

OFA – Policy Advisory Council (PAC) Orientation Meeting

January 12, 2022

Virtual via Zoom

Welcome

Peggy Brekveld, President welcomed everyone to the meeting. She thanked the 2021 PAC Steering Committee for their time and efforts over the past year.

Peggy introduced the four new Directors who started their terms after the November AGM: Vanessa Renaud, Ethan Wallace, Paul Maurice and Sara Wood.

OFA Update

Peggy Brekveld provided a few quick updates.

AGM Resolutions

AGM resolutions were reviewed by the Board in December and action plans have been determined.

Farmer Wellness Program

OFA is excited to announce the launch of the farmer wellness program. A telehealth line to provide mental wellness support to all Ontario farmers and farm families is now live.

Accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, in English and French, farmers can call 1-866-267-6255 to speak to a counsellor. Developed and launched by the Canadian Mental Health Association – Ontario Division in partnership with the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, this service is provided by LifeWorks.

Peggy thanked the counties and OFA staff that were involved to see this program come to fruition.

Home Grown

Peggy announced that the OFA Home Grown petition hit a milestone of surpassing 20,000 signatures supporting the protection and preservation of farmland and domestic food production. A milestone that she has been told is a rare accomplishment. The conversation has continued at all levels of government.

Provincial Election

OFA is preparing for the June provincial election by reviewing party platforms and preparing to engage with candidates. Information will be shared with counties when it is available.

Deadstock

Peggy stated that OFA is active on the deadstock file and the conversation continues to make access easier for farmers.

Diversity and Inclusion Training

The OFA directors and staff along with Grain Farmers of Ontario will take part in diversity and Inclusion training later this month.

Introduction to OFA Policy Process

Jason Bent, Director of Policy Research

Jason explained that OFA policy positions are developed with OFA Member input and approved by the OFA Board of Directors. PAC councilors provide a valuable connection to both Local Federations and OFA Commodity Members.

Jason introduced his team and the specific policy areas each are responsible for. He explained that the Farm Policy Research Group contributes towards the organization's development, awareness and advocacy of sound OFA policy positions by providing background analysis on policy matters affecting Ontario agriculture, as well as providing individual OFA Members with hands-on assistance and/or advocacy in the resolution of farm-related issues.

Jason explained that his team monitors listings of government consultations and OFA will provide written submissions to approximately sixty government listings per year. A summary is sent to PAC members a couple times per month.

Jason concluded that the PAC provide a valuable connection in the policy process. Important avenue for OFA to hear from the membership by having the PAC bring forward input from local areas. Also, important is the input from PAC through surveys that are sent throughout the year.

See attached PPT for more detailed information.

The Impact of PAC

Ben Lefort, Senior Farm Policy Analyst

Ben Lefort highlighted the PAC input on NPF discussions from the August 2021 meeting.

Ben explained that resulting PAC discussion and recommendations were discussed by the board and will ultimately help inform OFAs advocacy around the NPF

- Gave staff a clearer sense of the issues and holes within the current framework. What works, what doesn't and what needs to change

- A letter was sent to OMAFRA highlighting the issues and changes that were discussed at the PAC meeting
- PAC comments resulted in specific program recommendations. For example, asking OMAFRA to explore how BRM programs could better serve diversified farm operations.

See attached PPT for more detailed information.

Policy Advisory Council Handbook Review

Janine Lunn, OFA Capacity Development Coordinator

Janine Lunn reviewed PAC duties, emphasizing that part of the work is to monitor industry developments and identify emerging issues in the local areas that may affect the rest of the province. Also, that the role is a two-way communication to and from the local federation.

Janine explained that PAC are a valued link to individual members, OFA staff, commodities, and the local federation to the provincial voice. PAC contribute by:

- Opportunities to provide input on new or revised policy to OFA board
- May be asked to provide feedback as a campaign or advocacy project progresses
- May be asked to reach out to grassroots members and local Boards for direction

Janine reviewed the general PAC meeting schedule and expense policy announcing that the next PAC meeting is scheduled virtually on March 8, 2022.

How to write a resolution was reviewed and a reminder to the group that resolutions can be sent to the Board at anytime throughout the year.

See attached PPT for more detailed information.

Breakout Room Discussions

Janine Lunn listed topics that the OFA PAC reviewed in 2021 including natural heritage, soil strategies and the Canadian Ag Policy Framework.

Attendees were divided into eight breakout rooms to brainstorm potential PAC topics for 2022.

Attendees were asked to consider the following items when choosing potential topics:

1. *What are we asking the Board to consider about this topic? A new policy? A change to existing policy?*
2. *What would the ideal solution look like for the Ontario farm businesses*

Asparagus Group

- Improved policies for farm worker housing

- Continued work on processing/abattoir shortfall and lack of labour issue
- Vet coverage & emergency animal care when Mennonites move north and use Veterinarians in the south
- Veterinarian shortage, can Vet techs fill in?
- Crop wildlife damage – still lots of damage in the East & North (Sandhill Cranes)
- Understanding Farm Employee rules – the dos and don'ts
- Attracting new employees and skilled labour
- Land Use policy – gravel pits and hard-edge municipal boundaries

Broccoli Group

- Help with municipal component review process
- Rural internet infrastructure
- Better educated local municipality in the North
- How to become better social media spokesperson for agriculture
- Land use – keeping land as agriculture not easily zoned for other uses.
- Misinformation about farming/farmers, influence of activists
- Outline successes and failures of what has been done – farmland preservation, rural internet
- Farmland preservation
- Land use – urban growth areas expanding without justification
- Greenbelt – agricultural use or green use?
- Competing uses for farmland
- Inviting planners /civil engineers for new road designs for less land use when built

Cabbage Group

- Government incentives for fuel cars, free electric charging stations
- Create solutions for urban sprawl in Ontario
- Large price increases due to Covid and supply chain issues – any OFA thoughts?
- Environment – how to encourage late adopters to adopt best management practices
- Social media person at OFA for county federations to have access to. Missed opportunities
- Wild pigs
- Soil health
- Deadstock removal
- PAC functionality
- How to encourage farmers to consider mental wellness help?
- More active on climate change
- Environment policy – carbon sequestration, credits, future restrictions
- Attendance at local board meetings – how to increase?

Parsnip Group

- Environment policy – fostering innovation around climate change
- High input costs
- Fractional ownership options for young farmers who can't afford full ownership
- Economic incentives to reduce resiliency in the name of efficiency

- Highway maintenance
- Trans Canada highway maintenance, driver training needed in Northern Ontario
- Issue – wildly held view that only one political party has farmers interests
- Non farmers buying prime agricultural land as an investment

Carrot Group

- Emission reductions impacts on farm, how do we remain knowledgeable and on on the front edge
- Insurance coverage – what is really in our policies. OFA create a guide of questions to ask when obtaining and renewing policies
- Show quantity values for processes
- Options for predation control
- Decline in emergency hours at hospitals – could be the start of a bigger problem in health care
- Work with government on noxious weed control mechanisms
- Future insurability of Farms businesses with extreme weather events – will obtaining property insurance become more of an issue?
- Natural heritage – incentives to retire farmland into forested areas – federal funds (York as an example)

Squash Group

- Land use planning – 5 year plans are being reviewed great opportunity
- Upcoming provincial election and OFA position on key talking points (all candidate meetings)
- Conservation authorities – barriers to ag – do CA's go too far?
- Covid related price gouging and supply issues (fertilizer)
- Provincial/municipal budget cut impacts – drainage issues who is responsible, where is the follow up?
- BRM – commodity outreach for position. Potential for change with unified voice.

Radish Group

- Farm waste -we pay 16 cents/litre but nowhere to take it
- Farm safety improvements – LFA asking if and CAP funding etc. will be available for safety improvements to farms
- Carbon Tax/Trade – exemptions, decreasing trade barriers and increase competitiveness
- BRM – improvements to reflect level playing fields with other countries and government seems to advocate to use for Agstability but not a helpful program
- Farmland preservation – decreasing farmland due to rural severances.
- Make a policy to take to government so farmland will not go to housing
- Focus on domestic processing

Rutabaga Group

- Issues with MZO's – Home Grown take things farther, should there be a position on MZO's in areas where there are official plans and details on their use

- Rules for equipment on roadways – engage discussions on equipment size, limits for operating on roadways, decide if we take charge of the narrative or wait until something catastrophic happens
- Better understanding of Conservation Authority and the Act– how to interact as a farmer, roles and responsibilities
- Member engagement - what are counties doing, lessons learned, how to connect virtually
- MTO presentations on agriculture regulations – good topic to engage all members

The PAC steering committee will review the above input and suggest 2022 meeting topics to the Board.

PAC Steering Committee Elections

Peggy explained that the PAC Steering Committee was originally established as a three-member committee. However, in 2021 a motion passed to allow for a four-member committee.

Self-nominations have been submitted for this year, and all four steering committee members elected in 2021 would like to remain on the committee.

Motion: *Nap/Fentie “THAT all four self-nominated individuals be acclaimed to the PAC steering committee for 2022”.*

Carried

Acclaimed PAC Steering Committee members for 2022 are:

1. Julie Danen
2. Darcy Fuller
3. John Gillespie
4. Patrick Verkley

Peggy introduced the two Directors that will also sit on the committee, Sara Wood and Vanessa Renaud.

PAC Review Process

Peggy reminded the group that the Board has committed to a review of PAC in 2022. Peggy explained that the process will be a three-pronged approach to establish PAC members thoughts on what is and is not working, like and dislikes.

1. PAC to complete an electronic survey
2. A scan of how similar organizations across the county do policy development
3. Virtual meetings

The findings will be compiled in a report with recommendations brought back for PAC to review.

Adjournment