



July 7, 2017

Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs,
1 Stone Road West,
Guelph, Ontario, N1G 4Y2

Attention: Scott Duff and Karla Uliana

RE: Farms Forever Consultation

On behalf of the undersigned members of Sustain Ontario's **New Farmers' Working Group**, we would like to thank you for this opportunity to share our recommendations as part of the Farms Forever Consultation Process.

Our input has been consolidated from six key organizations that are currently working to support new farmers across the province.

We are pleased to see that the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs has recognized not only the need for new entrants, but also has identified that "people with farming experience from outside of Canada, young people with an interest in farming but who have no experience, and individuals seeking a mid-life or later career change see agriculture as an opportunity" (p.25 Farms Forever Discussion Paper, 2017).

Over the past 10-15 years there have been a range of initiatives and models across Ontario that have begun to address the need for new entrants, and provide support to those wanting to launch farm businesses. At the same time, the Ministry reorganized its resources to eliminate services to individual farmers except through their 1-800 information line. Young farmers born into farm families are well served by access to Growing Your Farm Profits programming and Succession Planning programs and funding. They are typically connected to learning opportunities through farm suppliers and community connections. Farming is a complex industry and the needs of those entering agriculture are complex as well. New farmers who are trying to enter in non-traditional

ways are not well supported. We believe a huge gap currently exists for many new farmers in the Province of Ontario.

The models that have existed within non-profit organizations have been supported by a variety of charitable and other grant funders, but perhaps most notably by the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF). The Foundation has recognized the significance of growing new agricultural entrepreneurs as having a positive economic impact on the province. It is time for OMAFRA to recognize that formal post-secondary programs are not a complete solution to new farmer training or support and that more land based training, mentorship and work programs are also key parts of the solution.

The FarmON Alliance, a three-year initiative in the province funded by OTF, was a project undertaken by a group of five organizations – Just Food, Farms at Work, Everdale, FarmStart and Eat Local Sudbury. A great deal of baseline research and analysis was completed by the group, and three of the organizations (signatories to this submission) continue to develop and offer practical training for new entrants as well as ongoing support.

Experience elsewhere in Canada and in the United States has shown the importance of community-based, regionally appropriate hands-on training and support for new farmers. However, unlike Ontario, in the U.S. the Farm Bill and the land-grant colleges provide capacity for this kind of work that is not available to organizations in Ontario.

There is a desperate need for sustained core funding for organizations that do not have the benefit of membership fees or check-offs because of the nature of the agricultural community they support. New entrants are an ever-changing group who go on to pay Farm Business Registration fees and check-offs to commodity organizations once they are launched. But during their pre-launch phase of learning and building their business plans, they are not “members” of anything. If new farmers form an important part of the future of farming, then it is necessary for the public to support new farmers through this phase of exploration and development.

New farmers are supported through regional service provision

In the Ontario experience to date, we have found that concentrated investment in supporting one centralized organization to deliver services to new farmers across the province has not worked. The province could more effectively support new farmers by investing at the regional level, with both defined deliverables for cross-provincial collaboration, matched with flexibility for each region to meet diverse and specific needs within its boundaries. Building upon the Starting a Farm - Business Information Bundle for New Farmers, OMAFRA could help direct a new farmer to the appropriate agency, services and programs in regions across Ontario for the help that they require.

The following recommendations build on ideas first laid out in a 2015 submission to OMAFRA on Farms Forever following the receipt of Premier Wynne's mandate letter to Minister Leal.

Farms Forever Proposal:

1. Creation of a broad New Farmer Advisory Committee. This Committee would include, for example, farm organizations and commodity groups, AMI, post-secondary institutions and NGOs involved in training and/or recruiting new entrants. The group would identify regional service delivery organizations and meet annually, with follow-up electronically, to review research, discuss high level needs and ensure that there is clarity of mandate, avoiding duplication.
2. Funding over 5 years to regional organizations across the province, who have new farmer training as a core mandate, demonstrated commitment, and are collaborative, recognized entities with community economic development experience and broad-based agricultural connections. Please see below for example of roles and funding breakdown based on experience to date.
3. Creation of a "New Farmer Brand" with website and social media presence to help direct new entrants to resources and assistance in their area, linked also to OMAFRA and all members of the broader advisory and supportive organizations.
4. Specific provision for access to organizational funding for training activities through the agricultural policy framework, 2018 -2023, as part of the competitive process. New farmers would be better served if the requirement for matching funding were waived for projects led by NGOs focused on providing new farmer supports, and the OMAFRA requirement that human resource funding be directed only to new hires was also waived. A job maintained in a small organization is more important than a job created, as staff is invariably let go to make way for new hires. Maintaining jobs is also a much more efficient use of funds, as it avoids the need for constant re-training and allows for career development.
5. New farmers do not always have dollars or time to participate in training programs. Ideas for realistic and practical access for new farmers to funding to help defray training costs are required.

A Transfer Payment Agreement between the Ministry and the regional groups would form a solid partnership that would move the New Farmer initiative forward.

Example of Budget

...that would make a lasting difference for New Farmers in Ontario:

\$500,000/year over 5 years - to support establishment of a new generation of farmers across commodities and production practices, enabling long-term, targeted economic development across Ontario. This money would be used to fund regional organizations, fund new farmer training and materials, collaborate across the province, develop web and social media presence and evaluate program results.

Including:

\$350,000 - to fund regional organizations for primarily human resources to carry out both collaborative province-wide roles, and provide dependable core support for regional work

\$52,500 - to fund 15% administration/overhead costs for these regional organizations

\$97,500 - to invest in collaborative web and social media development, communications and recruitment materials, translation, and development of evaluated, proven training material for province-wide use that is decided upon at advisory level. Includes expenses for facilitation and annual provincial meeting of Advisory Committee.

Example of Role of Regional Organizations

...based on what has been identified by new farmers, and supported to various levels in regions to date within project funding:

- Recruit potential new farmers and support initial exploration
- Provide appropriate regional training and mentoring programs
- Provide business planning support
- Facilitate partnerships and information-sharing across the region (and collaboratively across province) to coordinate service to new farmers
- Connect new farmers with available financing options
- Promote/host OMAFRA/AMI/Farmers Markets' Ontario or other programming that is supportive of farms at start-up phase
- Maintain database of regional contacts for farmers including inputs, marketing channels, etc.
- Maintain database of available farmland and farmers looking to buy or lease land, and support established and new farmers with long-term lease development
- Implement joint surveys across Ontario for new farmer issues
- Feed into local food/farm conferences - partnering with OMAFRA and other organizations to ensure that conferences include training/issues relevant for new farmers

This proposal is truly modest, yet provides a winning solution to coordinate and enhance required service to the full range of new farmers who want to get established in every region of Ontario.

The undersigned thank you for the opportunity to outline what we feel would be a very strong approach to supporting New Farmers in Ontario for the next 5 years. We would be pleased to be part of the leadership team that would turn these ideas into action, and ask that we be kept updated on the progress of the Farms Forever file.

Sincerely, the Undersigned members of the **New Farmers Working Group:**

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Sustain Ontario is a province-wide, cross-sectoral alliance of members that work together to promote healthy food and farming. Our mission is to provide coordinated support for productive, equitable and sustainable food and farming systems that support the health and wellbeing of all people in Ontario, through collaborative action. This review process submission is a result of a member-led network on **New Farmers** and does not necessarily represent the views of all Sustain Ontario members.