

# Federal funding to help farmers lower emissions and improve farm climate change resilience

by Lori Thompson, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter  
OTTAWA—Crop and livestock production is responsible for 10 percent of Canada's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This doesn't include emissions from the use of fossil fuels or from fertilizer production. The federal government has announced \$182.7 million as part of its Agricultural Climate Solutions program to help farmers lower their emissions and improve resiliency to climate change.

The Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA) will receive up to \$25 million to deliver the On-Farm Climate

crops are plants, like clover and alfalfa, that are planted to cover the soil rather than for the purpose of being harvested. Funding could include payment-per-acre to cover adoption of cover cropping, for example, or related costs such as seeds and equipment.

Rotational grazing is the practice of containing and moving livestock through pasture to allow forage plants to recover, deepen their root systems and improve soil health. Funded projects in this target area could include agronomic services to develop grazing management plans, interior cross fencing or water system infrastruc-



Federal funding through the On-Farm Climate Action Fund may soon find its way to Manitoulin Island. The funding is aimed at supporting farmers to reduce greenhouse gases.

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Action Fund (OFCAF) in Ontario, some of which may find its way to Manitoulin Island. "The funding is meant to support farmers in managing what we call best management practices to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases and enhance the storage of soil carbon," said Angela Straathof, programs director with OSCIA.

"It's less about climate change resiliency or adaptation and more about modifying practices to reduce the likelihood that agriculture will contribute to climate change," she explained. The program looks to practices that farmers can change in order to reduce nitrous oxide emissions, methane emissions and carbon dioxide emissions from their fields.

The three target areas supported by the funding include cover cropping, nitrogen management and rotational grazing. Cover

ture.

Nitrogen management could include funding for agronomic services to develop farm-specific nutrient management plans or equipment modification for fertilizer application in fields.

"Soil is the largest source of terrestrial carbon on the planet," Ms. Straathof said. "In Ontario, a good deal of land cover is devoted to agricultural practices. Just by nature of the number of hectares that the industry manages, there's a lot of room to store carbon in that soil that they're using for agricultural production."

Typically this is done by increasing soil or organic matter content, thus storing more carbon in the soil and releasing less carbon dioxide from the soil into the atmosphere. "That can be done through the

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## Ontario investing in the future of agricultural and horticultural societies

ONTARIO—The Ontario government is providing \$1 million to support the province's agricultural and horticultural societies who continue to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This will help them continue to operate and support their important efforts to educate people about the value and significance of agriculture in the province.

"Ontario's agricultural and horticultural societies have long enriched communities throughout the province, and we look forward to them continuing to make significant contributions from main street beautification projects to hosting the long-standing tradition of agricultural fairs throughout the province in 2022," said Lisa Thompson, minister of agriculture, food and rural affairs (OMAFRA). "These investments reflect the value of the societies contributions and our government's recognition of the pandemic-caused pressures these organizations have been weathering."

The funding will flow through the agricultural and horticultural support and recovery funding initiative and builds on previous investments of more than \$7 million to assist these organizations during the pandemic.

This initiative features two funding streams: base support funding will be issued to all eligible agricultural and horticultural societies through funding payments of \$1,000 as a means of supporting

their continued incorporation and activities.

Hardship funding for eligible agricultural societies will provide additional support which will be based on reported gate revenues for 2019. This will help offset operating losses, liabilities, and fixed overhead costs related to land and buildings.

Eligible agricultural and horticultural societies can expect to receive funding before March 31, 2022.

"The Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies (OAAS) appreciates OMAFRA's continued financial support for our over 200 agricultural societies. This new funding shows Minister Thompson's and OMAFRA's confidence in our agricultural societies and the impact the societies and their members have on their local communities. During the pandemic, our agricultural societies have continued to creatively promote agriculture and food awareness and engage their communities through in-person and virtual fairs, events, and activities," said Vince Brennan, OAAS manager.

Charles Freeman, president of the Ontario Horticultural Association (OHA) said members, "express their gratitude to

Minister Thompson and the Ontario government for their continued support during these challenging times. This funding will assist the societies and clubs in their ongoing endeavours to serve and beautify their communities."

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# Ontario farmers group discuss farmland protection and housing concerns

by Tom Sasvari  
NORTHEASTERN

ONTARIO—Farmland protection and housing are being affected throughout Ontario, including on Manitoulin Island, by burgeoning prices for all properties, land development for business rather than farming, and fewer people taking up farming as a profession.

“I know of three farm properties that were sold on Manitoulin Island over the past two years for over \$1 million each,” Bonita Mercer told members of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO) at their annual Northeastern Ontario District meeting last week. “It’s definitely changing the tax base and some can’t afford their own home.” Ms. Mercer is a Monetville farmer who also owns a farm and property on Manitoulin Island.

All issues discussed during the meeting, including the issue of farmland protection and housing, will be raised by CFFO with candidates of all three parties in the upcoming provincial elections.

Five main topics were on the agenda for policy making, including carbon pricing and trading; farmland protection and housing; farm labour; environmental stewardship; and food security.

Using a series of graphs, meeting moderator Suzanne Armstrong of CFFO illustrated a key fact: over the last 35 years, an estimated 2.8 million acres of agricultural land (18 percent) has been lost to non-agricultural uses. During the period from 1996 to 2016, an estimated 175 acres was lost every day to urban development.

“As the figures show, farmland loss is significant in each region in Ontario,” Ms. Armstrong said. “But what will people eat if there is no land to produce food on?”

West Nipissing has lost a lot of farmland to development, Ms. Mercer said. Other than her farm, there is only one other small cow-calf farm operation in the area. “There is lots of development allowed for subdivisions. We are seeing more farmers selling lots and people coming up from southern Ontario to live.”

Land and homes on Manitoulin have also been selling fast over the past two years, she added. “You better not sell your property unless you already have another place.”

Ontario’s population grew by 950,000 over the last five years and builders couldn’t keep up, said Ms. Armstrong. One million homes will be needed in the next 10 years to meet that need, but 83 percent of buyers can’t afford an average resale home. Resale home prices have risen eight to nine percent while incomes have only increased two percent per year.

The Kingston area is being impacted by people moving up from Toronto, said Vic Schamehorn. The price of property and housing there has gone up about 40 percent in the last year, he said. “And in Prince Edward County,



As prices for land escalate under pressure from urban housing and business needs, concerns among farmers are growing that young farmers are being priced out of the market.

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the well-to-dos are coming in and buying up all the property, including farming property. It used to be a farming area but now it is more of a holiday area.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has also led to more people in central Ontario and southwestern Ontario working online, making it easier for urbanites to transition to rural living.

“Property is being broken up into lots with land severances,” said Ray Ford. “People in southern Ontario are cashing out their farms and coming to the North where they’re buying farm properties for recreational use. It is an issue. If you’re in the cow-calf business and looking for land, it is getting a lot more difficult in the North.”

“Farmers who are retiring or getting out of the business are selling their properties and new housing is being put up,” added Brenda Schamehorn. “Lands that in the past had been farmed are no longer being farmed, and the significant increase in property values is affecting us.”

Alex Oosterhof said this is not a real concern in his area near Brockville and pointed out that in southern Ontario, new vineyards are being developed all the time. He did agree that housing is a problem on everyone’s agenda.

There are positive aspects to this rural migration, as Mr. Oosteroff pointed out. Not many years ago,

the local high school in the Elgin-Hastings-Northwood area faced closure because of decreasing population, but that changed as more people moved into the area. The land there was too hard to farm, he said. “It was very marginal land” for agriculture.

“Most municipal politicians do not have a farm background and don’t see the value of maintaining farmland,” Mr. Ford said. “This is a long-time concern of farmers in Parry Sound or Grey County, that farmland is being purchased for recreational use.”

“Our municipalities need money for infrastructure, to cover their costs,” said Mr. Schamehorn.

How to engage development where it is good and discourage development where it shouldn’t is an important consideration. “All of this affects farming,” said Ms. Armstrong. “Farmland is not making towns much (in terms of) money from taxes, but if you put 100 homes in an area, municipalities benefit from that.”

She wondered if more restrictions on land severances would help. “In Peterborough they have green belts. Is zoning a tool that can be used to prevent farm properties from being lost?” she asked.

“Rural zoning is not doing much to protect farmland,” Mr. Ford said. “We should be thinking about writing letters on

behalf of our districts to try to make them understand the importance of maintaining farmland.”

Mr. Oosteroff wondered if it would be helpful if there should be a percentage of farmland versus people. “If we have a population of 100,000 people, we need so many acres of productive farmland,” he suggested. “They don’t have a percentage being left for food production. Ontario is producing food for Ontario and the world. That’s why it’s so important to protect it.”

“What is the solution?”

CFFO President Ed Scharringa asked. “We all know values are going up. Is there anything we can do?”

“Maybe we need to do more advocating on behalf of our members and find more ways to transition the farm,” Mr. Scharringa suggested.

Passing on skill sets from generation to generation is another challenge, and with rising land and housing costs, it’s not economically viable for young people to begin farming.

“If farmers don’t have

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Best wishes for the season ahead during Farm Safety Week.

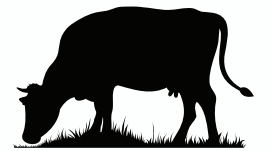
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# ...Ontario farmers group discuss farmland protection and housing concerns

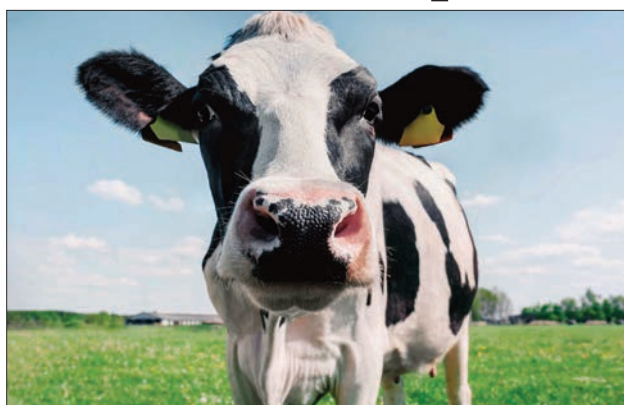
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land to work and produce food on, and young people are not learning the skills of farming, it is unsustainable," said Mr. Schamehorn. "I don't have anybody behind me getting started and we're losing the ability to farm, the generations who built and settled the land.

One suggestion was creating opportunities for people who want to grow food on their land through some sort of government grant program.

Food consumers make up 98 percent of the population, pointed out Paul

Bootsma, CFFO field services manager. "More and more people don't understand farming and food production as fields are turned over to housing. As long as there's food in grocery stores, our customers won't be concerned with food security. Agriculture needs to connect with our consumers. They see 200 acres in a field but don't connect this to food production. If a young couple is going past, they need to know they are eating products from that field. Consumers need to know where their food is coming from."

One member pointed out that there is a lot of



Consumers need to know where their food is coming from.

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prepackaged food on store shelves. He didn't see food security as a problem but

rather affordability, as packaged food is more affordable.

"Maybe we need to get back to the basics," Mr. Schamehorn said. "Family units have changed. They're no long well-suited to show the next generation how to properly prepare food."

Labour relations, regulations and transportation were also seen as concerns. One member works summers at a local abattoir processing chickens. He thinks there aren't as many small abattoirs around as there should be, largely due to "heavy regulations and labour." It would be good, he said, if government lifted some of those regulations. "They discourage a

lot of small butchers."

CFFO has been advocating for reduced red tape and regulations for small abattoirs, Ms. Armstrong said.

"We've called on the minister and they're well aware," said Mr. Scharinga. "Lots of times, Minister Lisa Thompson has promised it will be done. Enough talk, let's see some action."

"This has been a terrific conversation," Mr. Bootsma concluded. "It will all be put together as we go through all the districts and we will have a toolkit prepared to present to candidates in the provincial election, once the election is called."

# ...Federal funding to help farmers

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crops that are grown," she noted. "They are taking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and through their roots, they're releasing carbon into the soil. When those crops are harvested and stop growing, anything that remains on the surface of the soil also breaks down into soil organic carbon as well. Any opportunity the farmer has to minimize disturbance of the soil and maximize the amount of carbon going in is considered a good climate practice."

OSCIA is targeting late spring or early summer to open an intake, where farmers can describe a proposal of the project they want to implement. Based on the funding allocated to the three different management practices, the farmer may have a successful application or they may have to apply at a future opportunity. The initial intake will support projects for the current growing season but there will be another opportunity for farmers to apply for additional funding in 2023. The funding ends in 2024.

"Farmers can apply to enhance their nitrogen management in fields or adopt

cover cropping or implement rotational grazing practices if they have livestock," Ms. Straathof said. "Depending on one of those three practice types that they're going to be applying for, we assess the proposal that they submit to us on its eligibility based on the parameters given to us by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada."

"We're trying to maximize the number of hectares across the province that these practices are being implemented on and we're trying to encourage wider spread adoption by farmers who may not have tried these practices before," she said.

These practices are scientifically supported but may be new practices to some farmers. The funding is an incentive for them to minimize the financial risk they would otherwise assume in changing their practices.

"The fight against climate change is not only about reducing Canada's greenhouse gas emissions, but also helping farmers to innovate and adopt more sustainable farming practices," said Marie-Claude Bibeau, minister of agriculture and agri-food.

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