

**Press Release by the Smithville Agricultural Society, Mr. Greig Hancock, and by the Lincoln Agricultural Society, Mr. J. Kelter.**

Approximately 2 ½ years ago, the Lincoln Agricultural Society embarked on a search for a new location. Their current facilities in downtown Beamsville were significantly constrained and outdated. A rural location was sought as this would allow the Society to provide for a full range of agricultural support services and to allow animals to remain on site for extended stays. A location in rural Lincoln became the preferred site, and planning applications (Official Plan and Zoning By-law Amendments) were submitted and processed by the Town and Region. Through the Municipal process, it was discovered that the Province of Ontario raised serious concerns about the suitability of an Agricultural Society locating in an Agricultural District. In the eyes of the Province, this was more an Institutional use which in their opinion is better located within a Rural Settlement or on lesser quality agricultural soils.

*“The Provincial response to our application was a significant blow to our dreams, and has forced us to once again initiate a property search”* says Joe Kelter, President of the Lincoln Agricultural Society. *“The current applications were put on hold and while they have not been abandoned, a second search was initiated”*.

An ideal candidate site was found in the Township of West Lincoln and prior to pursuing the acquisition of this property, meetings were held between the Smithville Agricultural Society and the Lincoln Agricultural Society.

*“As two Societies providing essentially the same service, we did not want to compete with our colleagues in West Lincoln”* states Joe Kelter. *“If the West Lincoln site proved to be too close to Smithville then we would continue our search”*.

As it turns out however, the Smithville Agricultural Society was also facing difficulties operating out of their current location in Smithville. The site is also fully surrounded by urban uses and is not owned by the Agricultural Society. Accordingly, both Societies have decided to merge into one brand new Agricultural Society and are planning to operate out of the new West Lincoln site.

*“It was a natural fit for us to join and merge the two Agricultural Societies, since we could together provide a complete range of services to our agricultural members”* says Greig Hancock, President of the Smithville Agricultural Society.

A new location with better and more modern facilities will allow the newly merged Agricultural Society to continue and expand upon their long term tradition of providing support services to the agricultural community. These support services include, farm related seminars/workshops and trade shows together with exhibition and competitions. In a more rural location animals can be brought in for an extended stay, thereby enhancing the ability of the Agricultural Societies in dealing with proper animal care and husbandry. A new location would also provide a permanent home base for the local Federation of Agriculture and local 4H clubs.

The site selected by the Agricultural Societies is situated right at the Grimsby and West Lincoln border within the Hamlet of Grimsby Centre.

*“This is a central location which will enable us to provide service to the agricultural communities in West Lincoln, Lincoln and Grimsby and effectively serve the entire West Niagara Agricultural Community”* says Mr. Hancock. *“In addition being located in a Rural Settlement such as Grimsby Centre, also addresses the Provincial position which affected our last candidate site”* says Mr. Kelter.

In order to develop the West Lincoln site a number of support studies will be required. Mr. John Ariens of the IBI Group will be compiling and coordinating the planning process on behalf of the new location. Various support studies have been commissioned and will demonstrate the suitability of an Agricultural Society upon this property.

*What really excites me about this property” says Ariens of the IBI Group “is that this is a former Century Farm and all of the existing farm buildings and structures will be retained and used to create a Heritage Farm display area. Much like the Country Heritage Park in Milton, the history of agriculture will be showcased in this location within the backdrop of an actual farmstead”.*

Both Agricultural Societies will be working together over the next several months and a new Society name will be chosen. In the interim, the project is being called the West Lincoln Agriplex. Municipal applications are being initiated and it is hopeful that all approvals will be obtained over the next 6 months, thereby enabling construction to begin next Spring. Both Societies will continue to operate from their current locations until the new facility is up and running.