

The CFFO Commentary

Title: **Opportunities and Challenges within a Green Jobs Strategy**

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In many ways, rural Ontario is at a crossroads. The push for a Green Economy represents a period of opportunities and challenges for the way rural Ontario conducts its business. Some counties are taking a proactive approach to these changes and are developing a Green Jobs Strategy for their jurisdictions that will position them competitively in the future.

A number of Community Futures Development Corporations in Midwestern Ontario recently held a feedback session on a Green Jobs Strategy. These groups are preparing a report on opportunities in their part of rural Ontario that may strengthen the rural economy in a local, sustainable fashion.

In their view, now is the time to diversify and strengthen rural Ontario by seizing new opportunities. One of the drivers behind this study is that the rural economy is too dependent on agriculture and manufacturing for employment. In the last number of years, there has been an erosion of the manufacturing sector, as businesses either shut down permanently or relocate to lower cost jurisdictions.

The strategy has three main focus areas – business growth, community support, and environmental resiliency. The group believes that all of these aspects of rural Ontario have opportunities and challenges that can be answered, at least in part, through a Green Jobs Strategy.

For farmers both large and small, the greatest new opportunity may be the chance to provide and be compensated for environmental goods and services that improve the resiliency of the land and local watersheds in the long-term. It was emphasised by the guests from the agricultural community that farmers want to improve stewardship practices, but they need funding of some sort to do it.

The stakeholder engagement workshop held by the Community Futures Development Corporations of Midwestern Ontario was a great opportunity to provide input and feedback regarding the development of their Green Jobs Strategy. Hopefully this project is able to provide a strong direction for a competitive future for this area of rural Ontario and perhaps be a model for other areas of the province.

Nathan Stevens is the Research and Policy Advisor for the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario. The CFFO Commentary represents the opinions of the writer and does not necessarily represent CFFO policy. It can be heard weekly on CKNX Wingham and CFCO Chatham, Ontario and is archived on the CFFO website: www.christianfarmers.org. The CFFO is supported by 4,300 farm families across Ontario