

Executive Summary

This report summarizes the results of investigations into barriers to farmers' participation in agri-environmental programs conducted for the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO). The majority of the work was carried out under a grant awarded to the CFFO by the Agricultural Adaptation Council's (AAC) Small Projects Initiative (SPI number 606). Other sections revisit the relevant work conducted by the principal investigator concerning agriculture and the environment while under contract with the CFFO from July 2001 to December 2002.

The study has been conducted largely from the perspective of farmers in Ontario, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. It has been done within a provincially regional context. Perceptions of farmers' attitudes and behaviour surrounding their participation in agri-environmental programs have been gathered from specialists in government, delivery agencies and academia, from five focus groups conducted in different parts of the province, and a multi-stakeholder meeting.

The major purpose of this work is to inform the CFFO, the AAC and other stakeholders in the agri-environment of the scope and type of the many barriers farmers experience to full participation in existing agri-environmental incentive programs. By understanding these barriers, all stakeholders will be better-equipped to dismantle them to promote a better environmental outcome in Ontario. The report may also serve as an assessment of the feasibility of a full or partial shift in program practice from cost-sharing incentive programs to programs which make direct environmental payments to farmers. Here, environmental payments would be seen to have a dual purpose: to provide an alternative form of farm support and as a means of achieving agri-environmental sustainability.

In addition to this experiential information, data from the Canadian census and information provided by program delivery agencies have been interpreted and incorporated into the study. As well, two existing CFFO surveys were revisited to reveal whether systematic regional differences in participation exist or whether there are systematic differences between those who farm as a primary occupation and those who farm as a secondary occupation.

It is hoped that this report will assist the CFFO in advancing its position on agri-environmental programming. This is to promote the establishment of programs which would make direct environmental payments to farmers for environmentally-friendly on-farm practices and activities. It is also hoped that this report will reach a wide audience among farm interests, planners and practitioners, in both private and public sectors.