



2020 CFFO POLICY TOUR REPORT

FINDING THE BALANCE
FARMING, DEVELOPMENT &
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





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FINDING THE BALANCE

FARMING, DEVELOPMENT & ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

In winter 2020, the theme of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario's (CFFO) Policy Tour was Balancing Farming with Development and the Environment. Between January and March 2020, seventeen sessions with CFFO members focused on development and the environment, seeking feedback from members on three programs/policies:

- Agricultural Impact Assessments (AIAs)
- Environmental Farm Plan (EFP)
- Canadian Agri-Food Sustainability Initiative (CASI)

AGRICULTURAL IMPACT FROM DEVELOPMENT

Across Ontario, non-agricultural development pressure affects farmers differently due to regional variance of zoning regulations and proximity to cities. Agricultural Impact Assessments (AIAs) are a tool to evaluate and avoid adverse effects of this development on agriculture in areas such as the Greenbelt and the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH). The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) recently drafted guidelines to standardize these assessments.

As a provincial organization, the CFFO works to protect farmland in the interest of Ontario agriculture as a whole. While it appreciates the need for non-agricultural development, the CFFO wishes to ensure that the impacts of development on Ontario agriculture and individual farm operations are mitigated.

In general, CFFO Policy Tour participants felt AIAs were a positive tool and that the OMAFRA guidelines were comprehensive. However, there was skepticism over conflict of interest, in the case of both the developer and the municipality. This could be mitigated with increased transparency and grassroots engagement. Furthermore, CFFO members felt that AIAs should be a requirement more broadly across the province and not just in the (already regulated) areas around Toronto and the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH).

THE CFFO RECOMMENDS

THAT OMAFRA'S AIA GUIDELINES

- a. Require an AIA for non-agricultural development anywhere designated a prime agricultural area, as defined by OMAFRA or within municipal official plans.
- b. Require an AIA for any development project proposing to remove from production over 25 acres of a prime agricultural area, as defined by OMAFRA or within municipal official plans.
- c. Require that an AIA report clearly state who prepared it and who has paid for its completion .
- d. Allow agricultural stakeholders and OMAFRA the opportunity to review final AIA reports and provide recommendations to the respective review committees.

ASSESSING ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES

The Environmental Farm Plan (EFP), administered by the Ontario Soil & Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA), is a voluntary and confidential tool for farmers to self-assess their operations for environmental risks and is a requirement to access cost-share funding. The Canadian Agri-Food Sustainability Initiative (CASI), now spearheaded by the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA), has funding to roll out a verification program across the country that will streamline existing sustainability programs, getting farmers access to more markets while reducing their paperwork.

While the EFP and CASI are two distinct programs, they both rely on farmer buy-in. Throughout the CFFO Policy Tour, we heard that farmers care deeply about environmental sustainability but wonder who is defining the word “sustainable” and whether consumers are ready (or able) to pay more for it. They are concerned that national prescriptions and programs will not appreciate the complexity of Ontario agriculture, by region or by commodity.

Despite the grassroots origins of the EFP, Policy Tour participants seemed skeptical of it, seeing it as a government program because it has become synonymous with provincial cost-share funding. While they value the EFP as an educational tool, they do not feel it is necessary to redo the workshop and workbook every five years.

As for CASI, the CFFO is in strong support and considers it the EFP for our times. Farmers are in favour of having their stewardship practices measured and demonstrated, so long as the paperwork is not too onerous. At the same time, however, they realize that no amount of paperwork can build trust or replace good stewardship. While farmers understand the complexity of global trade, they also strongly believe that all food imports to Canada should be required to meet the same standards of sustainability and safety as Canadian products.

THE CFFO RECOMMENDS

- e. That the EFP program be revamped to decrease paperwork while increasing the environmental accountability of both farmers and landlords, and that the following suggestions be considered:
 - That the EFP be made a distinct program. While an EFP should still be required for cost-share funding through OSCIA, high-risk scores should not be required to be eligible.
 - That the renewal of an EFP workshop/workbook every five years be replaced by a review of the Action Plan and completion of any new EFP categories and questions.
 - That the EFP be maintained through continuing education credits (CEUs) from approved stewardship-related events delivered through farm & commodity organizations.
- f. That OMAFRA investigate pay-for-performance and/or outcome-based funding models, developing remote-sensing technology for verification.
- g. That the federal government ensure food imports to Canada adhere to the same sustainability standards as those of Canadian farmers.

The full report details a wide range of farmer feedback from CFFO's 2020 Policy Tour in hopes of creating a more nuanced understanding of agricultural challenges and opportunities so farmers and policy makers can forge a sustainable path forward, together.



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