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Farmers' Toolkit

Ten strategies farmers in the Clay Belt can utilize to develop, support and enhance the livestock sector.



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Photo Credits

Most photos provided by Marie-Pier Drolet (taken at La Chèvre laitière de Hearst Ltée) and Farmnorth.com.



Overview of the Ten Strategies

Prospective Farmers

- 1) Know and understand the perceived social barriers
- 2) Know and understand the realities of Northern Ontario's agriculture
- 3) Be on the lookout for mentorship opportunities in the Clay Belt

New and Existing Farmers

- 4) Become an ambassador for Northern Ontario
- 5) Create partnerships with other farmers
- 6) Create partnerships with agricultural stakeholders
- 7) Become a mentor
- 8) Get involved in the community
- 9) Work towards the diversification of agricultural activities
- 10) Seek local market opportunities

Image courtesy of Ferme GG Farm

1

Prospective Farmers

Know and understand the perceived social barriers



What is it?

There are several perceived social barriers held by prospective farmers living outside of Northern Ontario in regards to living in the Clay Belt. These include a perceived lack of social activities and job opportunities, isolation and language barriers.

Why does it matter?

Dispelling the myths about Northern Ontario, and particularly the Clay Belt, will help to play a key part in the development of agricultural activities and also help with the attraction and retention of newcomers in the region.

What can farmers do?

Prospective farmers can take a proactive approach in seeking information about living in the Clay Belt. A few examples include:

- ✓ Obtain information from municipalities and farm organizations on social and recreational activities that are organized in the Clay Belt area.
- ✓ Seek information from employment centres and community organizations such as the Far Northeast Training Board (FNETB) on employment opportunities in the Clay Belt.
- ✓ Take the initiative to attend presentations and conferences on topics related to Northern Ontario.
- ✓ Visit the region and meet with different stakeholders working in the agriculture sector (farm organizations, farmers, representatives from municipalities).
- ✓ Take the course How to start a farm in Northern Ontario, offered by Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). It outlines social and recreational opportunities by district.
- ✓ Contact local OMAFRA Agriculture Development Advisor and be informed on the potential funding opportunities and support.



2

Prospective Farmers

Know and understand the realities of Northern Ontario's agriculture



Image courtesy of Ferme GG Farm



What is it?

Agriculture in Northern Ontario is unique: it is important to recognize differences from agricultural activities in Southern Ontario, such as challenges, opportunities, and what farming practices need to be adjusted.

Why does it matter?

It is important to have realistic expectations when establishing farms in Northern Ontario. This will help farmers face challenges and take full advantage of the agricultural opportunities in the Clay Belt.



What can farmers do?

To better understand the realities of agricultural activities in the Clay Belt, the prospective farmers can:

- ✓ Consult research that has been conducted in the region by (but not limited to): Guelph University, Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO), New Liskeard Agricultural Research Station, Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance (NOFIA), and Northeast Community Network (NeCN).
- ✓ Conduct market research before establishing agricultural activities to better understand the needs of the region and have a more accurate idea of the sources of income.
- ✓ Make small-scale experiments in the North (e.g. how do different crops react on different soils).
- ✓ Be aware of the necessity of tile drainage and the opportunities related to the region's climate.
- ✓ Understand the soil type and its quality by consulting OMAFRA soil maps.
- ✓ Take the online course: How to start a farm in Northern Ontario, offered by OMAFRA.
- ✓ Discover web sites such as Farmnorth.com and Beefnorth.com.

3

Prospective Farmers

Be on the lookout for mentorship opportunities in the Clay Belt



What is it?

It could be highly beneficial for prospective farmers to connect with existing farmers in the Clay Belt and seek mentorship opportunities in the region.

Why does it matter?

Prospective farmers should look for mentorship opportunities in the Clay Belt to learn the trade from a local perspective and develop a sense of belonging to the community.

What can farmers do?

Prospective farmers can:

- ✓ Communicate with municipalities and farm organizations to help find knowledgeable and well-established farmers who would be interested in working with them and providing hands-on experience.
- ✓ Look for opportunities to work with an established farmer in the Clay Belt.



4

New and Existing Farmers

Become an ambassador for Northern Ontario



What is it?

Existing farmers should become ambassadors for the North and properly inform the general population and agricultural stakeholders from all over the province about the region's assets and opportunities.

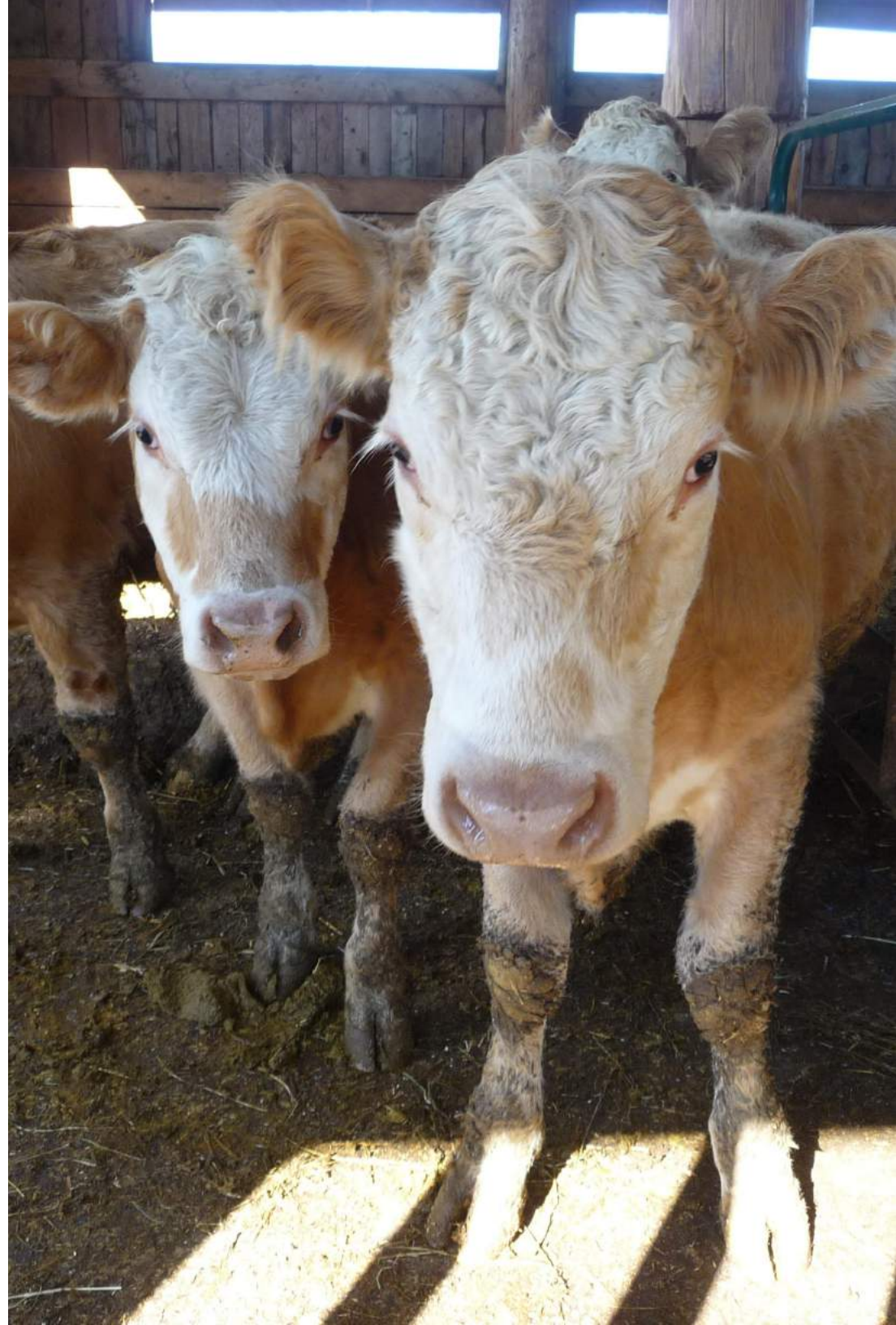
Why does it matter?

Prospective farmers, agricultural stakeholders and the general population often share perceived barriers regarding agricultural activities in Northern Ontario. Leadership from existing farmers in Northern Ontario could assist dispelling some of these myths. Conveying the realities of agricultural activities in the Clay Belt could also help on the local level, for example, communicating the importance of agriculture for the municipalities and the region as a whole.

What can farmers do?

Northern Ontario's ambassadors can do some of the following:

- ✓ Represent and sell Northern Ontario in regional and provincial initiatives related to agriculture (e.g. farm shows and conferences) by participating and sharing success stories.
- ✓ Write out success stories to be posted on websites like Farmnorth.com.
- ✓ Use social media to demonstrate and promote agricultural activities in Northern Ontario.
- ✓ Take the time to answer questions from new and prospective farmers.
- ✓ Establish a matching site for mentors/mentees to match up prospective new farmers with established ones.



5

New and Existing Farmers

Create partnerships with other farmers



What is it?

Farmers in the region should work more closely together and create partnerships with each other to better share knowledge and resources (material, human and financial).

Why does it matter?

Agricultural activities have significant costs and learning the trade can be time consuming. Thus, partnerships can lead to better time and resource management, while also building bridges between farmers.

What can farmers do?

Sharing resources can take different forms. Here are a few examples:

- ✓ Grow and sell hay and grain to allow other farmers to purchase them locally, and thus save on transportation costs.
 - ✓ A social media page or a website could be put in place to match local demand to local production.
- ✓ Purchase equipment in partnership with other farmers and then share this equipment.
- ✓ Work closely with one another in regards to transportation
 - ✓ As livestock or equipment is moved from Northern to Southern Ontario, and vice versa, there is an opportunity to create partnerships and share transportation costs
 - ✓ A social media page or a website could be created to coordinate the sharing of transportation
- ✓ Encourage and develop co-operative movements to facilitate the sharing of information and resources, and also potentially share and save on the cost of services.



6

New and Existing Farmers

Create partnerships with agricultural stakeholders



Image courtesy of Ferme GG Farm

What is it?

Farmers should create partnerships with agricultural stakeholders and collaborate community members to encourage the development of agriculture in the region.

Why does it matter?

Working together and in the same direction at the local, regional and provincial level helps develop stronger agricultural activities in Northern Ontario.

What can farmers do?

Several partnerships can be developed, including the following examples:

- ✓ Explore opportunities to partner with Indigenous communities for the sale of local agricultural products (e.g. organize a farmer's market).
- ✓ Collaborate with trappers to work on solutions regarding predator management.
- ✓ Reach out to farm organizations and farmers in Northwestern Québec to explore partnership opportunities for knowledge and resource sharing.

7

New and Existing Farmers

Become a mentor

What is it?

Farmers should explore mentorship opportunities for new and prospective farmers.

Why does it matter?

Farm succession is often generational but is more limited in Northern Ontario. Mentorship programs would help with the attraction and retention of newcomers in the region.



What can farmers do?

To become active mentors, farmers can:

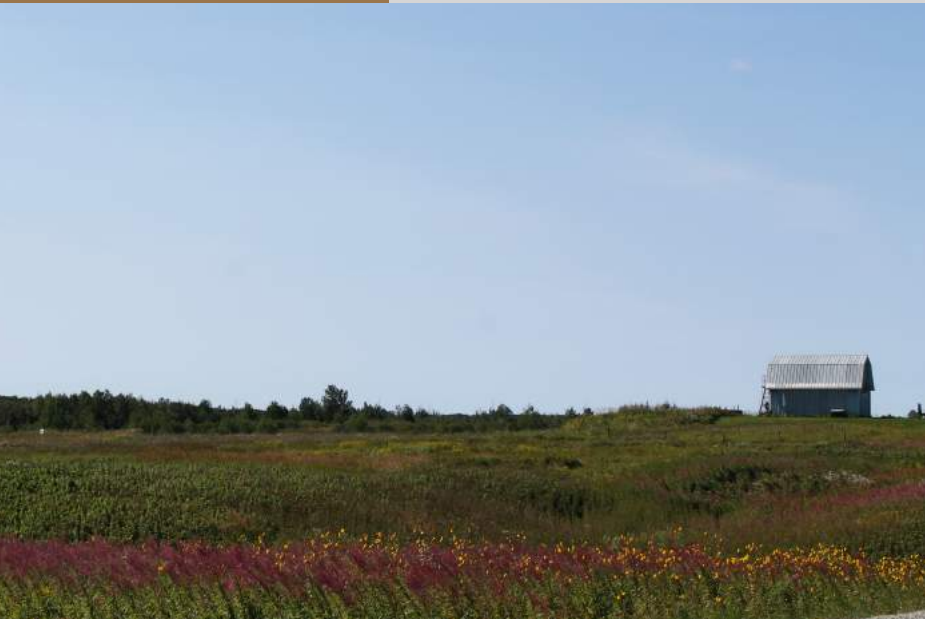
- ✓ Offer internship to local high school and university students on their farm.
- ✓ Allow agriculture students to work on the farm as part of a co-op or apprenticeship program to provide experiential learning. There are federal funding programs that subsidize youth work placements that could be sought.
- ✓ Offer mentorship opportunities for new farmers by sharing local experiences and knowledge.



8

New and Existing Farmers

Get involved in the community



What is it?

Farmers should be involved in their community and participate in community initiatives to make themselves known.

Why does it matter?

The community residents and municipalities in the region have limited knowledge about local farmers and the importance of agricultural activities in the North. As a result, several opportunities related to agriculture are missed.

What can farmers do?

To get involved in their community and have a positive impact, farmers can:

- ✓ Organize and participate in events (e.g. workshops and conferences) that promote agriculture and educate Northern residents on local agricultural production in the region (e.g. importance of buying locally, selling land to farmers, local investments and economic development).
- ✓ Organize farm visits for the general population.
- ✓ Participate in school-related initiatives to expose the younger generation to the farming lifestyle and its opportunities (e.g. farm visits and in-class presentations).
- ✓ Participate in networking and promotional events both locally and regionally and share success stories with media outlets.
- ✓ Continue to participate in agricultural studies, research and demonstrations.
- ✓ Participate in a community Agriculture Economic Development committee.



9

New and Existing Farmers

Work towards the diversification of agricultural activities



What is it?

Farmers should diversify their agricultural activities on an individual and regional level. Examples include producing different types of crops, raising various types of livestock or having different products than other farmers in the region.

Why does it matter?

Livestock production in the Clay Belt can take different forms, and it is important to capitalize on different opportunities for economic purposes.

What can farmers do?

To diversify their agricultural activities, farmers can:

- ✓ Establish small-scale farms as well as large-scale or industrial farms. Each farm size offers a variety benefits and challenges, but a balanced mix of these options would be optimal for the region.
- ✓ Develop value chains and value-added products with the help of workshops and technology transfer.
- ✓ Research and experiment with different crops to see if they are viable in the North.
- ✓ Raise a diversity of livestock (e.g. chickens, goats, cows).



10

New and Existing Farmers

Seek local market opportunities



What is it?

Farmers should work with agricultural stakeholders in the region to sell their products locally and expand their agricultural activities.

Why does it matter?

In addition to potentially saving costs, selling products locally can raise awareness on the importance of agricultural activities in the North, provide fresh products and contribute to the economic development of the region.

What can farmers do?

To pursue local market opportunities, farmers can:

- ✓ Create partnerships with Indigenous and smaller communities to sell products (for example, a farmer's market could be organized once a month in those communities).
- ✓ Promote their products to local grocery stores and restaurants.
- ✓ Participate in community initiatives, for example, farmer's markets, local festivals and other events that already exist.



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