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Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario

5653 Hwy 6 North, RR5 Guelph Ontario N1H 6J2

Voice (519) 837-1620 Fax (519) 824-1835

E-mail: cfomail@christianfarmers.org

Web site: www.christianfarmers.org

NEWS RELEASE

Subject: **A new task force to help farmers help the environment**

Guelph, March 2005. The Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario is calling upon the Ontario government to set up a task force charged with identifying farmer-delivered environmental services and developing a method of paying for them.

"Ontario farms produce more than just an abundance of food," said John Kikkert, the CFFO's President. "They also contribute to wildlife habitat, wetlands and other environmental services. We believe it's time for the province to formally recognize those contributions through annual payments to farmers and rural landowners."

Kikkert made his comments at a recent meeting of the CFFO's Provincial Council. Made up of delegates from across the province, the Council adopted a position statement outlining key aspects of a provincial task force on environmental payments.

The CFFO position statement asks the provincial government to create a new task force composed of an independent chair and three representatives from each of the following groups --- farmers, countryside residents and consumers. The task force would carry a mandate to:

- Identify the environmental services (alternative land use services, greenbelt services, ecological services, landscape services) that are or can be provided by farmland and rural landscapes;
- Design a method of whole farm annual payments for environmental services throughout the countryside;
- Explore unique ways of raising the funds needed to pay for environmental services, including the idea of a small charge on the retail sale of all food; and
- Propose a management system for the delivery of environmental payments that takes into account farmer, countryside residents and consumer interests.

"Ontario needs a new policy direction for our countryside environment that replaces one-time payments for environmental improvements with whole farm annual payments for long-term stewardship," said Kikkert. "Farms have enormous potential to deliver increased environmental benefits to society but farmers can't deliver them without receiving steady public financial contributions."

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In adopting the new position statement, CFFO delegates referenced the advice coming from the provincial government's Agricultural Advisory Team. The Team advised the government that "the Ontario government through the Ministries of Agriculture and Food, Environment, Natural Resources, Tourism and Recreation:

- Recognize and take seriously the environmental benefits agriculture contributes to society;
- Lead research with both governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to identify and assess what has been done in other jurisdictions; and
- Develop programs and financial incentives to farmers that recognize these societal contributions and which could provide an additional income stream for agriculture."

The advice of the Agricultural Advisory Team can be obtained at:
www.gov.on.ca/OMAFRA/english/aat/advice.htm#compensation

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For more information, please contact:

John Kikkert	President	(905) 957-7766
Elbert van Donkersgoed	Strategic Policy Advisor	(519) 837-1620
John Clement	General Manager	(519) 837-1620