



LONG-TERM THINKING FOR TODAY'S ISSUES

October 10, 2018

Hon. Ernie Hardeman, MPP
Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
11th Floor,
77 Grenville Street
Toronto, ON
M7A 1B3

Discussed in person and delivered via email: minister.omafra@ontario.ca

Re: Soil Health

Dear Minister Hardeman,

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.

Good soil stewardship on farms is foundational to the success of farming families and the health of the agricultural sector as a whole, and it has many benefits for society at large, as well. This vital resource rewards good management and can suffer significantly from poor management practices. While farmers work to be good stewards of the soil, there are many factors that impact how agricultural soils across the province are managed.

The CFFO affirms its support for Ontario's 2018 Agricultural Soil Health and Conservation Strategy.

The Soil Strategy is based on best available science and extensive consultation, of which CFFO was a part. It offers a plan to protect our soils through practices like increased crop rotation, cover crops, and livestock grazing. Initiatives through this strategy should be aimed to consider all the benefits that can be derived from healthy soil, including the positive impact this has on food production, water quality, greenhouse gas sequestration, and biodiversity – including soil biodiversity.

The CFFO believes the province must pursue timely implementation of Ontario's Soil Strategy actions. To that end, the CFFO proposes a number of key recommendations:

- 1) Support research on and adoption of soil health Best Management Practices (BMPs).**
 - On-farm trials, proof-of-concept projects, and innovation grants should be funded in order to test and demonstrate new BMPs by farmers.
 - Knowledge transfer and translation must be enhanced, both so that farmers can be informed about recent research results and researchers can learn about on-the-ground experiences of farmers.

- Soil health BMP adoption supports should be targeted regionally and should recognize both past practices and future potential; for example, practices such as crop rotation and cover crops are currently critical to improving water quality in vulnerable watersheds.
 - Research on barriers to BMP adoption needs to consider the impact of other government policy and regulations which might hinder easy adoption.
- 2) **Update provincial soil mapping for all regions**, not only agricultural regions.
- Soil type mapping and land suitability classification systems should continue to be updated, as well as expanded to include a finer scale of detail.
 - Data should be accessible electronically for all stakeholders, including farmers, extension personnel, and policy makers.
 - Ideally, soil maps should be made fully consistent with other maps used by provincial ministries, especially maps that track land use and environmental assets.
- 3) **Support farmers in their efforts to improve soil health and reduce nutrient losses.**
- Given the range of issues and importance of impacts, targeted and transparent funding will need to be increased. Programs, such as the Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP), need to be sufficiently funded in the long term to ensure that they continue to provide effective support for farmers.
 - Past regional programs such as GLASI, the Farmland Health Checkup and the Soil Health Checkup offered valuable education, extension and funding to support farmers' efforts to improve soil health and reduce nutrient losses. The CFFO strongly supports the Soil Strategy's action to expand availability of similar programs to other farming regions of the province. We encourage the province to establish a designated timeline, such as five years, to achieve this goal.

Summary

The CFFO recognizes that good soil stewardship is foundational to human health and prosperity, as well as the health of the broader environment, including water and air. While strong government, research and extension support is important, in the end, it will be primarily farmers on the front lines, promoting soil health improvements across the province. Through their good stewardship, all of society benefits. It is, therefore, vitally important that we collaborate productively, focus on achieving better soil health, and support the contributions farmers can make through their soil stewardship efforts.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide our input and share with you our priorities.

Sincerely,



Clarence Nywening, President

Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario