

6 Barriers to Participation in Agri-Environmental Programs

6.1 New Data

The discussion of barriers to participation in agri-environmental programs in this section draws from the three qualitative modes of research which contributed new primary material to this project: key-informant interviews, focus groups and the multi-stakeholder meeting.

6.2 Themes Deriving from Key-Informant Interviews

Some 18 interviews among 33 key informants were conducted for this research. Many were experts in government, Conservation Authorities, other agencies or in academia. Most key-informants had direct experience in delivery of agri-environmental programs such as the Environmental Farm Plan, the Rural Water Quality program, the Well Upgrading and Decommissioning program or others. The interviews were semi-structured sessions lasting from one to two hours each. For each, a project description was provided to the informant followed by a discussion about farmers' barriers to participation drawn from direct experience.

These conversations provided us with a good understanding of the barriers to participation and related questions. For the purposes of this report, we will summarize the barriers into two types: barriers relating to the key-informants' understanding of farmers and barriers relating to design and delivery issues.

6.2.1 Farmers' Personal Barriers as Seen by Key-Informants

Foremost among barriers to participation, as perceived by key-informants, was farmers' mistrust of funding and delivery agencies. This mistrust was thought to be directed mainly towards government and its own extension staff, but farm organizations involved in delivery were sometimes included. Interviews with government extension staff did not convey this impression, however. They had learned from experience or had been trained to be sensitive to this issue.

In the same vein, key-informants attributed successful program implementation to the skill of contact personnel who had gained the trust and respect of farmers. They often said that trust would only be gained if the contact person was already well-known to the

farm community and/or was actually from the area and/or was himself or herself from a farm background. A related barrier was the lack of training and/or expertise of extension staff or their having personality traits which were off-putting to farmers. Many key-informants stated that farmers believed that agency or government personnel “knew nothing about farming.” The implication was that only those with a farm background and/or were sympathetic to them were qualified to be involved in program design and delivery.

Key-informants felt that farmers’ perspectives were highly personal, grounded in the context of their own property and operations and not as a part of a larger picture. A number of key-informants related that farmers themselves do not perceive their farm to be part of a larger ecosystem or that their operations could be polluting the wider environment. Farmers’ lack of understanding of program objectives was also cited as a barrier.

Some key-informants mentioned that some farmers were already good stewards and so did not feel the need to participate in programs. Others mentioned that farmers were keenly aware of potential liability issues surrounding their practices. They were reluctant to have knowledge of their activities potentially brought to light by participation in programs.

It was sometimes thought that the larger or more prosperous farmers would be more likely to participate in existing cost-share incentive programs, simply because they could afford their share of the outlay. Some felt that current low commodity prices were hindering many farmers from participating. They were aware that many farmers wish to earn their living from a fair market place, not from support mechanisms.

Incongruously, despite the fact that most incentive programs did not fully compensate farmers for projects and that incentive levels were insufficient, the cost-share element was not seen as problematical by key-informants. Most felt that government should not fund capital projects which would increase the value of the farm.

As well, some key-informants felt that farmers would feel their sense of “ownership” of the programs would be lost under full compensation or that their innate sense of environmental stewardship and responsibility would be undermined. They claimed that farmers themselves would be suspicious of fully-compensated projects; fearing that funding would be abused or co-opted by those who knew how to “work the system.” Another key-informant mentioned that there were many repeat applicants in some watersheds, implying that some farmers did indeed know how to turn the programs to their advantage. Similar equity issues were raised by another key-informant, who believed that farmers would resent

grants being offered to one farmer when another had already voluntarily implemented the same practice.

Farmers not active in farm organizations were said to be isolated and at a severe disadvantage when publicity and recruitment were done through presentations at farm meetings. There is, in fact, considerable variation in publicity style throughout the province. Some regions count on local press coverage for publicity. Some agencies rely on word of mouth and others on direct recruitment by agency personnel. Brochures and pamphlets are usually widely distributed and placed on public display to maximize the reach of programs. Government and agency websites have ample coverage of programs.

Sometimes farm family dynamics were said to create barriers. This happened, for example, when decision-making was held by the father of an adult child who was a partner in the farm business. In the same context, gender issues did not emerge in the key-informant interviews, although they were evident in the focus groups. Simple time constraints imposed on farm families hindered either the application process or the completion of projects. This was cited as another major barrier.

Culture and ethnicity are apparently important considerations in certain areas of the province. In the Grand River CA, considerable success was reported in recruiting old order Mennonites to programs. This was apparently through skillful and sensitive interaction by the agency's contact personnel who had gained the trust and respect of the community. As well, many immigrants familiar with Europe's regulations and programs were said to be willing participants in programs; that they were familiar with European programs and understood the necessity for them. The francophone farmers in eastern and northern Ontario were not thought to be under-represented in programs by key-informants in those regions.

6.2.2 Design and Delivery Barriers, as Seen by Key-Informants

Although key-informants believed that fully-compensating programs would be unacceptable to farmers, many among them also thought that the level of compensation was often insufficient to attract voluntary enrollment. The cost-sharing formula is variable throughout the province, but remains well under 100 percent. There are, however, upper limits to total project disbursements. No programs appear to tie the grants to any real or derived value of environmental services or compensation due to lost productive capability,

although this is a major theoretical pre-occupation of environmental and agricultural economists.

The complexity of paperwork and the time involved in making applications was another important barrier to participation mentioned by key-informants. The Healthy Futures for Ontario Agriculture program was often cited in this context. Another noted that Healthy Futures programs were complex but this was because they were designed to be properly evaluated and thus accountable. Healthy Futures was also designed as a community-based program, to be led by local initiative from community groups. Nevertheless, key-informants reported a number of problems with uptake in the Healthy Futures programs and also the Well Upgrading and Decommissioning program.

Simplicity of procedures was considered a sign of successful implementation, but again deliberate intervention by agencies to ease the paperwork was variable. Some delivery agencies helped farmers with paperwork and some did not.

Competition among delivery agencies for a limited pool of program funds was said to be another barrier. In some programs, the process relies on local initiative and pro-action by the delivery agency to access provincial funding. Some CAs in Ontario were said to lack the time and/or expertise to produce a successful application. Some lack the permission or financial support of their municipalities to apply to cost-sharing programs.

Where this has occurred in the past, farmers in some regions have been excluded from provincial programs. It was reported, however, that all of eastern Ontario, except parts of Leeds-Grenville, was covered by some type of environmental program. The area surrounding the municipality of Kawartha Lakes in the Shield Region had little access to programs at one time, but it was reported that considerable local enthusiasm was building from the pro-active stance of the municipal administration itself and several dynamic contact people involved. Something similar was reported for Renfrew. This impression is verified by the high rates of participation in the EFP mapped for these regions in Figure 5.6a.

The fact that there is a large number of disconnected programs with different conditions and requirements was seen as a barrier to uptake by some key-informants. Reasons for this diversity of programs are structural, but also have to do with Ontario's traditions of pragmatic local flexibility and reliance on local initiative, partnership-building and volunteerism. The limited time horizon of programs, of necessity tied to political and budgetary mandates, was also thought to be a barrier to participation by farmers.

The Clay Belt of northeastern Ontario forms a farming region clearly different from the rest of the province. It was said that interest in the EFP was low there. The reach of provincial environmental programs had not extended to the north-eastern area surrounding New Liskeard until recently. This farming area is also different from the rest of the province in that it is targeted by the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund through the provincial Ministry of Northern Development and Mines and the federal FedNor program for regional development, as well as OMAF initiatives for local agricultural and other kinds of development.

A farmer near New Liskeard interviewed as a key-informant leads the Temiskaming Agricultural Development Association. This incorporated volunteer body has accessed large grants from various sources, including Healthy Futures, for agricultural development and environmental activities in the region. Incorporation was necessary in order to create an arm's length body to discourage the possibility of abuse by individuals. The Temiskaming association and its dynamic leadership had attracted a large participation from area farmers.

Other initiatives by pro-active farm groups elsewhere in the province were reported. In the Quinte region, for example, an association of farmers had accessed funds from the Healthy Futures program for local projects. At the time of the interview they were experiencing procedural and bureaucratic frustrations typical of the interface between government and local actors. Lack of understanding of government procedures likely contributes to the frustrations of those on the ground.

6.3 Themes Deriving from Focus Group Discussions

Five focus groups of between three and seven participants were held during the Fall of 2002, one in each of the five regions established for this study: Hanover (Southwest), Winchester (East), Lindsey (Shield), Ingersoll (South) and Earlton (North). At each, a complete description of the project was given and full explanation of the purpose of the meeting. This was followed by a semi-structured but free and informal discussion lasting one and one-half hours. Notes were taken, or a tape recording made for later transcription. The discussion addressed each of the following questions:

- Why do you think farmers decide to get involved in programs like these?
- Why do you think farmers don't get involved in programs like these?

- Who is best fit to manage environmental programs?
- Do you think that programs that pay landowners for environmental services would be popular? An “environmental service” is something like providing a place for wild birds or animals to live, leaving some land in nature, making a wetland etc.

We deliberately made no attempt to promote any particular position. The guarantee of confidentiality, our value-neutral position and a flexible interview framework allowed very free, frank and wide-ranging discussion of the questions above. The following discussion describes each meeting followed by a general summary on personal issues and design or delivery issues. There are obvious points of convergence with the information provided by the key-informants, but also some major differences.

6.3.1 Hanover Focus Group – Southwest Region

The Hanover focus group was pre-occupied with the perceived low public image of farming, probably because of their proximity to Walkerton and the events surrounding the recent investigation over water quality. It was thought that local consciousness was rising about environmental and health issues in farming as a result of this case. It was thought that men and women had an equal voice on the farm in regard to decision-making about participation.

This group had little precise knowledge of available programs. Those who were aware of programs said that those who do get involved do so because farmers have a strong connection with the land and sense of environmental responsibility. The EFP was seen positively, as a limited but still good, first step. It was felt that a central agency was needed to co-ordinate information flow, especially since the closure of local OMAF offices.

Some saw farmers who participate in programs as status-seekers. These participants then create a certain tension in the community. Rather than achieving a positive demonstration effect, they produced reticence to get involved among others. One would be seen to be out of step with the rest of the community. It was thought that many wanted to avoid upsetting local social relations.

For others in the group, there was no particular resistance to the idea of incentive programs. One might as well get involved because the project would be done in any case.

The availability of programs was seen as an inducement to get a planned project off the ground. The timelines of projects were seen to be appropriate to carry them out. It was mentioned that Ducks Unlimited Canada was an intrusive presence in Western Canada.

The time and paperwork involved in launching a project were major problems. It was thought that farms were now too big to do everything that should really be done. There was never enough time.

There was a general understanding of the need for prioritizing sites for funding, but concern about who would be making the decisions. A competent and qualified third-party review was felt necessary, but also that it should also be by peer review. This was not seen as an inconsistency.

There was little outright hostility toward government, rather a suspicion that government expected information about farm practices and the environment in return for program funding. It was hinted that farmers sometimes deliberately sent false information to government about their operations.

Some participants were aware of current European practice. When the concept of environmental payments was presented, some agreed in principle, feeling that this approach would inevitably come to Ontario, but not in the near future. Some felt that there would be public support for payments, if the public at large were assured that the benefits went to farmers and were not feeding a bureaucracy. To some, it did not matter where their income originated, as long as they remained viable. There was no support for any scheme that would provide public access to farmland, however.

This meeting occurred very much in the shadow of Walkerton. With the Nutrient Management Act's regulations still formative, there was a large concern about other forms of environmental regulation rising. These concerns were not easily separated from a general concern with the overall farm economy and other structural problems in farming.

6.3.2 Winchester Focus Group - East Region

In this region, considerable friction exists between municipalities and the farming community about the agri-environment. A phosphorus mitigation program is being implemented regionally, which raises some controversy. Resentment and finger-pointing are common, with some examples occurring at the meeting. There was no sense of acceptance of the local application of pollution credit trading between the towns and farmers.

There was a general mistrust of programs, with the feeling that farmers were left out of the planning and design of them. As elsewhere, farmers were wary of programs being designed and delivered by those with no knowledge of farming.

This group was positive, however, about corporate sponsorship of programs, by Domtar, for example. The local CAs are pro-active in achieving partnerships with other partners as well. The fact that provincial funding for some programs was unequal across the province was seen as very unfair.

This focus group agreed that funding is an important incentive to participation, but that the grants are in fact small. The major barriers were the paperwork and time involved in participating in programs. There was no problem attracting participants once farmers knew money was available. Word of funding availability was said to travel fast within the farm community. There was otherwise no particular social pressure to participate in programs. Key-informants in this region had mentioned that farmers did not want it widely known that they were involved in programs.

The impending NMA was thought to be a large barrier to participation in programs. Farmers felt they were in limbo about the force and type of associated regulations and especially whether funding would be available to implement them. Fear of the unknown was thought to be slowing uptake in voluntary programs.

As elsewhere in the province, this group did not clearly differentiate voluntary programs from the regulatory regime, using the language of “compliance” for voluntary programs, for example. Fear was expressed about government inspection and policing of the environment and the possibility that inspectors would come onto farms, make changes and then charge the farmer for them.

They expected delivery of programs to be by professionals. They were wary of the costs of program administration, whose resources they felt would be better spent in grants than in bureaucratic costs. In this group, mistrust was greater towards the federal than the provincial government. It was felt that the Land Stewardship programs were well-managed and equitable, perhaps not realizing that these originated at the federal level.

6.3.3 Lindsey Focus Group – Shield Region

This meeting occurred in the Shield Region, which has very high uptake in EFP and where it was said by key-informants that local uptake in other programs was rising quickly. It

was said that the environment was being discussed at all farm meetings. Some felt that EFP was being used as a requirement to access other environmental program funding simply in order to increase its reach. In this case, there was the sense that confidentiality of the EFP would be in jeopardy if it were used in environmental cross-compliance.

It was thought that the financial incentive to participate in programs was important, but there are darker, even fatalistic undertones. These farmers also thought that they were being led into making a commitment through a voluntary program and then being caught with obligations and mounting expenses.

There was little sense of choice in the matter. If farmers were not willing to participate voluntarily, then they would be regulated. There was a sense of urgency to participate; that one must act fast to avoid being put on a waiting list. This was said in particular of the Healthy Futures funding. In the meantime, farmers were investing in projects while waiting for funding approvals. These, they said, were often projects that they would have done in any case.

It was thought that some program requirements were “ridiculous.” Some felt that engineers and accredited contractors stood to gain the most from program funding. Accreditation is required for some construction projects under certain programs. They perceived that costs rose when grant money was involved, and that gouging by contractors was occurring.

It was said that the requirement for nutrient management plans in this region was inhibiting participation in programs. Those unable to contribute to cost-share programs were also excluded. Farmers were willing to do projects, but there were no funds. Deadlines were also seen as problems. Different funding levels in different CAs and other regional forms of flexibility were seen as unfair.

As elsewhere in the province, there is a clear mistrust of government and even fear of the Ministry of the Environment (MOE). There was also some tension with some CAs, who were seen as intrusive. They had not experienced “harassment” from Ducks Unlimited Canada, however. There was no support for the environmental lobby to administer farm programs. Peer evaluation of proposals at the local level was needed. It was thought that OSCIA or some similar organization should administer programs, not MOE, which was seen as too exacting. OMAF was preferred as the lead ministry on programs. Even so, the former strong allegiance to OMAF was thought to be wavering.

In regard to the concept of environmental payments, this group thought that farmers would approve of annual payments, but that speculation about the possibility of future direct environmental payments would deter participation in existing programs. They had some knowledge of European programs but were generally cynical about them; it was thought that European farmers were immigrating to Ontario to flee the heavy intervention there. Farmers were “sick of red tape” and lack of “common sense” in their relations with governments and other agencies.

Some at the meeting were hostile towards other rural landowners and the idea of including them in agri-environmental programs. Others approved of extending environmental programs to non-farm rural landowners.

6.3.4 Ingersoll Focus Group – South Region

This focus group was held in an intensively-farmed and economically viable area of Ontario, the South Region. The farmers at this meeting felt that farmers would participate in incentive programs when the advantage to them was obvious. The programs act as a catalyst for those who were intending to undertake projects. They did tend to wait for programs before proceeding with projects and then only enrolled when undertaking large projects.

These farmers felt they were already good and innovative environmental actors. The financial incentive was important and should be increased, but grant money was not the over-riding importance.

The Healthy Futures program was well-received and said to promote innovation. This group was disappointed that funding for manure storage was not eligible. They agreed that program criteria were likely to raise costs from contractors, but were confident that the job would be well-done by them.

It was thought that farmers who intensively cultivated all their available land would not be convinced to enter projects, especially projects requiring land to be taken out of production. It was thought that only marginal land would be allowed to be removed from production. Since it was perceived that land along streams was the most productive of all, voluntary buffer programs were thought unlikely to succeed. Those who already had some non-cultivated land would be more likely to participate in such programs.

It was thought that regulation would be required to force some farmers into certain actions. Older farmers were thought to be more resistant to program uptake. It was thought

that farm women were isolated from decision-making. These and other traditions were thought to die hard among the local farm community.

OMAF's extension personnel were seen as excellent but that cutbacks to their number now slowed participation in programs. They thought these agents had done considerable "hand-holding" and urging of farmers to get involved in programs. The CAs now play this role. One-on-one extension was thought to be a good means of promoting uptake, as long as the agent "understood agriculture." As elsewhere, personality factors were important in promoting uptake. Concerns about maintaining confidentiality were high.

Some doubt was expressed that OMAF was still effective in its relations with farmers. Yet, other ministries were seen as difficult to work with. They were put off by perceived squabbling and lack of co-ordination between ministries. OSCIA was thought to be a good delivery agent, especially because it was at arm's length from government. Still, it was seen negatively as being rather loose-knit and reliant on volunteers. Putting any new institution in place, however, would require a long time to achieve trust. The CAs were seen as the appropriate delivery agents for water-related projects, although many new programs were somewhat annoying. Any new institutional delivery agencies would take a long time to gain the trust of farmers.

This group was unaware of most program details. They wanted and needed timely information and supported the idea of a clearing house for this. Their use of the internet was poor, however. Little was known about the DUC programs. These they negatively associated with "tree-huggers" but some farmers liked DUC's approach and its generous funding levels. The farmers were suspicious of vested environmental interests. The concept of trading pollution credits was unacceptable. It was thought tax incentives would be a good form of support to agriculture.

It was understood that the EFP takes time to do. They were wary of confidentiality issues, where government might learn details about the farm. Also at issue was the fact that farmers were put in a position where money was committed to a project before eligibility for funding was established. As elsewhere in the province, these farmers were wary of strings attached to programs and about policing and inspection. They were wary of forfeiting control over their land or decision-making.

As for the concept of environmental payments, some at the meeting thought it would be difficult to promote a change in outlook that would allow land to be taken out of

production. Farmers were thought to be more amenable to changes in farm management practices and adopted innovative best management practices more readily. It was thought that individual negotiations between agents and farmers for specific projects would yield more success. Again, while they were willing to do things such as plant tree rows or set out bird-nesting boxes, they were unwilling to take land out of production to accommodate an environmental program.

They were at a loss as to how and where provincially significant areas were established for protection. They thought that if this were known, then things might be easier. It would all require great flexibility and impartial one-on-one negotiation between agencies and farmers. Farmers would need time to adapt to the idea of environmental payments.

6.3.5 Earleton Focus Group – North Region

The focus group held in Earleton, in the North Region, was among francophones only. Access to programs was only recently obtained in this region. There were a number of basic differences in outlook among these farmers, compared to other Regions, but also many similarities in their concerns surrounding programming. This group was more preoccupied with questions of the agricultural economy and its development and also with environmental regulations.

This was an astute and aware group, with a wide and well-integrated perspective on current issues. They were indeed a *group*, with a sense of cohesion among themselves which did not exist elsewhere in the province. They were familiar with issues in Europe, Quebec and elsewhere in Ontario. Moreover, unlike any other group, they were able to detach their opinions from their own properties and personal considerations to see a wider picture.

There was some affinity with Quebec and its practices, not surprisingly, since they were Franco Ontarians. For example, an agri-environmental club had been formed locally which had hired a professional agronomist, as is done in Quebec. Also, this group was notable in not displaying the generalized mistrust of government or program agencies that almost all other farmers interviewed displayed. Rather, their mistrust was focused on engineers and contractors.

As elsewhere, this group was very sensitive to the impending NMA and its regulations, a major preoccupation of the discussion. It was thought that enrollment in voluntary programs would forestall further environmental regulations. They felt they were

good environmental actors and stewards of their land, with strong and long-term commitment to farming and the region. As elsewhere, the divide between mandatory regulation and voluntary participation was not clear. Their major pre-occupation was with the regulatory environment. But, in either case, they felt left out of deliberations.

The local OMAF extension agent was well-respected but was thought to be overwhelmed with work and new obligations. There was concern that such agents would burn out under these new burdens. As elsewhere in province, to be acceptable, any agents needed to be knowledgeable and realistic about farming conditions.

At the same time, they were ambivalent about the role of program delivery agents. It was well-understood that access to Healthy Futures funding required local initiative and pro-action. It was said that much talk was current about it and other environmental initiatives, but that nobody was listening. Lack of time and aversion to the paperwork were cited as reasons. Information was needed, but there was a strong resistance to using the internet, although it was locally available.

The EFP was not high in their worldview. It was said the incentive offered was inconsequential. It was thought that the impending environmental regulations would be a strong barrier to participation in voluntary programs. The lack of apparent benefit of programs was another barrier. As well, program funding was seen to inflate the costs of projects as the “engineers” and certified contractors would stand to capture the benefits. Considerable criticism was leveled at what were perceived as self-serving programs whose major effect was to perpetuate work for delivery agents and civil servants.

This group was familiar with and approved of the concept of environmental payments, being familiar with related concepts from European programs. But they were unified in thinking that the European approach would not work in their area. With a declining local population, there was little scope for sustaining agro-tourism ventures. Liability issues would hinder them in any case. The proximity of a vast wilderness on Crown land was seen to work against the conservation activity more common in the south.

Conservation interests were locally active, but not within the farm community. These farmers were not, however, averse to conservation projects. They were acceptable, if the need were demonstrated and if those enrolled were well compensated. Again, program criteria had to be realistic to farming. As elsewhere, there is tension between environmental

activists and farmers, the former seen as being unrealistic. The urban-rural divide was also present and constantly being reinforced.

6.3.6 Personal Barriers, as Seen by Farmers

The orientations of the farmers in the focus groups were different from those of the key-informants, even for the same issues. Regional differences in outlook were also more evident as well. Self-interest is strong among those in southern Ontario as opposed to those in the north, who do exhibit a more collective concern.

From the perspective of farmers as well as key-informants, however, mistrust of government is probably the paramount barrier, followed by lack of time and perceived paperwork involved. Many interpret agency involvement as an intrusion in their practices. Participation in programs is often not out of deeply-held stewardship convictions, rather is part of pragmatic cost-saving by those who would have done the projects in any case.

Farmers missed the direct extension activity of OMAF, reduced because of government downsizing. Uncertainty over the extent and implications of the impending regulations under the NMA were preventing uptake in programs and causing considerable anxiety. This mistrust extends especially to ministries outside of OMAF such the MOE and the MNR. The federal presence is shadowy but equally mistrusted.

There is no particular barrier presented by the fact that programs originate at different levels of government and are delivered by different agencies. The status quo is mainly acceptable. There is no strong sense that farm organizations should deliver all programs.

Concern is almost universal about the possibility of environmentalists and/or their vested interests intruding on decision-making on environmental farm management. This is a serious barrier, not only to participation in agri-environmental programs, but to the effective integration of other stakeholders and other environmental programs into the question.

The time and effort required to participate was a serious barrier for many. Few farmers felt they could easily afford the extra time and energy required to participate in programs. Others found the level of payments to be insufficient to make it worth their while.

6.3.7 Design and Delivery Barriers, as Seen by Farmers

Many of the farmers in the focus groups have a lack of knowledge of how to access programs. Some know very little at all about them. Others feel the level of incentive grants is insufficient. It is not apparent to some what direct benefits to the farm would result from entering into programs.

The local flexibility of Ontario's programs is interpreted as unfair to farmers in general. The complexity of programs and their delivery arrangements is mainly mystifying. There is also an almost universal fear that confidentiality is threatened and that inspection and regulation is rising in the province. They do not strongly differentiate voluntary incentive programs from the regulatory regime.

The concept of environmental payments is interesting to them and some believe that the public would approve of funding these. On the whole, however, the concept is not seen as realistic in today's policy environment and not workable in areas where large tracts of the natural environment remain intact, such as in the North Region.

6.4 Themes Deriving from Stakeholder Meeting

6.4.1 Issue Identification and Barriers in Existing Incentive Programs

On October 16, 2002 an open stakeholder meeting was held as part of this research. The 62 participants were mainly civil servants, delivery agents, academics and some farmers, mainly representatives of the CFFO itself. A separate report on this meeting is found in Appendix I.

The meeting consisted of a presentation by the author, an hour of open discussion about existing agri-environmental programming practice in Ontario and eight breakout discussions. The breakout sessions focused on two questions: issues and barriers surrounding current programs and the feasibility of environmental payments programs and the suitability of keeping existing delivery structures.

A plenary session followed in which all viewpoints were openly displayed and discussed. All written comments from the breakout groups were included in the report produced for this meeting (Appendix I).

The two questions for breakout discussion were:

- How can we resolve issues surrounding current agri-environmental incentive programs? You may want to use these as a guide: design issues, funding issues, implementation issues.
- Are programs which award annual environmental payments feasible for the Ontario situation? You may want to use the following as a guide: What are the barriers? Can the current institutional framework be retained?

A wide diversity of issues about existing programs emerged during the stakeholder meeting, some of them, plainly contradictory. Despite the fact that government has retreated from direct involvement in farm extension and related intervention, the participants made a clarion call for long-term public commitment, both financial and in terms of firm policy, to enhance existing agri-environmental incentive programs. An increase in the level of incentives and other funding was recommended. Further, the use of disincentives was mooted as an instrument to achieve higher participation.

There was also a strongly-expressed need for creating and/or maintaining trust between farmers and program agencies, including the need for farmers' inclusion in all aspects of the policy process. There was considerable emphasis at this meeting on extending access to incentive programs to all rural landowners.

There was a definite expression of the need for a lighter administration, a disentangling of the various authorities involved and clearer delineating of jurisdictional boundaries. At the same time it was generally stated that stakeholders, especially in government, needed to work with other stakeholders in a collaborative fashion. The inclusion of municipalities in programming was mentioned. Mention was also made of the need for broader public education in order to garner wide approval for program expenditures.

There emerged a strong need to clarify goals and simplify procedures, especially paperwork done by farmers. There was a clear call for consistency in criteria regarding the implementation of existing programs, but that implementation itself should be local. A parallel discussion surrounded the desire for province-wide access to programs, but local flexibility in targeting of environmental problems for action.

6.4.2 Feasibility of Environmental Payment Programs

In considering the feasibility of programs which would pay environmental payments, the need for disentanglement of authority was re-stated. As well, it was said that there is a need to promote a stewardship ethic over simple agricultural production for its own sake. It appears that the seeds of a post-productivist stance were present among these stakeholders. Again, long-term commitment would be required and a strong political will to uphold support for a policy of environmental payments. The need to inform the public, bring them onside and otherwise influence public perception of the agri-environment, again using a collaborative approach, was stated.

There was a decided split in opinion as to whether current institutional structures could be maintained to deliver environmental payments programs. The current framework was thought to be too competitive by some. In any event, a major overhaul would be required. A need for consistency was again expressed and there was divided opinion on the choice of tax incentives *vs.* direct payments as the best method of redistributing public resources to farmers for environmental stewardship. There was no consensus on whether such programs should be local or provincial in scope.

The necessity of gaining and keeping the trust of farmers emerged, as well as the need for higher levels of funding. Often mentioned was the distrust of government and university academics by participants in existing programs. To judge from their experience at the time of the meeting, the administration of the Healthy Futures for Ontario Agriculture program was considered far from ideal in these respects.

During this session, there was expressed a desire for increased rigor in environmental responsibility. This included the quantification and monitoring of impacts, monitoring of results and requirements for minimum standards. Again, simplicity in procedures was considered a firm necessity.

It was thought that the timing was right for the idea of environmental payments in the province. The public was sensitized to the agri-environment following Walkerton and farmers were receptive. There remained, however, the need to identify goals, identify the benefits of environmental payment programs and generally establish baseline standards.

6.4.3 Discussion and Conclusions on Stakeholder Meeting

Since many of the participants at the stakeholder meeting were civil servants or delivery agents involved in existing programs, the barriers reported here reflect this agency perspective. Still, a wide diversity of opinion was expressed in both the general discussion and the breakout groups. Within this diversity, issues concerning individual responsibility *vs.* sustained public responsibility were prominent, as were issues surrounding relations between farmers and other stakeholders in regard to stewardship and uptake in programs. Clearly expressed was the need to engage farmers in the entire dialogue and maintain trust and good relations between them and agencies. Ominously, the fact that few farmers attended the public stakeholder meeting, despite our wide advertisement and encouragement, does not bode well for their active participation in the integrated public and political dialogue which will be necessary to launch programs containing environmental payments.

Many of the funding, design and implementation issues and/or contradictions which have emerged elsewhere in this report and in the federal review of the EFP discussed in Section 4.2 were evident throughout the stakeholder meeting. There is deeply divided opinion on regional or social targeting *vs.* universal access to programs. The participants remained divided on whether agri-environmental programs ought to be part of the regulatory regime, remain voluntary, or occupy a middle ground; used in cross-compliance, for example. More consensus surrounded the need for long-term commitment by government and clear, strategic policies for access to funding and targeting for specific areas and environmental outcomes.

To conclude from this stakeholder meeting, basic decisions must be made about priorities and orientations. These include, but are not limited to, such things as: definition and measurement of goals, access, eligibility and geographical scope of programs. As well, the multitude of existing delivery agencies may not offer the best institutional framework for delivery of programs or accountability for money spent. All stakeholders will have to work together to decide on these issues and cleave to them in order to encourage environmental stewardship through either the current incentive programs or any future environmental payment programs.