



LONG-TERM THINKING FOR TODAY'S ISSUES

October 10, 2018

Hon. Ernie Hardeman, MPP  
Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs  
11<sup>th</sup> Floor,  
77 Grenville Street  
Toronto, ON  
M7A 1B3  
Discussed in person and delivered via email:  
minister.omafra@ontario.ca

Hon. Rod Phillips, MPP  
Ministry of Environment, Conservation and  
Parks  
11<sup>th</sup> Floor, Ferguson Block  
77 Wellesley St. W.  
Toronto, ON  
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Via email: minister.mecp@ontario.ca

Dear Ministers Hardeman and Phillips,

## Re: Water Stewardship for Agriculture

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.

The CFFO wants an agricultural system that encourages good stewardship of our water resources through policy, research, and on-farm innovation. As Ontario's climate becomes increasingly erratic, farmers will need to produce quality crops and livestock in extremes of flood and drought. Good soil health, irrigation, drainage, and retention systems are necessary for food production.

We are asking the Ontario government to take the following actions:

- 1) **Guarantee funding for water quality research and monitoring projects** across the province.
- 2) **Ensure incentives to address water quality and soil health**, especially in sensitive watersheds.
- 3) **Ensure Ontario's agricultural water regulatory environment allows farmers to manage water on their farms** through drainage, irrigation, and retention systems.

### 1) Funding for Water Quality Research and Monitoring

Government plays a key role in providing funding to support water quality research and monitoring across the province. Many current monitoring projects and systems are already in place, but funding must be ongoing to establish baselines and to monitor the impact of stewardship efforts.

The CFFO calls on government to ensure that those on the front lines of water quality monitoring and research, such as our universities and conservation authorities, have sufficient funding over the long term to maintain data collection and in-field research projects. These are vital supports for agriculture and for society as a whole, as we work to improve water quality for the benefit of all who live in Ontario and in our broader watersheds, now and into the future.

To that end, the CFFO also supports Ontario's collaboration on regional and international management of Great Lakes water quality.

## 2) Water Quality and Soil Health Incentive Programs

The CFFO strongly encourages government to ensure that there is incentive funding to support farmers' water and soil stewardship efforts. Currently, the Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP) includes a project category focused on Environmental Stewardship to enhance water quality and soil health. Through this and other programs, the Ontario government has an important role to play in supporting farmers' on-farm stewardship work.

There are also other actions farmers can take to improve water quality and soil health. Incentives are especially important in cases where best practices are primarily for the public good and where farmers will not be able to recover the costs to implement these practices from the market place.

## 3) Agricultural Water Regulatory Environment

It is vital that water regulation in Ontario, including "permit to take water" and wetlands policy, recognizes the unique priorities of on-farm water management practices and infrastructure.

Biological use of water depends on having the right amount of water at the right time in order for crops and livestock to thrive. Farmers must use many techniques to control an increasingly erratic supply of water, including retention/storage, drainage, and irrigation systems.

Our water regulatory system needs to better facilitate implementation and use of these types of water control infrastructure. In particular, the definition of "wetland" needs to recognize the difference between existing or restored wetlands versus agricultural drainage and retention infrastructure. Farmers must be able to manage on-farm infrastructure and access stored water intended for farming.

We encourage you to engage with other ministries that control environmental, natural resource, and municipal policies and regulations so as to breach water management silos.

## Summary

Good on-farm water stewardship promotes farm business sustainability over the long-term and respects the surrounding environment.

CFFO wants government commitment to enabling a more productive and profitable agricultural sector through water policy and ongoing funding for incentives and water quality monitoring and research. Policy needs to encourage soil health and wise use of irrigation, drainage, and retention for optimal farm water management. **Monitoring and research that leads to on-farm innovation will allow farmers to be more self-reliant in the face of floods and droughts.**

We appreciate your consideration of these issues.

Sincerely,



Clarence Nywening, President  
Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario