

PAC Meeting - Table Discussion Question Summary

Breakout Session #1

Attendees were divided into seven breakout rooms and asked to consider the following questions:

1. How would you define Sustainable Agriculture?

- Profitability is an important factor – to be sustainable for the long run. Able to make a living.
- Can mean it survives with a subsidy – but we know agriculture is actually 'super-sustainable' because we are increasing in quantity and quality of our products. Even though costs go up we find ways to survive, expand and thrive.
- Often is used as a buzz word – political word that gets thrown around and it sounds good to the general public, but we aren't sure what different audiences mean when they say it
- Are there 3 tiers to it – lots of pressures out there. Economic, farm preservation, soil preservation factors that should be part of the picture. If we don't have all three (ie. Healthy land and available land – are required for the farm to thrive!)
- Many operators are adding organic matter and making improvements to their soil.
- Includes the bottom line of the economy, environment and social aspects- cannot just focus on the environment, but the viability of the farm as a whole.
- Very complex to describe- lots of oversimplification- cycles that have evolved, not always looking at the whole picture.
- Many connections are not explained
- People and organizations choose the pieces of the pie that they want to talk about- not looking at it as a whole function- different parts of the pie mean different things to each person
- What does the definition comprise of? Worldwide we need to define what weight each component should carry, and how do they relate to each other.
- Confused by "sustainable" because this topic is more broad- Big word as it encompasses the future of agriculture.
- Use the European system to address some of the systems in Canada- as they have done the hard work.
- We have always been sustainable and always will be. This is all baloney. We are sustainable.
- Sustainable means farming needs to sustain itself.
- Every individual operation must be handled differently to sustain itself. To be sustainable, is it economics or environmental? To us, it is more economics, if a farm is not economically sustainable (profitable), nothing else can happen or matters.
- Most of the table wanted to throw the entire sustainable word out, and feels that a better word be 'balanced' or 'profitable'.
- Has to be economically viable
- Provide for the needs of today and the future – long term viability – next generation
- Provide for unforeseen circumstances

- Best way to manage all resources (financial, HR, etc)
- Sustainability is different for rural vs urban.
- All commodity and industry partners working together as strong and united voice. We have come a far way but not far enough.
- Balanced (inputs = outputs) and viable
- People, planet, profit – farming is a business and farmers have to make money, but they also take care of their land; if farming is not an attractive industry (time off, mental health, etc.), no one will be farming for generations to come.
- Economic
- Long term plan to support livelihood
- Taking care of the land and doing what a farmer is supposed to do
- Best management practices, succession planning, etc. to allow what we do to continue beyond the next generation
- Can't agree on best management practices (every province has a different version)
- Ontario's achilles heel is diversity (how to account for the variety of commodities grown)
- Best management practices on each farm/for each sector
- Every place is different, who is willing to provide data
- Farming is a business, has to be a sustainable business, with a business plan that is attractive to the next generation (can't farm green if you are farming in the red)
- People, planet, profit: if you aren't making money, don't have time off, no mental health, etc., no one will be sustainable in the future, need to be there for generations to come.
- Knowing when to slow down, avoid burnout, etc. (more stress than before, everyone is bigger, planning not just for yourself but for those around you)
- The definition of sustainably agriculture is different if you ask a farmer vs. a random person.

2. What do you like about the framework described in the presentation?

- First point was that it has to be economical, which was a good thing
- That producers are business-owners first; important that the framework acknowledges that fact
- Allowing for regional difference, not a cookie-cutter approach
- It seemed to cover a lot of the important factors
- They suggested recognizing early-adapters; this is a beneficial change that we haven't seen in previous programs (some operators have been practicing cover cropping for over 30 years)
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3. Where do you think the framework falls short?

- Agriculture is a complex business and needs to react to last minute changes for example weather, too structured a framework will not work
- Private industry partners need to be at the table and part of the equation/framework.
- NGO's such as OSCIA need to deliver the programs/\$'s as they have staff on the ground to assist farmers one on one (not just via a website)
- Framework/funding needs to have some predictability such as the original EFP program.
- Dollars! Wanting to see the details of what are the **incentives** to make this pay. (i.e in the dairy world, if the system requires higher protein, the paid incentives help support the investments to change equipment, training and practices, and operators make that shift and have the support to do so). Need to compensate for the trade offs that are being made
- Noted examples of wood lots, bush lots – what are the incentives to maintain
- Things are missed in the framework presented. Many things that relate directly to agriculture are not taken into account.
- We should be doing our homework and not just accepting what is put before us.
- Common sense seems to have left us a long time ago and we need to think for ourselves.
- We are tired of having this sustainability stuff shoved down our throat.
- We as both an industry and society shouldn't be 'sheep' and just follow along.
- If the government values 'sustainability' they must PAY for it. Put your money where your mouth is. This could include investing in your municipalities and other things. Is there accountability?
- Framework is dependent on data, likely difficult to get.
- How to be as productive as possible on less acres, with less inputs, how to account for differences in provinces, difference in commodity production within provinces.
- How to attract workers in Ontario to keep it attractive/competitive

4. Are farmers comfortable sharing the information described in the presentation?

- Yes and no; it will require sharing data and financial information – is that to be shared with the program itself or would it be publicly shared with other producers?
- Benchmarks are required for a program to know what the benefits are that are being gained for the environment.
- It's inevitable that farmers would be expected to share data in order to measure the benefits and gains.
- Concern that it could be yearly reporting ... would we need to "re-report" the data we have already shared with other government agencies that we've already reported to?
- IDEA: if we already share data with agricorp, can we check off a box that the sharing of data is easy/one time effort so that is more efficient
- Fundamentally depends on how the system is set up and how the data is shared- benchmarking with other producers is so common- but there is reassurance that the data is based on an average and not specific examples.
- Worries that words can be used against her or twisted.

- Not as many specifics were mentioned in the report, so some felt comfortable with that type of information.
- Farmers can be hesitant to share due to public opinions.
- Farmers can also be defensive- transparency requirements action. Energy is wasted worrying about minority groups with opinions.
- They type of system implanted has to be user friendly and kept confidential.
- Most people are afraid to speak up if they do not agree with this 'agenda' and possible regulations or recommendations.
- We need to be critical thinkers. We need to be more vocal--why do we need to just jump on the bandwagon?
- Who is the best to share the information with? Gov't? No! Have already shared so much information.
- Generally, don't want to share information, particularly financial information
- Will share information with whoever will pay to get the info ie carbon sequestration
- People collecting and interpreting info have to have ag experience
- Sharing of information is a no, very competitive environment
- In Wellington, people are working in teams (not just solo), different farmers working together (like Mennonite communities), don't have acre utilization on their own (not the norm, through cool)
- Trying to build a sense of community (previous generations, one family would raise the beef, next season the other family)
- More stakeholders involved in farm (ie. multiple landlords, don't need one knowing what the other is getting for rent)
- The information is cropping systems, etc. (intellectual property, a fairly new conversation), innovation and technology is tied to profit.
- Sharing of information is already happening through local SCIA's, etc.
- Operation already has multiple ways to sharing information, easier on smaller, specific operation relative to larger farmers (ie. aquaculture to cash crop)
- Need to be able to share information for policy makers to understand objectives, targets, etc. since they don't know info otherwise.
- How to make sure data is used appropriately.
- ie. argue about carbon sequestration, don't have a current way to measure sequestration.

5. Should economic impacts be considered when developing a sustainable Ag Strategy? How important is this?

- Farmers need to be able to easily access knowledge and dollars.
- Gov't could cover the extra risk associated with implementing new BMP on farm – eg cover crop, gov't pay to cover the crop insurance risk premium
- Accept actual cost for implementing new BMP's and make them program coverable.
- Need for full cooperation between Fed and Prov governments and Ministries at both levels.
- Farming needs to be recognised for both economic and environmental positive impacts.

- Top importance! We don't want to be subsidy farmers! Sustainable and economic benefits are required to see the whole process work effectively.
- With cost sharing, you as the operator need to put some effort in, but if the ratio is not beneficial it's not going to get the uptake.
- Farmers are frustrated with the programs that have limited funds so all the planning can go in, but impossible to know if there will be enough funds left on 'program day' to allow many producers in the queue.
- Yes, it makes us less competitive. Without profitability nothing else is relevant.
- Extremely important
- So many factors fall into farm profitability (ie. weather, soil types, crops grown, etc.), not a simple conversation (speaking with people who don't understand what farmers are doing)
- Worried about the sustainability of agriculture within my county, its about economics & a sustainable framework wouldn't hurt, can't think individually
- 1800 farms to 263 farms in 18 years in Halton, how to ensure farms in the GTA remain competitive, Wellington & Waterloo will also be following Halton's trend.

6. Do you think a sustainable ag strategy will make Canadian agriculture competitive, would it positively or negatively affect your livelihood as a farmer?

- YES, if it's defined with an economic lens
- Some challenge if the product is for domestic production only, or is a product reliant on export markets.
- It will allow us to become more competitive AND should benefit us as farmers with a sustainable livelihood
- Any products that can be marketed and promoted (with a premium) with that labelling can help as well
- Hoping for a competitive edge for our export markets
- Difficult to say how much the 'sustainable' sticker would then mean, if every product is brought up to the standard.
- Concern about truth in labelling (examples of the false stickers/false advertising promoting GMO free and preferred production methods in certain brands and companies in their work)
- Marketing strategy – will we need an effective and truthful marketing plan for Canadian farm products.
- Less competitive
- We are a small piece in a big global world. Who drives us? For cash croppers—Brazil, China, Chicago Board of Trade?
- Biggest influencer on this is our own government and makes us less competitive globally with every step they take.
- Brazil will always be competitive in Feb March April May. Right now they have nothing to sell.
- USDA manipulates us.
- The strategy presented will make Canadian Agriculture less competitive on a global stage.
- Depends on compensation level

- Restrictive policies made by people who don't understand agriculture can be very negative.
- Unintended consequences (ie Underutilized housing tax)
- Govt is doing this for political gain.
- Regulatory regime in Canada puts us at a disadvantage compared to other countries, checks and balances in Canada for our safety (exceptional system), who is the market beyond the Canadian consumer? Political imbalance with food
- If we enforce all of our rules with imported food, would see some shortages, do we uphold our standards in a globalized world.
- Strategy will hurt us.
- Can have all the strategies we want, if our system is broken its all irrelevant (if we don't have food distribution, won't matter)
- If we want sustainable and need to change out crop rotations, we need markets for those products.
- Sustainability must be beyond the farm gate.
- Includes farm infrastructure.

7. Do you think a sustainable ag strategy will help or hinder growing demand for Canadian food and ag products?

- It all comes down to the right marketing – having the right strategy with input from the producers and considering what is available to be marketed as 'Canadian vs local' ... some products can be marketed locally, and some cannot. Even if we can grow greenhouse bananas in Canada, they are not necessarily sustainable! And with distribution of grain and milk, difficult to promote the local item
- The consumer also has to have the DESIRE to purchase sustainable in their selection process. It depends if we have price shoppers vs virtue shoppers
- It would be nice if the government would hold other imports to our standards if we are becoming more sustainable.
- Example of pork production being very narrowed now in the California requirements, and other nearby states are challenging it because they can't meet that neighbour states requirements – being aware of what a new policy puts into place where trade is concerned.
- I think it will help as a marketing tool, our ace in the hole is to have a proven system of environmental consciousness.
- Have to learn how to quantify so that measures of farming are equal or at least similar.
- The demand for Canadian food is related to the bottom price- can we market that we have a sustainable market and utilizing correct practices but does that help sell our product? Unsure if the benefit is as big as we want it to be.
- It's an educational step to make people want this, more tools are needed.
- Need to advertise the steps that being taken – ie "Certified Organic"
- Understanding the sustainability will help us internationally with food demand and trade.
- We produce more than we'll consume- so we need to satisfy the demand outside of the country.
- The key is to motivate and incentivising those who do not already buy Canadian products.

- More long-term effects if we only focus on export.
- Hinder, it will make us less competitive. It is something for companies to capitalize on.

8. What would prompt more innovation on your farm? Choose the top 3.

- a. Alleviating taxes and regulations to make our operations more profitable and able to reinvest.**
- b. Providing more taxpayer money to invest in areas specified by the government.**
- c. Engaging with people who have experience innovating.**
- d. Engaging with people with theoretical ideas on innovation.**
- e. Guidelines on innovation determined by someone else.**
- f. Regulations on innovation are determined by someone else.**
- g. Innovative ideas with a business case to show benefit to your operation.**
- h. Other – please list.**

- A,B,C & G
- A,B,D
- A,G
- A,B,G
- H - Anything but this list – see below

To protect taxpayer dollars, need to invest in innovation (if you give out payments, farmers will spend on pick-ups, etc.)

Got out of conventional into no-till, now listed as an innovative practice (to the average farmer, still innovative), why does the slow farmer get the benefit.