



LONG-TERM THINKING FOR TODAY'S ISSUES

March 3, 2022

Hon. Lisa Thompson, MPP
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
77 Grenville St.
11th Floor
Toronto, ON
M7A 1B3
Delivered via email: minister.omafra@ontario.ca;

Re: Recommendations on Agricultural Priorities Related to Environment Goals and Sustainability

Dear Minister Thompson,

The Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO) is an Accredited Farm Organization representing the interests of over 4,000 farm families in Ontario who are called to the vocation of farming. CFFO policy promotes economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable farming, advocating that farmers receive fair return for their production and stewardship efforts.

Thank you for your invitation to the CFFO to participate in the recent agricultural roundtable on the environment and emission reduction, held preparatory to the upcoming Federal-Provincial-Territorial meeting. As a follow-up to that conversation, we would like to submit the following recommendations for your consideration.

The CFFO strongly supports the need for industry and government to collaborate in finding solutions that work for farmers and benefit the environment. To that end, the CFFO offers the following recommendations:

- Sustainability needs to focus on improving production *and* environmental benefits together, including protection of productive farmland, improved soil health, and crop rotation.
- Greater support must be offered for beneficial practices that are challenging to initiate. Cover crops are one example where professional advice and cost-share or grants will help more farmers successfully implement the practice.
- Government and industry need to work together to find viable solutions to better establish a baseline of current environmental farm practices and the benefits these practices are providing.

Existing Environmental Goals & Actions

The CFFO has made significant efforts to support farmer sustainability. Many CFFO members are actively undertaking best practices for soil health, water quality and providing other environmental goods and

services such as reduced GHG emissions and providing pollinator habitat, to name just a few. However, the CFFO does not collect organization-specific data to help measure environmental goals.

CFFO education and policy discussions often focus on topics related to best practices, including those to improve soil health and water quality.

The CFFO also supports research and tools focused on soil health and farm sustainability. In particular, CFFO recently supported a University of Guelph research project on remote sensing for soil organic matter, entitled “Assessing Soil Organic Carbon Levels.” The CFFO has also been the lead organization in support of Resilient Fields, a new sustainability tool for farmers. Resilient Fields is a free online tool to help farmers work through specific field challenges and find sustainable solutions for their farms relating to managing soils, nutrients, water and the growing season.

The CFFO is a member of the 4R Nutrient Stewardship Steering Committee, which has set goals for the number of acres it hopes to bring into the program and is keeping ongoing measurement of progress towards these goals.

Last year, CFFO joined many organizations by writing in support of Fertilizer Canada’s request for federal recognition of the 4R Nutrient Stewardship program. We believe this program is a positive, proactive approach toward promoting agricultural sustainability, and federal recognition is an important stepping stone in advancing increased adoption of 4R Nutrient Stewardship.

Potential Sector Environmental Targets

The CFFO recommends continued focus on environmental goals and targets related to soil health, water quality and wise use of resources. Progress made on these goals should be carried forward.

Sustainability needs to focus on areas that maintain or improve production *and* bring environmental benefits. These include protection of productive farmland, improved soil health, and crop rotation. At the same time, it is important that environmental goals do not compromise production or come at the cost of farmer incomes or our overall food security, in Ontario or globally.

Cover crops have consistently come up in our conversations with members as a practice that is beneficial, but it can be costly to implement and challenging to manage successfully. **Cover crops are one example of a practice that would benefit from greater support (both through professional advice and cost-share or grants) to help more farmers successfully implement this practice.**

Municipal drainage infrastructure across the province also provides benefits to farms and local communities. This is vital infrastructure that needs to be kept in good repair to ensure it is functioning properly. Support should be offered to ensure municipal drainage, both on publicly and privately owned land, is cleaned and maintained.

Working Towards Shared Environmental Targets / Outcomes

Economic outcomes are well measured and the benefits of doing so need no explanation. However, environmental practices and the benefits these bring are not as well measured. It is vital that the agriculture industry be able to measure and demonstrate environmental practices in order to highlight the improvements farmers have made in recent decades. **To reach this goal, government and industry must first work together to find viable solutions to better establish a baseline of current practices and the**

benefits these practices are providing. This is necessary to ensure we have a clear message to the public about the good work farmers are doing.

Practices that benefit soil health and water quality also bring other environmental benefits, including storing carbon and increasing overall farm resiliency. The CFFO has been active in the ongoing work to implement “Ontario’s Agricultural Soil Health and Conservation Strategy.” Healthy soil is the foundation of long-term farm success, food production, and environmental benefits. Implementation of this strategy needs to move forward.

Likewise, the CFFO has been an active participant in the Agriculture Sector Working Group relating to nutrient concerns in the Lake Erie and Lake St. Clair watersheds. This has been a successful collaboration between industry and government to better understand the concerns, measure current baselines and progress, and work towards solutions.

Wise use of resources ensures greater benefits and reduces losses to the environment. As mentioned above, the CFFO also participates in the 4R Nutrient Stewardship program in Ontario. This is an excellent example of work toward wiser use of nutrient resources on farm.

Other Sector Targets

An important economic goal for the next policy framework should include focus on inter-provincial trade to reduce barriers to trade, increase domestic markets and increase overall regional and national food security.

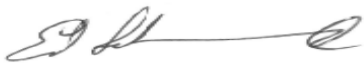
An important social goal for the next policy framework should be focus on reducing food waste throughout the supply chain from production, transport, processing, retail and consumers. Preventing and recovering this waste is another key aspect of wise use of resources across the supply chain.

Conclusion

The CFFO strongly supports farm sustainability and the benefits of collaboration between industry and government to find workable solutions. The CFFO recommends that sustainability needs to focus on improving production *and* environmental benefits together, by protecting productive farmland, improving soil health, and crop rotation. Greater support needs to be offered for beneficial practices that are challenging to initiate, such as cover crops. Government and industry need to work together to establish a baseline of current environmental farm practices and the benefits these practices are providing.

We appreciate this opportunity to provide our input. We look forward to further conversations on these important issues as negotiations for the next policy framework continue.

Sincerely,



Ed Scharringa, President
Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario