

## Locals meet with Minister Thompson about issues

By Mark PavilonsEditor

Grass roots agricultural issues were front and centre at a local round-table discussion recently. Lisa Thompson, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, joined King-Vaughan MPP Stephen Lecce and a number of agricultural representatives in Vaughan for a frank and open discussion. On hand at Sant Greenhouses in Vaughan were Councillor Avia Eek and her husband Bill, representing the Holland Marsh. Minister Lecce advised that this is just the first of many roundtables on tap with Minister Thompson. I am proud that King-Vaughan is home to some of Canada's most innovative farmers and producers; helping to create local, sustainable, quality products for families at home and abroad. That is why I was excited to host Ontario's Agriculture Minister in our community to better understand the challenges and opportunities related to farming with the aim of protecting and growing the family farm. Special thanks to our host at George Sant & Sons Greenhouses, as we brought together agriculture leaders representing a diverse cross section including beef, greenhouse, agri-business, fruit & vegetables, beekeepers, and equine sectors. I believe it is critical that they have a voice, which is why we created a platform for local farmers and the agriculture sector to create a more sustainable and competitive marketplace. Eek said the topics ranged from energy produced on-farm, to municipal bylaws. Trucking yards are a huge problem in Vaughan, and large non-agricultural buildings seem to be going up. Other issues include fertilizer tariff, nitrogen reduction, carbon fixing, food literacy in the curriculum, opportunities for advancing trade, Agricorp, SAWP, food supply chain, innovation, and more. Eek said there was also talk about bringing in other ministers to meet with local farms, including transportation, municipal affairs, environment, to address the various issues our food and farming community are facing. Eek offered her farm as a potential meeting spot in the future. I thanked Minister Lecce for including us, and organizing this, it was a great opportunity to share with Minister Thompson, the importance of including those stakeholders who are directly impacted by policy decisions made at the provincial level by those who do not fully understand the complexities of Agriculture and Agri-Food business. Farmers such as myself were able to bring important issues to the forefront, said Councillor Jakob Schneider. From protecting our farm land for future generations, housing for farm workers to carbon sequestration on the farm. This round table is just the start. We hope to continue to engage farmers and agricultural stakeholders on an on going basis. As always community engagement and consultation makes our decisions as government on policy more effective and works for the larger good. Also on hand for the meeting were representatives from Zander Sod (King), JC Orchards (King), Green Tractors (King), Sant Greenhouses (Vaughan), Mark Hopkins (beekeeper in Vaughan), an energy lawyer/farmer, Jay Wilmott (King), a beef farmer, Councillor Jakob Schneider, Dave Budweth (Nobleton Feedmill in King), and Brookdale Nurseries.