



ONFARM Stakeholder Engagement Working Group: Outreach & Engagement Strategy



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The Project

The On-Farm Applied Research and Monitoring (ONFARM) program is a four-year, applied research initiative delivered by OSCIA on behalf of OMAFRA to support soil health and water quality research across farms in Ontario. This program is funded by the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative.

ONFARM has three primary objectives:

1. Stakeholder engagement
2. Water quality monitoring, modelling and Best Management Practice (BMP) assessments within the priority subwatershed (PSP) areas
3. Paired on-farm trials using soil health BMPs at farms throughout Ontario

The ONFARM Stakeholder Engagement Working Group (SEWG) has been brought together to enhance collaboration amongst Ontario's agriculture sector organizations that are involved in on-farm applied research, monitoring and demonstration initiatives that relate to agri-environmental stewardship, focused on water quality and soil health. The SEWG will direct the development and implementation of engagement and communication activities, including building industry support for the establishment of a network of long-term applied research demonstration sites.

SEWG Membership (as of February 2021)

Karen Thompson [Chair], Assistant Professor, Trent University
Jo-Anne Rzadki [Vice Chair], Business Development & Partnerships, Conservation Ontario
Aaron Breimer, CCA and General Manager, Veritas Farm Management
Brian Dickson, Agricultural Engineer, OMAFRA
Cameron Ogilvie, Knowledge Mobilization Coordinator, Soils at Guelph
Gerard Grubb, GerMar Farms
Jennifer Doelman, BDS Farms
Darby Wheeler, Policy Advisor, Beef Farmers of Ontario
Marty Vermey, Senior Agronomist, Grain Farmers of Ontario
Kelsey Hill, Manager, Nutrient Stewardship, Fertilizer Canada
Dr. Sarah Hargreaves, Research Director, Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario
Woody Van Arkel, Van Arkel Farms
Ron Campbell, Operations & Member Service Manager, Ontario Agribusiness Association

The working group includes input from OMAFRA and OSCIA staff.

Goals of This Strategy

The goals are derived from the short, medium, and long-term outcomes of the strategy (P.12). The engagement and outreach strategy activities focus on:

1. Sharing evidence-based and practical solutions to advance farmers' knowledge and implementation of BMPs suitable for improving soil health and mitigating nutrient losses to the environment within the Ontario context. Information should be accessible to encourage adoption. Innovative BMPs will be encouraged to advance soil health and water quality outcomes.
2. Sharing the successes, challenges and strategies of soil health trailblazers in an environment where farmers and advisors can gain knowledge and become comfortable trying new practices.
3. Improving collaboration between farmers, crop advisors, researchers, and other non-traditional partners to build strong and effective working relationships. These collaborations will facilitate additional access to information and support for farmers making decisions to enhance water quality and soil health.
4. Elevating the profile of ONFARM to generate opportunities for long-term soil health and water quality BMP research via external funding opportunities and increase shared ownership between government and industry for advancing stewardship related to on-farm applied research and monitoring activities.
5. Demonstrating to producers, advisors and a broad audience of agricultural stakeholders the measured and demonstrated progress toward Great Lakes phosphorus reduction commitments. This work will also include BMP performance data analysis, modelling and cost-benefit analysis.

Our Target Audience

The target audience refers to those stakeholders that the activities below are aimed to engage. **Farmers**



Why: Farmers will be of utmost importance. Specifically, decision-makers or on-farm influencers will be an important target audience of the activities below. Farmers and other stakeholders who are interested in learning about what other farmers are doing should also be able to engage with the ONFARM project in an accessible way. Additionally, farmers who do not actively seek others out/work with others but are innovating in new ways should be able to engage with the project.

How: While not all farmers are engaged on social media, it is a valuable tool to reach those who are. Other peer-to-peer learning opportunities and plain language knowledge transfer activities will help engage those individuals who are not using social media. More traditional means of engagement on the farm, at conferences, and through email (via listserv) will help engage other farmers.

Government and Conservation Authorities



Why: Government and conservation authority audiences must also be engaged. This will be a key step in terms of ensuring the success of the ONFARM project by creating positive outcomes through effective knowledge transfer to the public sector, which has the capacity to keep the project viable beyond its funding agreement. Conservation Authorities also have an ongoing interest in soil health and water quality research. These groups can help drive interest on a regional and watershed level.

How: Personal interactions with farmers and ONFARM Stakeholders through events. Plain language materials and stories to demonstrate why soil health and water quality matters and what farmers are doing. Social media engagement will also be used.

Agri-food, Agribusiness, Related Organizations, and Non-Traditional Partners



Why: Some organizations have already been engaged through membership on the SEWG, and additional organizations should be engaged to complement ONFARM and leverage existing networks to engage the broader farming sector. Related organizations might include agricultural retailers, seed and fertilizer input suppliers who have a vested interest in soil quality, and whose business is adjacent to it. Non-traditional partners might include financial institutions or sustainability initiatives. These organizations might have an interest in supporting the ONFARM project. Such involvement will increase the reach of engagement activities for effective knowledge mobilization across the sector.

How: Tailored small group demonstrations and plain language case studies will allow organizations to engage with the project. On-farm events and conferences will also provide a place to engage these groups.

Outreach Partners and Collaborators

The ONFARM project will collaborate with several groups to strengthen the reach of the project and build strong partnerships to advance common goals. These groups may include:

- Innovative Farmers of Ontario
- Academic institutions
- Other jurisdictions with similar programming such as the Midwest Cover Crops Council, Cornell University, Practical Farmers of Iowa, Vermont Healthy Soils Coalition, and University of Wisconsin (Wisconsin Discovery Farm Model)
- Industry groups (i.e. those interested in precision agriculture such as Farms.com)
- Stakeholders for various watersheds impacted by the ONFARM project (conservation authorities, other stewardship groups)
- Other provincial soil health and water quality initiatives (GFO applied research activities, EFAO farmer-led research program, ALUS, etc.)

Building on Existing Relationships

The ONFARM Project has successfully engaged the following organizations through participation on the SEWG. This is an important strength, as these organizations have existing networks that can be leveraged for engagement.

- Ontario Soil Network
- Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario
- Grain Farmers of Ontario
- Beef Farmers of Ontario
- Fertilizer Canada
- Ontario Agribusiness Association
- CCA Association
- Conservation Ontario
- Fertilizer Canada
- Academic institutions (including Soils at Guelph and Trent University)

Selection of Enhanced Demonstration Sites

Four enhanced demonstration sites will be selected by the Stakeholder Engagement Working Group in collaboration with the Technical Working Group. Sites will be selected from among 25 paired soil health trial and/or eight edge-of-field (EOF) sites, which have been predetermined as research sites by the Technical Working Group. These sites will have a focus of collaborative investment to encourage industry sponsorship and enhance knowledge transfer and engagement activities. The target leveraged investment for these enhanced demonstration sites is at least 15% (in-kind and financial) from Ontario agriculture and adjacent organizations and at least four contributing partners from Ontario agriculture sector organizations, non-governmental organizations, academia, farmers, agricultural retailers, etc. Direction on leveraged investment opportunities and partnership collaboration at these sites will be provided by the SEWG and OSCIA. Each site will host a minimum of one demonstration event and produce one knowledge transfer medium annually. These knowledge transfer items and events will be planned and developed by OSCIA in conjunction with the cooperator and with input from the SEWG. Farmer and industry engagement at these enhanced demonstration sites will be surveyed to ensure participants at enhanced demonstration site events benefit from knowledge transfer methods, are interested and able to apply learnings from events and to determine interest and opportunities for collaboration. The SEWG collaborated on the criteria for enhanced demonstration sites, which were:

- Diversity of farm type and region
- Innovative equipment and soil health practices
- Practical experience with the BMPs in the context of their own farm

Providing the Technical Working Group with these criteria allows them to select a range of sites that could be used for engagement activities and generate awareness of the program and interest in enhanced collaboration and leveraged investment. This iterative process ensures that the enhanced demonstration sites selected have the qualities to strongly demonstrate the value of ONFARM, while giving the SEWG the ability to select which sites are best for engagement purposes.

Outreach and Engagement Strategy Activities

The following list of activities will help to engage stakeholders across Ontario to achieve the goals mentioned above. The Stakeholder Engagement Working Group identified several activities and organizations for collaboration. The activities are sorted by target audience, highlighted in green.

Activity	Description	Timeline	2020 Progress
Farmers			
Champion Videos*	Share personalized stories to demonstrate success and failures to encourage adoption of soil health practices. These stories should be presented as short, informational videos that can be shared via social media (Appendix A). Each enhanced demonstration site will produce two videos with the goal of sharing through the farmer's network. Additionally, videos can build off existing videos of champions, if possible, to highlight early adopters and existing work.	Year 3 and year 4 (1 video per site, per year)	
Evaluation Survey	A survey will be shared with attendees following ONFARM engagement events. The survey will report on ONFARM engagement outcomes and gather feedback to improve future events and engagement activities.	Ongoing, following ONFARM engagement events	22 responses collected in the ONFARM Event Experience survey 55 responses collected in the 2021 ONFARM Forum Experience Survey
Sector Questionnaire (Optional)	There is an opportunity to engage beyond the funding agreement evaluation survey (described above) and conduct a sector-wide questionnaire to understand knowledge gaps and opportunities to progress uptake of soil health and water	To be determined	

	quality BMPs on Ontario farms. This survey would need to be done in collaboration with other stakeholders working towards similar outcomes as the ONFARM project.		
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*Planned for 2021:

- Four champion videos (summer/fall 2021)

Activity	Description	Timeline	2020 Progress
Tailored/Mixed Audience			
Interactive ONFARM map	The map will showcase the ONFARM sites across the province and will include site descriptions and photos. Individual site pages will be updated with KTT links as products are developed and include research results and other information. This content will be determined in collaboration with the SEWG and the ONFARM co-operators.	Within year 1	The interactive map was published in March 2021. The interactive map has site descriptions, photos and additional content where available. Site pages will be updated with photos, media and reports. The ONFARM site has had 2,138 views since it launched in September, 2020
"Tail-gate" Tours*	These tours will provide a space for farmers to share with peers at enhanced demonstration sites. Tours should be tailored to an audience of neighbours, local government officials, agri-food and agribusiness stakeholders, and farmers.	4 total per year, alternating sites.	Four meet-and-greets for co-operators were held in Williamstown, Coburg, Oil Springs, and Embro: 63 attendees total, 18 of which were farmers

ONFARM Forum	The virtual forum will bring together a variety of stakeholders for knowledge sharing. For the first year, the goals to (1) share successes of the ONFARM project from its inception to March 2021 and (2) share a call-to-action to spark interest in potential collaborations for the future viability of the ONFARM work beyond its current funding cycle.	Annual beginning February 2021	195 attendees total and 139 maximum concurrent attendees (~20% of attendees indicated their primary profession as farmer) at the 2021 ONFARM Forum
Soil Health Meetings/Conferences**	Speak at 4-6 soil health meetings or conferences annually to provide updates and results of the project, with plain language presentations that allow audiences to understand the benefits of the program. These meetings/conferences can include various AGMs, SWAC conference, Latonell, FarmSmart, etc.	Minimum 4 speaking engagements per year	1,497 touch points in 2020 (See Appendix B for details)
Social Media	Using the social media guidelines (Appendix A), farmers can regularly post to their social media accounts to provide short updates, results, and progress of their project. Farmers may use these posts as opportunities to direct followers to the ONFARM website, which will house information and updates. The SEWG will help facilitate this activity by creating posts (See Appendix A) and engaging or commenting on ONFARM social media. #ONFARM is to be used in all posts related to the program	Ongoing	#ONFARM has been featured in 11 tweets from @OntarioSoilCrop, since social media initiatives began in October 2020 with: 48 retweets 83 likes
ONFARM Factsheets*	A series of factsheets to highlight the work underway through the ONFARM program, showcasing research findings and profiling cooperators. These factsheets will build off other work underway in this space (e.g., on-farm research and cover cropping) and direct readers to additional resources.	Within year 3	

*Planned for 2021:

- Video tour of Upper Thames River Conservation Authority ONFARM site (Spring 2021)
- ONFARM Demonstration events at enhanced demonstration sites: Locations and dates TBD
- Three factsheets (summer, fall 2021)

**Planned for 2021:

- ONFARM feature at Canada's Outdoor Farm Show (September 2021)
- Presentation at Latonell (November 2021)
- Presentation at Ontario Agricultural Conference (January 2022)
- Presentation at OSCIA AGM (February 2022)

Activity	Description	Timeline	2020 Progress
Government/CAs			
Online case studies*	Publish a series (6-10) of plain-language case studies documenting successes and challenges of farmers participating in ONFARM. Case studies can be shared via the ONFARM website, through the mapping portal.	Within year 3	
Research/Academia			
Walk-the-Farm Research Days**	These events will give researchers an opportunity to participate in small groups to learn about farm practices and outcomes. These events will engage researchers beyond those already involved in the project.	2 total per year, alternating sites, starting in year 3	

*Planned for 2021:

- 6-10 case studies (fall, winter 2021)

**Planned for 2021

- Walk-the-Farm Research Days: Western, eastern and central Ontario: Site locations and dates TBD

Logic Model

This logic model is meant to help understand how the activities listed in the Outreach and Engagement Strategy will help achieve the goals of the Strategy through short-term, medium-term, and long-term outcomes. The logic model will also help to evaluate the strategy as it is being implemented, using the success indicators under the outcomes. The logic model also allows the SEWG to understand how to best manage external factors that may affect the engagement strategy.

INPUTS	OUTPUTS	
	Activities	Target Audience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEWG time and collaboration • Video equipment • Knowledge • Enhanced demonstration site time and collaboration • OSCIA Administration • In-kind and financial investment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online Case Studies • Champion Videos • Tail-gate Tours • Cover Cropping in Ontario: Finding a Recipe that Works on Your Farm • Walk-the-farm Research Days • Virtual ONFARM Forum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmers • Academic Institutions • Conservation Authorities • Local Government • Agri-food and agribusiness associations



OUTCOMES		
Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation at events • Engagement on social media • Access to information on soil health and water quality BMPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active interest from partners/farmers • Increased awareness of soil health and water quality BMPs • Collaboration between conservation authorities and agriculture organizations • Funding for long-term research on soil health and water quality BMPs • Increased uptake of soil health and water quality BMPs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved soil health on farms across the province

Measuring Success

Success indicators are broken down into short-, medium-, and long-term timeframes.

Short Term

Short term measures of success will look mostly at participation in the engagement activities. These measures include:

- ✓ 4 events per year, with a minimum of 15 participants at each event
- ✓ 80-100 participants at the annual Forum
- ✓ Increased virtual engagement (Twitter, project website)

Medium Term

Medium-term success will look beyond participation in the ONFARM engagement activities and focus more on awareness and uptake. These measures include:

- 4-8 contributing partners across all Enhanced Demonstration sites
- Increased interaction from new demographics (i.e. landowners)
- Increase percentage of farmers who indicate intention to adopt soil health and water quality BMP strategies (measured by evaluation survey)

Long Term

Measuring long-term success can be more difficult without proper baseline metrics. While long-term success may not be directly attributed to the ONFARM project, it is important to include larger goals for the project to work towards, including:

- Improved soil health on farms across the province, resulting in increased acreage as a measurement of uptake, using soil health and water quality BMPs

Next Steps

Beyond the engagement activities for this project, the Stakeholder Engagement Working Group will be responsible for exploring 2-3 governance models to advance the project through its timeline (during year 3). This process will include transitioning both the Stakeholder Engagement Working Group and the Technical Working group into a steering committee (during year 3). This committee will be dedicated to enhancing agricultural sector collaboration for advancing ONFARM soil health and water quality stewardship (beyond current project funding period).

It will also be important for the SEWG to explore various funding opportunities to continue the project beyond the funding agreement. This may take place at Working Group meetings, where members can brainstorm opportunities for further funding (ongoing, starting no later than year 2). Ultimately, engaging non-traditional organizations, government, and research institutions will help foster opportunities for long-term funding.



Appendices

Appendix A: Social Media Tip Sheet

Social Media Tip Sheet

Promoting the ONFARM Program



ONFARM Background

ONFARM is a 4-year, Canadian Agricultural Partnership-funded applied research initiative delivered by OSCIA on behalf of OMAFRA to support soil health and water quality research on farms across Ontario. One of ONFARM's main objectives is outreach and engagement. As a participant in this initiative, you can help share your experiences with other farmers, researchers, and your neighbours by using social media.



Follow the tips below to engage the agricultural community and beyond, and communicate the unique results, stories, lessons learned, and successes from ONFARM project activities.

Consider Your Audience

Not everyone will understand the technical aspects of ONFARM projects, so it is important to structure your message accordingly. Talk about the work you're doing, successes and challenges you've experienced and what the project means for your farm, community and region. Use the social media platform you are most comfortable with to start and consider using a mix of social media platforms to engage more people.



Consider Your Platforms



Instagram

- Mostly photos and videos
- Supports live videos for immediate sharing

Facebook

- Posts without word limits
- Photos and videos (under 30 seconds) to help tell a story
- Live video sharing via Facebook Live

Twitter

- Informative posts (280 characters max) for short project updates
- Photos and short videos help the reader to understand

Use these hashtags to reach a broader audience than just your followers:

#ONFARM (For all ONFARM posts)

#OntAg
#SoilHealth
#4R
#SustainableAg
#LetsTalkSoil
#CdnAg

#WaterQuality
#CdnAgPartnership
#LakeErie
#Farm365
#Phosphorous

Use these Handles to link relevant organizations to your post:

@OntarioSoilCrop (For all ONFARM posts)

@ConOnt
@OMAFRA
@OMAFRAEnviro
@UTRCmarketing
@UTRCsoilwater
@GrainFarmers
@BeefFarmers
@EFAO2

@LandWaterNews
@LTVCA
@essexRegionCA
@Maitlandvalley
@MaitlandStwdsp
@SoilsAtGuelph
@FertilizerCA



Appendix B: ONFARM Involvement at Soil Health Meetings/Conferences

Meeting/Conference	ONFARM Involvement	Number of Attendees
2020		
CCA Soil and Water Day	ONFARM overview	55 attendees
Huron County SCIA AGM	ONFARM overview	59 attendees
UofG/OMAFRA Soil Health Forum	ONFARM overview	227 attendees
Grey-Bruce Farmers' Week (GBFW) 2021	ONFARM panel discussion	633 households
GBFW 2021	ONFARM overview and video of ABCA Huronview demonstration farm	633 households
Ontario Agribusiness Association (OABA) Agronomy Committee meeting	ONFARM overview	12 attendees
Ontario Professional Agri-Contractors Association and Timing Matters workshops (5)	Commodity-specific information linking to ONFARM projects	161 attendees
Ontario's Soil Action Group meeting	ONFARM overview	35 attendees
OSCIA AGM	ONFARM overview	155 attendees during session
Midwest Cover Crops Council meeting	ONFARM overview	–
Canada-US Great Lakes Nutrient Committee Annex 4 Nutrients Public Webinar	ONFARM overview	160 attendees
Total 2020 Engagement at Soil Health Meetings/Conferences		1,497 touchpoints