municipality has not completed this designation process, then ground-mounted solar projects are prohibited on any specialty crop areas and/or Canada Land Inventory Class 1, 2, 3 and organic lands within that municipality.

Can lands used for a solar project be returned to the original use?

Absolutely, at the end of the life of a solar project the system must be decommissioned. This means that all equipment is removed from the property and the property is returned to its original state. Since solar projects have no harmful chemicals, there is no risk that the property would be contaminated.⁶

Are solar projects compatible with agricultural applications?

In some cases, yes, solar projects can be compatible with agricultural purposes. For example, the project could allow for the grazing of livestock on certain parts of the property. Solar projects can also promote biodiversity, for instance, through the establishment of beekeeping installations. We encourage you to speak with the project developers and owners to discuss what might be possible at a specific property.

⁶ Please refer to CanSIA's Backgrounder on Decommissioning.