



**Ontario Federation of Agriculture**

**Ontario AgriCentre**

100 Stone Road West, Suite 206, Guelph, Ontario N1G 5L3  
Tel: (519) 821-8883 • Fax: (519) 821-8810 • www.ofa.on.ca

## **Election Change You Need to Know**

### ***Be Prepared for Electoral Reform – an Important Issue for Rural Ontario***

#### **The October 2007 Provincial Election Referendum Question**

Provincial elections will take place on October 10, 2007. In addition to voting for the candidate of their choice across Ontario's 107 ridings, voters will also be asked, through a Referendum question, to choose between two options for electing members of the provincial legislature in subsequent provincial elections. The choice will be between keeping the current electoral system, often referred to as the Single Member Plurality or First-Past-the-Post system, and opting for the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) electoral system.

#### **THE BALLOT:**

Which electoral system should Ontario use to elect members to the provincial legislature?/Quel systeme electoral l'Ontario devrait-il utiliser pour etire les deutes provinciaux a l'Assemblee legislative?

The existing electoral system (First-Past-the-Post)/L'actuel systeme electoral (systeme de la majorite relative)



The alternative electoral system proposed by the Citizens' Assembly (Mixed Member Proportional)/ L'autre systeme electoral propose par l'Assemblee des citoyens (systeme de representation proprtionnelle mixte)



Under the current system, the candidate in each riding or constituency with the most votes wins the riding. Once a riding has three or more candidates, it becomes possible to win the riding with less than a majority of the votes cast. Taken together, riding by riding, parties often win the majority of seats in the legislature with less than 50% plus of the overall popular vote.

Under the proposed MMP electoral system, voters are given two votes on one ballot. One vote is for the local candidate of their choice, the other vote is for the Provincial Political party of their choice. In order to implement this, there will be an increase in number of seats in the legislature to 129 seats. Of these, 90 seats would be elected locally – the same manner in which people are currently elected. The remaining 39

seats would be "List Seats" and represent the votes for one's party of choice. These List Seats are essentially elected at large.

Prior to the election, each party will choose their list candidates and publish this list through Elections Ontario. While the process used to create the list will be published after-the-fact, there does not appear to be a requirement for public input into creation of each Party's list.

The current system has 107 seats in the legislature. By reducing the direct vote of local candidates elected to only 90 seats, the Provincial electoral boundaries will need to change, making each district larger. It is proposed that local districts should retain their representation by population. For example, Northern Ontario currently has approximately 10% of the seats (11 out of 107). Under the proposed new system, the North will retain their 10% share by having 9 out of the 90 seats. In essence any six current electoral districts across the Province will become five ridings in the MMP system.

#### **Matters for further Consideration:**

1. Impact of the decrease in number of directly elected MPP's:
  - Reduction in number of rural seats therefore diluting the rural perspective in the legislature
  - Potential further weakening / diluting of the agricultural / rural voice by increasing the size of electoral districts / ridings.
  - Constituency obligations on the 90 directly elected members will be increased. Given the large geographic nature of rural and northern areas, it may become increasingly difficult to represent these constituents.
  
2. List Seats:
  - "The List" is created by each Party and published prior to the election. It is presumed that this list will reflect the demographics across the Province, but there is no legislated requirement for this to be the case.
  - The order of names on "the List" is critical as they will be taken in the published sequence. The top few names on the list will get a seat in the legislature (depending on the number of "Party votes").
  - It is likely that the "List seat" politicians will be predominantly urban-based.
  - MPP's from "the List" will be appointed as opposed to being directly elected.
  - People who could not get elected regionally, for whatever reason, still have a chance to get a seat in the legislature.
  - What accountability will these 39 "List Seat" individuals have to the voters? They will gain their seat through the Party, not through the direct vote of the people, and therefore their primary loyalties and accountability will be to the party.

There is a potential for Cabinet appointments to be disproportionately chosen from "the List". Does this also impact accountability issues?
  
3. Does this system encourage new parties to enter the legislature and potentially influence political decision-making?



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4. Will this new system reverse the decline in voter turn-out? Is there any data to support the notion that this process will be more engaging and improve voter turn-out in future?

**This is an important issue for rural Ontario. Please take every available opportunity to learn more about the referendum, and make an informed vote on Election Day – October 10, 2007**