

February 9, 2023

The Honourable Lisa Thompson
Minister of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs
11th Floor, 77 Grenville St.
Toronto, ON
M5S 1B3
Sent via email to: minister.omafra@ontario.ca

Dear Minister Thompson,

RE: Recognizing the Historical Provision of Environmental Goods and Services by Ontario Farmers

Ontario farmers have been leaders in adopting Beneficial Management Practices (BMPs) such as no-till, strip-till, buffer strips, and grassed waterways that provide Ecological Goods and Services (EG&S) to the public such as clean air, clean water, and healthy soils. The success of the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) and the popularity of various environmental programming through the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA) shows our farmers take stewardship seriously and understand their responsibility to take care of agricultural lands.

As part of the new Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (SCAP) federal, provincial, and territorial Ministers agreed to a \$250 million cost-shared Resilient Agricultural Landscape Program (RALP) to support EG&S provided by the Canadian agriculture sector. Our farmers are grateful for the cost-shared funding support from provincial and federal governments to implement BMPs; however, cost-share programs from government meant to incentivise the further adoption of BMPs often only apply to a practice that has not been previously implemented by farmers on the land included in their funding application. The result is that early adopters of BMPs are effectively excluded from support and their efforts to improve environmental performance go unrecognized. Furthermore, this funding criteria fails to recognize that BMP implementation may take several years of trial and error before long-term adoption can occur.

We have heard the growing dissatisfaction from our farmers who feel they are being excluded from previous and current cost-share programming because of their earlier stewardship activities. In November of 2022, farmer delegates to the OFA Annual General Meeting approved a resolution calling on government to ensure farmers who have adopted a beneficial management practice prior to the RALP implementation date are eligible for financial support.

OFA agrees with our members that RALP presents an excellent opportunity to design a program that recognizes and builds upon the good work and environmental stewardship that has already been accomplished by early adopters of BMPs. Many of the environmental benefits that government and society desire emerge as co-benefits of BMPs implementation, and those co-benefits can be further enhanced by designing RALP to recognize and incentivize further action by those who have already successfully incorporated BMPs into their farming practices. We request that the final program design for RALP include options to recognize the stewardship

activities of all farmers in Ontario and provide equitable access to cost-shared funding regardless of when those activities began.

One option to recognize early adopters may be to apply a tiered approach to the RALP design with entry-level programming for first-time applications, and higher-level programming for those that have already implements BMPs and are now seeking funding support to further build upon and enhance environmental co-benefits. Higher-level programming may also include added data requirements to BMP implementation, for example measurement, collection and reporting of various BMP data, or participating in Agrisuite Greenhouse Gas Calculator and reporting progress. There are certainly other options that would serve to recognize the actions of early adopters of BMPs that could be incorporated into RALP program design.

OFA shares the same goals as RALP to ensure that farmers and farming in Ontario remains profitable and sustainable. We look forward to continuing to work with our colleagues at OMAFRA to create an EG&S program that works for all farmers.

Sincerely,



Peggy Brekveld
President

cc: OFA Board of Directors