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# DON'T LET THEM PAVE OVER OUR FARM

BY MAX LASS

**Editor's Note:** In our Spring 2008 issue, we ran an article by Samantha Albert, "Pigs that Root and Turkeys that Fly," about Vicki and Max Lass and their Church Hill Farm in Punkeydoodle's Corners near Stratford, which was followed by a wonderful, heartfelt story written by Vicki about the challenges – and, ultimately, the joys – of owning and operating a humanely run, small-scale livestock farm. You can read these articles at [www.edibletoronto.com/content/pages/articles/spr2008/pdfs/pigsThatRoot.pdf](http://www.edibletoronto.com/content/pages/articles/spr2008/pdfs/pigsThatRoot.pdf).

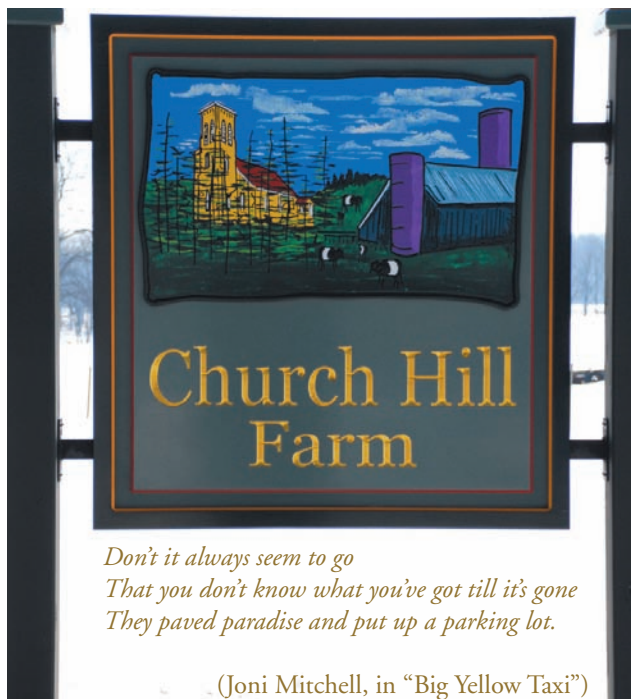
When she wrote her story last winter, Vicki had no way of knowing that she and Max would soon be faced with the most asinine challenge imaginable – the possibility of Church Hill Farm being literally paved over to make way for a highway bypass. Please consider signing an online petition ([www.ipetitions.com/petition/ChurchHillFarm](http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/ChurchHillFarm)) opposing this, and making as big a stink as you possibly can about it. People like the Lass family and their neighbours should not be forced to face the potential expropriation of their farms, along with their livelihoods, their homes, their years of hard work, and their cherished memories. This affects us all – consumers and farmers alike.

Dear readers:

I recently contacted the editor of this magazine to let her know of some distressing activity in our rural neighbourhood, and to ask her advice. There is currently a Ministry of Transportation of Ontario (MTO) feasibility study ([www.7and8corridorstudy.ca](http://www.7and8corridorstudy.ca)) underway to look at options for road expansion in the Highway 7/8 transportation corridor. The planners have deemed this road reconstruction necessary in order to deal with traffic congestion on the two-lane section of the highway between Greater Stratford and New Hamburg (Shakespeare area), and with anticipated problems in the New Hamburg area in the future.

Of the six possible options, four adversely affect some of the most productive agricultural land in Ontario, including a large part of our farm. My neighbours and I need your help, as Ontarians concerned with eating local, sustainably produced food. We need ideas, suggestions and contacts to help us mount a successful campaign to keep the study from recommending that any farmland be expropriated for further highway development.

What do we all lose if we let this type of poor planning continue? And by "all," I mean you, the consumer, and us, the farmers, because these decisions affect us all. For us, it means we will lose years of investment establishing rich pastures that offer shade and protection, and constant outdoor access, for all of our rare breeds (one of the proposed



*Don't it always seem to go  
That you don't know what you've got till it's gone  
They paved paradise and put up a parking lot.*

(Joni Mitchell, in "Big Yellow Taxi")

highway routes would see our farm cut in half). We will lose significant crop land, which is an income source that helps us to support our fledgling herds (and is future pasture land for our herds as they grow in number). We will lose a beautiful wooded area, rich with wildlife, that has been maintained by us and a number of our neighbouring farmers and which, combined, gives over 100 acres of natural habitat to a number of species. We will lose the progress made by our son's class project to build bluebird houses in an effort to reestablish the species in this area. We will lose our home since, with fewer acres, our farm would no longer be financially viable. We will lose numerous sources of local food that reaches many urban markets, and so much more.

Let me tell you about one of my many neighbours who will be left on a

farm that, like our farm, will no longer be workable. For five generations, they have been caretakers of their farmland. They run a small dairy operation with their children; they never use hormones, no antibiotics are used (unless absolutely critical), and cow comfort is their top priority. Because they are so careful with their animals, they rarely go away, so they have a little one-room cabin on a corner of their property where the family can go on "holiday," while still allowing the parents to do the milking. If one of the proposed routes gets approval, it will pass through their cabin, cut their property in half, and leave them with an insufficient amount of land to grow crops for their herd. It will



**Max and Vicki Lass and their two children**

also cut them off from land they currently rent from a neighbour to help supplement their feed supply. Their business will be ruined, and five generations of devoted caretaking and production of high quality food will be gone.

If we continue to let this type of activity happen, we will have a very sad landscape: we will not be able to feed ourselves. We all have a role to play in keeping our agricultural land from being paved over. Although this would be a personal tragedy for us, I would suggest that it is a personal tragedy for all of you, as well, if we continue to pave over productive agricultural land.

What is happening to us is not without precedent in our province; it is not the first time such a study has been done, or a proposal has been made, to pave over prime agricultural land, nor will it be the last. It is not the only time we will see plans being made that are based on what I hope, thirty years from now, will be seen as outmoded ways of thinking and travel.

And it most certainly won't be the first time that the agricultural community protests such lunacy. But our community is small and our voice might not be heard without your support. We need you to help send a message to our politicians that we do not want further destruction of some of our most valuable natural resources; that we want to feed ourselves from local sources; and that we want to be a province that can feed itself.

We need to let them know that this is more important than some frustration with having to stop at four traffic lights while driving through New Hamburg. We have until September 30th to provide comments to the study team. We need your help. Please add your voices to

ours and let the Ministry of Transportation know that we do not consider the alternatives they are studying to be viable. Please speak to everyone you know and ask them to help us stop these horrendous decisions from being made.

Any advice and potential contacts would be welcome, as well. Help us to preserve our ability to produce food in this province, for this province, by signing our petition at [www.ipetitions.com/petition/ChurchHillFarm](http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/ChurchHillFarm).

You might also want to make your opinions known to the Honourable Jim Bradley, our provincial Minister of Transportation ([www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/about/minister.htm](http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/about/minister.htm)), as well as to the MPP for the affected constituency, the Honourable Leeanna Pendergast ([www.ontla.on.ca/web/members/members\\_detail.do?locale=en&ID=7098](http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/members/members_detail.do?locale=en&ID=7098)), who is opposed to the highway reconstruction and is fighting against it on our behalf. To contact Church Hill Farm, please direct all emails through *Edible Toronto* at [info@edibletoronto.com](mailto:info@edibletoronto.com) (writing "Church Hill Farm" in the subject line), or write to us care of *Edible Toronto*, P.O. Box 85528, Toronto M5N 0A2.

Thank you for contributing your voice in order to make our voices stronger.

Sincerely,

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