



March 6, 2024

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this letter to share how important the Saugeen Municipal Airport is to the future of our business here in the Hanover, Walkerton and West Grey area because of a recent business expansion into northern Ontario.

Cedar Crest Trout Farms, also known as Springhills Fish, is a second-generation family fish farming business in Grey-Bruce. We raise rainbow trout, Arctic char and coho salmon with a focus on eco-friendly and humane farming methods.

We grow fish at five land-based fish farms out of Hanover and West Grey, a processing plant near Chatsworth, and we recently started a partnership with Sheshegwaning First Nation for a new farm on Manitoulin Island. We hatch the majority of rainbow trout that all fish farms in Ontario grow out, supply most major Canadian grocery stores with fillets, and also deliver fish directly to 1,500 homes every month across the province. Furthermore, the Ontario Aquaculture Association operates out of our "home farm" in Allan Park.

The expansion to Manitoulin Island was a significant step for our business. To stay competitive, we needed to venture further afield and open our own grow-out facility in Lake Huron. After a province-wide search, the best way to do this was a long-term joint-equity partnership with Sheshegwaning First Nation.

It only took one season of farming up north to realize the distance is going to be a challenge. First, it is hard for quick decision-making and long-term planning when leadership's boots are not consistently on the ground. Second, it can be hard for staff training, team building and morale when team members are isolated in the north.

Furthermore, and perhaps the spark for this letter, is the distance can be a strain on building new relationships and forging community ties with our friends at Sheshegwaning First Nation. Our partnership is about more than economics, it is about "joining families" and being part of their community through ceremonies, pow-wows, education events, Pride parades, tours, and regular management meetings. In return, for members of Sheshegwaning to participate in activities down here in the Hanover, Walkerton and West Grey community.

To ensure this expansion will be successful, my co-owners Arlen and Mike, as well as many staff members and myself, have done a lot of “burn and turns”, which means driving the 8 hours up to the activity, then the next day driving the 8 hours home.

It was during one of these grueling drives that we discovered our home community supports an airport in our backyard. And we were even more excited to hear it was fantastically equipped with a flight school, storage, a restaurant and was super conveniently located.

Shortly after, we met with Marohl Kuhl of Kuhl Flight Academy who was more than happy to run the numbers and see if it was feasible for us to operate a small plane between the Saugeen Municipal Airport and the far end of Manitoulin Island.

Shockingly, it was not as extravagant of an idea as you would think: the flight would only be one hour; it would use a third of the fuel compared to driving our farm vehicles; and planes can cost less than some of our heavier farm trucks and machinery.

The benefits are numerous, including more efficient farm management, better work-life balance, lower carbon footprint, and being able to extend our community ties and relationships more easily with our Manitoulin friends. Furthermore, we do a lot of advocacy and education through the Ontario Aquaculture Association, and flying opens up even more opportunities to advance our sector.

Thus, in June 2023, my co-owner Mike and I started flight lessons — something neither of us could have ever pursued if the flight school was not nearby. I have already finished ground school, written all three exams, and am taking solo flights.

Over the last 9 months, I have learned that we have so much more than a fantastically equipped airport here — we have a welcoming and encouraging community of flyers in Grey-Bruce. It is made up of experienced pilots and aviation enthusiasts who can talk flying for hours, as well as newbies like me struggling to get our “air legs” beneath us.

If you are wondering what types of people a place like Saugeen Municipal Airport attracts, you only have to look at my cohort of 14 students from Ground School in the fall. It was not the wealthy 1%-ers, it was a diverse group that included:

- One construction fellow who found it less expensive to own a plane and a cottage in northern Ontario, than try and afford a cottage within driving distance;
- A local young woman with dreams of flying for Air Canada one day;
- A retired tradesman looking for a hobby and an easier way to visit his kids who live across the province;
- A nurse hoping to practice more medicine in remote and fly-in communities;
- And me, a fish farmer looking to get some time back and ensure his business expansion succeeds.

Furthermore, my many hours at the Saugeen Municipal Airport have shown me the immense practical value that the airport provides to our community. There are regular visits from Ornge for emergency healthcare services, who rely on our airport for fuel and fast access to people's care. There are crop dusters up and down all day protecting our farmers' crops. And there are so many visits from families, old folks' homes, or groups of individuals with development disabilities who just have fun watching the planes.

When we distill the Saugeen Municipal Airport's value down to simple metrics like tourism, we miss out on the contributions of our immense community of pilots, wannabe pilots, and aviation enthusiasts that call this airport home. We miss out on visitors who enjoy a meal at the Landing Gear and swap stories with the locals. And we also shut out the economic potential of having such a convenient transportation in and out of Hanover, Walkerton and West Grey.

When I lived in Toronto in my twenties, I found it so odd that politicians were pushing for more public transportation across Ontario using trains and high-speed rail. It was strange because I grew up finding old railway spikes along the driveway at our home farm in Allan Park, as it was the abandoned railway bed for a train that used to run from Hanover into the GTA.

If only politicians had the foresight in the 1980s to keep those rail lines, the geography of this province would feel drastically different, and the carbon emissions and ease from transport would feel drastically different.

I would encourage today's politicians to celebrate the Saugeen Municipal Airport and not close off this community to what the airport offers today — but also not close it off to the amazingly unknown future coming with electrically-fueled aviation and new aviation technologies that could change transportation of people and goods forever.

Thank you for taking the time to hear about what the Saugeen Municipal Airport means to our family and our community here in Hanover, Walkerton and West Grey.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



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