



## York Region Environmental Alliance

*Seeking solutions & raising awareness -  
climate change, pesticides, sustainability*

# 2019 Annual Report



# YORK REGION ENVIRONMENTAL ALLIANCE

## WHO WE ARE

Incorporated in 2002 to campaign against the cosmetic use of pesticides, the York Region Environmental Alliance (YREA), a registered charitable organization #: 84559 0553 RR0001 has continually expanded its mandate to address ecological issues that impact our health and the health of our environment. We reach thousands of people annually in York Region, the GTA and beyond, through community outreach events, YREA's very popular quarterly News & Views [e-news](#), (over 750 subscribers) our [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page (over 700 likes/followers).

The York Region Environmental Alliance is governed by a volunteer board of directors and is administered by part-time staff and volunteers.

## 2019 BOARD OF DIRECTORS & STAFF



**Gloria Marsh, Executive Director**

**Abdullah Abbas, President**

**Susan Sigrist, Secretary**

**Donna Pearson, Director**

**Sylvia Halligan, Director**

**Don Harfield, Biochar Technical Advisor**

**Patty Ella, Accountant, PME Management Solutions**

Mike O'Hara, organic farmer of Headacre Farms and YREA's long serving Director and Secretary passed away at the end of 2019. He was a wonderful person & will be missed.

## 2019 ISSUES & ACTIVITY HIGHLIGHTS

### BILL 66 SCHEDULE 10 'OPEN FOR BUSINESS' - THE GOOD NEWS

YREA made deputations at Vaughan, King Township and East Gwillimbury. The 'open for business' bill would have allowed municipalities to override important water, agricultural and environmental protections contained in the Clean Water Act 2006; the Greenbelt Act, 2005; the Places to Grow Act, and other provincial legislation. Of particular concern in comments submitted to the province were:

- public health & safety, the environment, drinking water, Ontario's Greenbelt, Oak Ridges Moraine
- the effect of provincial and municipal plans/policies and other related legislation on such by-laws
- the minimum requirements for consultation and notification
- a lack of appeal opportunities

YREA was one of 24 groups that signed on to the submission by the Ontario Headwaters Institute.

There were over 500 comments received by the Ontario government, most of them, including numerous enlightened municipalities against this bill. Schedule 10 of bill 66 was subsequently removed.

### BILL 66 SCHEDULE 5 – THE BAD NEWS

Unfortunately, the Ontario government failed to listen to calls to remove Schedule 5, which repeals the Toxics Reduction Act (TRA) that encouraged manufacturers to reduce their use and creation of toxic substances and pollutants. The premise of the repeal was that the act was ineffective, but a 2017 report showed that was not the case. There was:

- 7% decrease in the use of toxic substances.
- 2% decrease in the creation of toxic substances.
- 9% decrease in the amount of toxic substances contained in products between 2015 and 2016.
- 2% decrease of toxic substances released into the air, land and water during the same time period.

Repealing the TRA allows polluters to release more toxins thereby compromising environmental & human health.



### BILL 108 – MORE HOMES MORE CHOICE (MORE SPRAWL)

This bill has some troubling negative impacts on 13 existing acts, including Conservation Authorities (municipalities to determine how CAs spend the levies they receive); Endangered Species (pay to slay in lieu of actions to protect SAR); Environmental Assessment (exemptions for EAs relating to transit, mining, development); Planning (return to old OMB rules, industry allowed to expand boundaries, build on farmlands and forests, circumventing local municipal planning without public engagement).



## BIOCHAR WORKSHOP



YREA attended this Kitchener event hosted by the University of Waterloo along with farmers, biochar industry producers, government staff and NGOs interested in the use of biochar in agriculture. The numerous presentations of study results of biochar utilized in soil and livestock systems were positive but the consensus was that more local research on how biochar improves and contributes to soil health would be of benefit.

YREA continues discussions with potential stakeholders on establishing a local biochar enterprise.

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## GLYPHOSATE REAPPROVAL - HEALTH CANADA

YREA attended a strategic briefing disclosing all the subterfuge and deceit uncovered during litigation of Bayer/Monsanto Roundup cancer case in California. Our abridged comments to the federal government:

We demand immediate action :

- cancel the re-registration of glyphosate in Canada, as we can no longer have confidence in the 2017 decision, which was based on industry-biased science;
- that the Federal Minister of Health conduct an independent review (as permitted by law) of the glyphosate assessment process in Canada to, among other things, investigate possible interference by Monsanto in the Canadian assessment;
- have glyphosate added to the list of restricted pesticides for agricultural use.



YREA also submitted pesticide comments provincially and federally to ministers of agriculture, health and environment regarding amendments to provincial Pesticide Regulation ERO #019-0601. Abridged here:

YREA fervently supports stronger pesticide bylaws - not weaker ones. Pesticides brought indoors on a pet have been found to persist in carpeting and easily transmitted to crawling toddlers. Yet with our so called ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides anyone can readily buy Roundup from the local hardware store. This must stop.

CEMETERIES - To allow pesticides in cemeteries is ludicrous when instead we should be looking at more sustainable groundskeeping practices. There is a growing movement towards more environmentally sensitive considerations with natural burials and green burials. We suggest that relatives may not wish to see loved ones buried in a place sprayed with the toxic chemicals that may have contributed to their deaths or to risk exposure themselves, thereby joining them prematurely.

FORESTRY – 42,000 hectares of public forest were sprayed with glyphosate in 2019 in Ontario to eliminate hardwood species like aspen, oak and birch in favour of more profitable coniferous growth. Aspen, oak and birch burn more slowly than the glyphosate-resistant coniferous trees, and experts say removing them is stoking the fires that now plague our forests annually across Canada. Quebec is the only province that has a ban on this practice and over a 10 year period reports less than half the fires of Ontario. YREA cannot overstress the importance of stopping this practice right across Canada - to reduce forest fires, to protect the flora, fauna and biodiversity that is also effected, to reduce atmospheric pollution and particulate matter that contributes to extreme weather events.



AGRICULTURE - Glyphosate (Roundup) has been reapproved for use by Health Canada even though there are now over 42,000 lawsuits against Bayer/Monsanto by users who have contracted many types of cancers. We therefore strongly disagree with the assertion that ‘a rigorous review of scientific studies on potential impacts on human health and the environment’ has been done. Rather, YREA contends that the susceptibility of regulators to intense lobbying from industry and its colluding scientists is the reason so many unsafe products are approved. The ‘spray all’ approach of conventional agriculture has been a dismal failure. Pesticide resistant superweeds infest over 100 million acres of farmland in North America requiring more spraying and more GM seeds now engineered to resist the highly volatile herbicide dicamba. To say that pesticides remain contained within a given area is an outright lie. It has been proven these toxic substances drift to contaminate our bodies, food, the bodies of birds and animals, the air, soil, rivers, lakes and drinking water at great distances from the original application, even contaminating organic farms. Pollinator extinction is imminent if chemically intensive industrial agriculture is not curbed.

HUMAN HEALTH – Besides cancer, GMOs and pesticides are linked to autism, ADHD, Alzheimer’s, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder among other ailments. Glyphosate/Roundup is a known endocrine disruptor. The scientific document, entitled GLYPHOSATE:DESTRUCTOR OF HUMAN HEALTH AND BIODIVERSITY clearly outlines the parallel rise in these diseases with the increased use of Roundup. Dr. Zach Bush, endocrinologist and author, provides us with shocking data. In 1965 4% of the entire US population acquired a disease; in 2015, 46% of US children alone were diagnosed as autistic. He projects that to rise to 1 in 3 by 2035 with 70% of adults contracting cancer by 2035. Every province is complaining about health costs. In the wake of mounting evidence, dozens of countries have banned or are restricting the use of glyphosate. This is one way we can reduce health care costs and prevent the dire predictions of escalating numbers of humans with diseases.

YREA’s contention has always been – if we cleaned up our food and cleaned up our environment, we wouldn’t have a health care crisis. We wouldn’t need a cure if we got rid of the cause. We therefore urge you to revisit this important issue and implement measures to protect and improve human and environmental health.

## SINGLE USE PLASTICS



YREA submitted the following abridged comments municipally, provincially and federally:

**Single use plastics** - What is single use? A bag of sliced bread, a bag of carrots or apples is also used just once in this form of packaging. Then there are plant pots, returnable to Sheridan & Loblaws in the garden centre season but what about all the other outlets selling potted plants throughout the year? Outdoor furniture, lumber, decking, planters and insulation are being made with recycled plastics. Plant pot take back program?

**Non-stretchy polypropylene bags** (coded 5) are often used for organic produce because they require 65% less plastic than a clamshell yet these bags would be placed in the paper stream by an automated sorting system and contaminate it. Improved automated sorting could help with higher utilization rates and less contamination as could more personnel to do manual sorting. (Black plastic, also coded 5 pp could also be recycled with improved more efficient sorting technologies).

**Compostable cups** – This is an easy switch for all municipal uses. Cups are plainly marked compostable and are lined with corn starch rather than plastic and are readily available. Contacting the head offices of Tim Horton's, McDonalds & Starbucks outlining the benefits of switching to compostable cups could herald a very positive green shift.

**Take back plastic bags** – At the moment Loblaws, Longos & Metro take back plastic bags at their stores. What about Sobeys, Food Basics & No Frills? A letter requesting this? YREA has had some success in this way going back as far as 2008 when we wrote to all major grocers. Another letter to Loblaw regarding excess packaging at T&T has had an impact, as they have reduced produce packaging and their take out containers are now cardboard instead of Styrofoam.

**Compostable produce bags** – A switch to compostable bags for produce would reduce an untold amount of plastic as these bags could then be used in our kitchen green bins. We need to be aware that there is a distinction between compostable & biodegradable. Compostable will turn into compost, whereas biodegradable will only break down into smaller and smaller pieces of plastic.

**Streamline practices across municipalities** – When doing spring clean ups, among the most common items found that have blown out of blue boxes are Styrofoam & stretchy plastics. They are not acceptable blue box items, yet new residents who have moved to York Region from Toronto are not aware of this as these items are recycled there. Expand YR recycling to include polystyrene & plastic?

**Shopping malls & reusable dishes** - When Cadillac Fairview was retrofitting the Eaton Centre, YREA strenuously advocated with their Sustainability Coordinator of the time that the food court change to reusable dishes instead of Styrofoam and gave successful examples from other parts of the world. This did come to pass and we are pleased to see this action expanding to other shopping malls. However, many other fast food outlets greenwash by having separate bins for waste, paper, cans/bottles but have been observed dumping all their waste in one garbage bin. We cannot over stress the importance of mandating the streaming of waste properly at all fast food outlets and malls.

**Cellophane to replace plastics** – cellophane packaging which is plant, not petroleum based and composts in home & municipal systems within 10 days is a sustainable alternative. Industrial hemp stalks & other agricultural residues could be a source of cellulose to produce compostable cellophane packaging as a replacement for plastic, generating value added income for farmers & contributing to the circular economy. Another robust source could also be the invasive Phragmites, plaguing our waterways and wetland and is almost impossible to eradicate without herbicides. Cellophane is being used for lining coffee bags, some organic packaging & clear portions of paper bread bags. The rip test can tell the difference. Cellophane tears, plastic doesn't.

**Incineration** – YREA has strongly advocated against incineration from the outset. Besides the horrendous human & environmental impacts of the resulting pollutants in the form of dioxins, furans & toxic fly ash, we would just be making more plastic by not recycling it.

**Considering a ban** – YREA has advocated for a ban on plastic shopping bags & Styrofoam for years. Perhaps now is the time to finally implement this. If PEI can do it, so can the rest of us. We do not think that paper would be a suitable replacement as it would only mean cutting down more trees.

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## OUTREACH & EVENTS IN WHICH YREA PARTICIPATED:

- Vaughan Earth Hour
- Repair Café, Aurora Library
- Metamorphosis film screening/panel discussion which included YREA, Aurora Library
- York Region climate change action plan workshop
- Richmond Hill Healthy Yards
- Green Directions Vaughan stakeholder workshop
- Centre for Social Innovation waste free grocery opening, the Annex, Toronto
- Richmond Hill Centre Development
- Met with MPP Michael Parsa to discuss issues of concern
- York Region Sustainability Awards, Vaughan
- York Region Forest Festival, Stouffville
- Enviro Day, Woodbridge Farmers Market
- Vaughan Promenade redevelopment
- Resilient Richmond Hill
- Provided our **SHOP LIKE THE PLANET'S WATCHING** educational resources to YRDSB Swan Lake Outdoor Education Centre



Centre for Social Innovation - waste free grocery  
*Photo courtesy of Zephyr Organics*

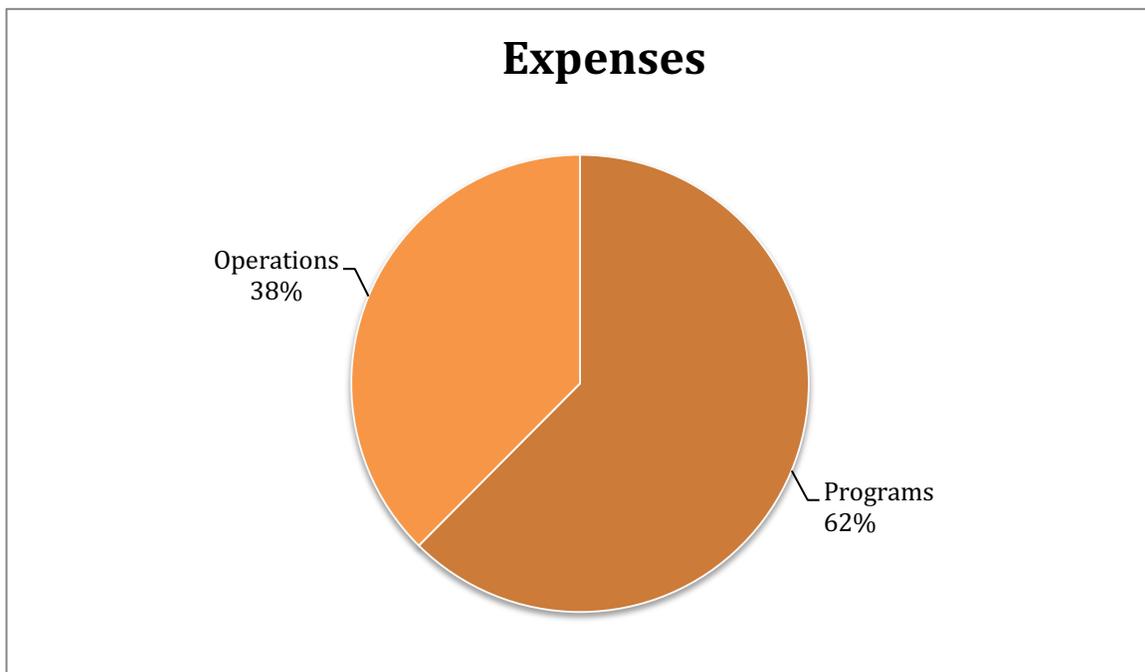
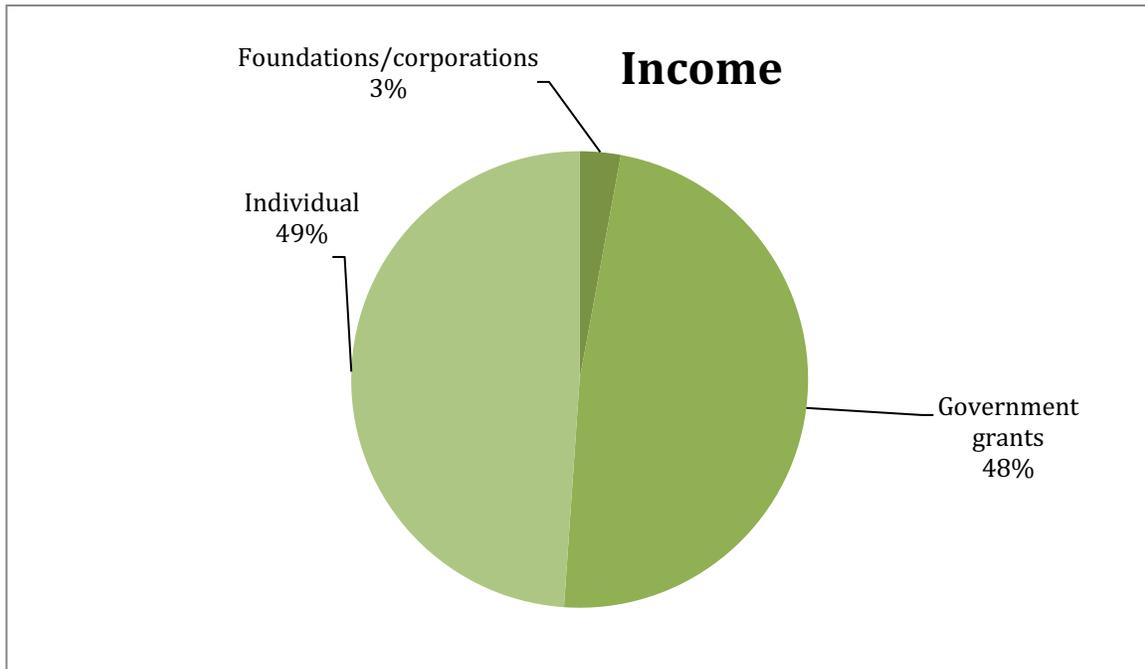
We continue to advocate on many matters at the community, provincial & federal level, individually and through joint submissions with like-minded NGOs. We are a member and/or supporter of:

Canadian Organic Growers  
Friends of the Earth Canada  
International Biochar Initiative  
Land Over Landings  
Ontario Clean Air Alliance  
Ontario Greenbelt Alliance

Ontario Headwaters Institute  
Ontario Nature  
Ontario Urban Tree Council  
Ontario Zero Waste Coalition  
Organic Growers of Ontario  
Safe Food Matter

# YORK REGION ENVIRONMENTAL ALLIANCE

## 2019 FINANCIAL YEAR END



OUR HEARTFELT APPRECIATION TO ALL DONORS AND ESPECIALLY TO THOSE  
WHO HAVE SUSTAINED YREA WITH ANNUAL DONATIONS  
WE ARE VERY GRATEFUL TO EVERYONE

**GUARDIAN \$2000 & UP**

Gloria Marsh (*donation in kind*)

**PROTECTOR \$1000 - \$1999**

**CUSTODIAN \$500 - \$999**

Marilyn E Stewart

**STEWARD \$200 - \$499**

Leslie Atkinson

Diane Keating

Spencer Lanthier & Diana Bennett

Sylvia Halligan

Gloria Marsh

Debbie Schaefer

**KEEPER \$100 - \$199**

Sharon & Jim Bradley

Mark Hubbard & Susan Sigrist

Angela Marsh & Justin Keating

Catherine Marshall

Donna Pearson

Tom Waechter

Anonymous

**FRIEND \$20 - \$99**

Abdullah Abbas

Stephen Cockle

Patricia Watson



YREA was presented with a donation of \$2500 from Mayor Bevilacqua during Vaughan's Earth Hour event. We are so very thankful for this generous support



We gratefully acknowledge the contribution of IBM through their matching grants program

Thanks to our board members for their continued volunteer commitment to YREA & to Director Sylvia Halligan for keeping our website updated

## LOOKING BACK AT 2019 & AHEAD TO 2020 FOR YREA

2019 was a year of advocacy and letter writing. The enormous amount of issues of concern were truly overwhelming. We raised awareness of the perils of coal tar spraying of driveways, vehicle idling, excess road salt, light & plastics pollution, advocated for tree planting, naturalized gardens and roadsides, the benefits of pollinators & getting out into nature. Many of these issues have not yet been resolved.

### ON YREA'S 2020 RADAR:

- Pesticide education & advocacy
- Organic food/agriculture/farmland conservation
- Pollinator habitat/species at risk
- Solar paneled parking lot advocacy
- Biochar social enterprise development



YREA incorporated in 2002 with an initial goal of raising awareness of the hazards of lawn chemicals and advocating for a ban on their use. Yet we find ourselves revisiting this issue again 18 years later as pesticides now impact the demise of pollinators, contaminate our bodies, air, soil, rivers, lakes, food, drinking water and the bodies of pets & wildlife. YREA's 2020 vision is to promote local organic agriculture & farmland conservation & advocate for pesticide reductions through sustainable farming practices as one of the many solution needed to address the tremendous challenges we face. We would also be elated to announce some solar panel covered parking lots.

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President



  
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