



PETERBOROUGH COMMUNITY FARM CASE FOR SUPPORT

Farms at Work
with Jamey Coughlin

farmsatwork.ca

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**THE LOCAL
ADVANTAGE**
with Peterborough County



Executive Summary

Peterborough County faces a structural failure in its local food system: new farmers are not entering the sector at the pace required to replace an aging farm population, largely due to lack of affordable land, startup capital, and credible pathways to test viable farm businesses. At the same time, the region significantly underproduces fruits and vegetables relative to local demand, despite having available idle farmland and accessible markets.

The proposed Community Farm addresses these gaps by creating a low-cost, low-risk platform where prospective farmers can access small plots, shared infrastructure, and business training to test whether they can operate viable farm enterprises. Community growers and programs growing to meet household needs can also be accommodated. As such, it goes beyond simple access to farmland; it is a structured ecosystem that recognizes the community continuum from informal food growing to independent farm ownership, with an emphasis on the transitional opportunities along the spectrum when people learn together.

What makes this opportunity distinct is the unusually favourable starting conditions for Farms at Work: secure access to land at negligible cost, a highly supportive and engaged landowner, existing on-site infrastructure and equipment, and the ability to begin immediately without significant capital investment. This materially reduces both financial exposure and execution risk compared to typical community farm models.

The recommended course of action is to proceed with a controlled pilot (2026–2028), subject to defined conditions and decision gates. The project requires modest startup resources (approximately \$40K–\$70K, depending on infrastructure investment timing) and can operate at very low baseline cost due to subsidized land access and existing organizational capacity.

Initial financial returns are limited and dependent on ongoing grants and donations; this is not a self-sustaining commercial model in the near term. However, the downside risk is constrained by the ability to operate at minimal scale, defer capital investments, and exit with limited sunk cost if needed. The expected returns are primarily non-financial: increased number of new farm businesses, expanded local food production, improved access to land, and stronger alignment with regional food security and economic development priorities.