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April 25, 2024

Mayor Canniff and Members of Chatham-Kent Council,

The Kent Federation of Agriculture represents well over 1,800 primary producers and agri-business members in Chatham-Kent. Our primary focus is to ensure a strong and sustainable agricultural and rural sector in the Chatham-Kent area.

The Kent Federation of Agriculture supports those sectors most impacted by this decision, namely the egg farmers and chicken farmers of Ontario in opposing any by-law that would allow back yard chickens in urban Chatham-Kent.

Avian Influenza (AI) poses a very real risk to our food supply system. Research has shown that contamination of commercial flocks can originate from urban back yard chickens. When AI is detected in a commercial flock, that flock must be euthanized, the facilities thoroughly cleaned and disinfected and a withdrawal period must be observed. The result is crippling to that farmer - the financial, mental and emotional stress that accompanies this situation can be devastating.

There are over a million hens in our area that produce over 29 million eggs each year with a farm gate value of \$78 million annually. As well, pullets for egg production, broiler chickens, broiler breeders, turkeys and ducks are vulnerable to AI.

AI has already been found – in fact, the first detection in Ontario in 2023 was in a backyard flock located right here in Chatham-Kent. Nine cases have been found in Ontario already this year, one as close as Amherstburg. AI has recently been detected in dairy cows as well as humans that have direct contact with the infected animals.

An outbreak in the human population would be catastrophic as we have seen in recent years with covid.

While permitting the urban population to have backyard chickens seems like a fantastic way to unite the rural and urban communities, in this particular case the risk to our food chain is too great. Disease, manure handling, rodent control and an increase in wild predators will be ongoing problems not only for the neighbouring residents but for the community as well.

Commercial farmers need the help from council to control this outbreak and help protect the food supply for all Ontarians.

Brad Snobelen, President
Kent Federation of Agriculture