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Provincial Toolkit

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



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



Overview of the Ten Strategies

- 1) Map land availability
- 2) Create policies in support of Northern agriculture
- 3) Think of the North in regional context
- 4) Enhance provincial efforts to build agriculture in the North
- 5) Understand the challenges/limitations of livestock production
- 6) Assess agricultural opportunities for Crown land
- 7) Review and maintain funding and grants
- 8) Support research related to Northern Ontario
- 9) Support programs to assist new farmers
- 10) Encourage partnerships

Image courtesy of Ferme GG Farm

1

Map land availability



What is it?

Mapping provides a visual representation of key agricultural resources.

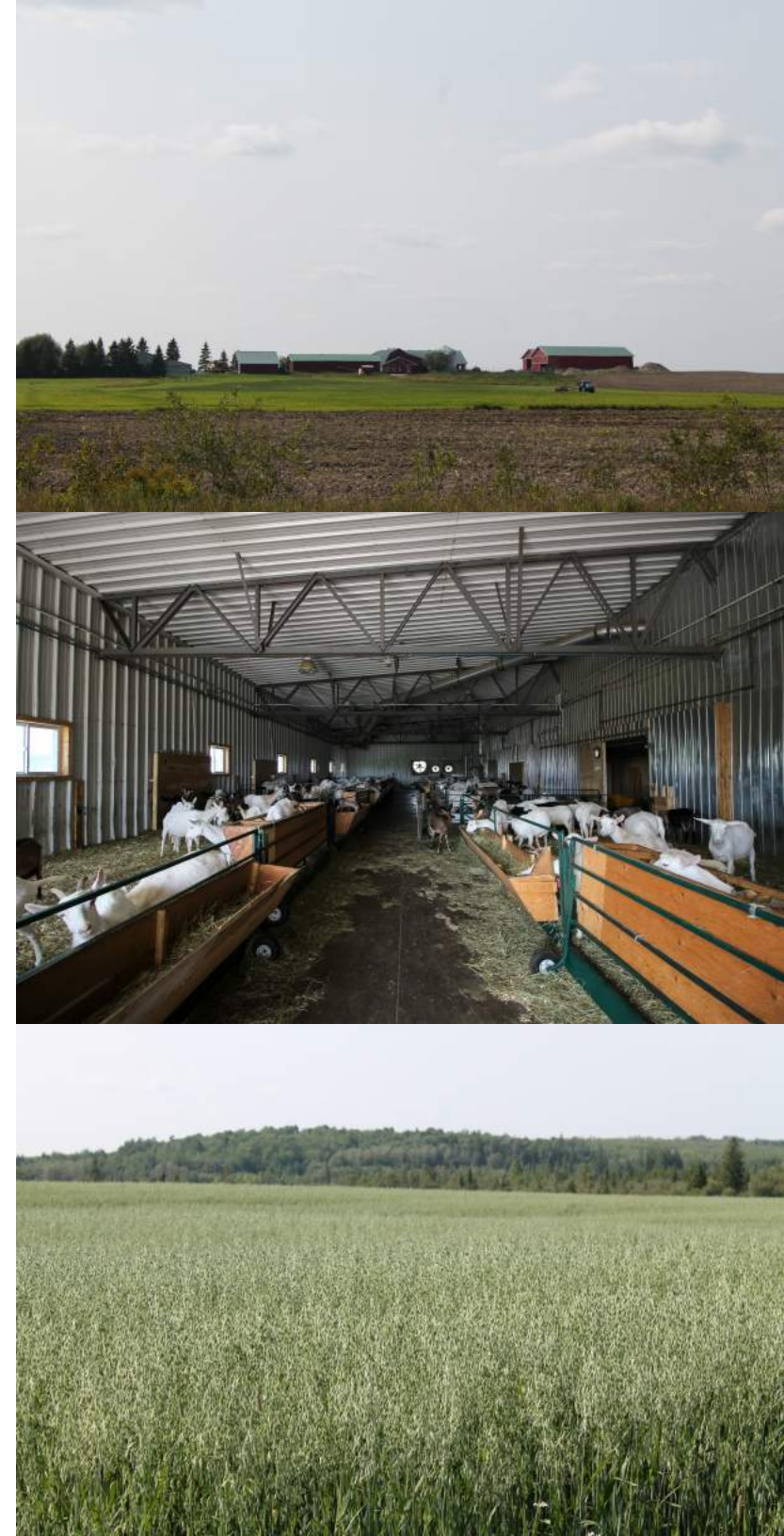
Why does it matter?

Mapping provides a foundational understanding of existing farmland, land availability and suitability that are important to new and existing farmers.

What can the province do?

The province can work independently and with municipalities and farm organizations to create maps that can help new and existing farmers:

- ✓ OMAFRA should continue to update soil classification maps within Northern Ontario to get a more complete understanding of soil capability.
- ✓ The province should work with and encourage municipalities to identify existing farms and privately-owned lands that are suitable for new agricultural endeavours.
- ✓ The province should encourage municipalities to develop mapping demonstrating the location of agricultural assets and infrastructure. An example of such mapping can be found at Enhancinglocalfood.com.



2

Create policies in support of Northern agriculture



What is it?

Agricultural stakeholders within the Clay Belt recognize the important role that the provincial government can have in building the agricultural sector in the North. The province is encouraged to continue to focus on this initiative.

Why does it matter?

The provincial government has an important role to play in policy and helping to direct agricultural development in the North.



What can the province do?

Examples of what the province can do include the following:

- ✓ Funding and grants are an important aspect of agricultural development (and are dealt with in more detail in Action 7).
- ✓ Farmers would be happy to see the province investigate the potential for livestock insurance.
- ✓ Farmers recognized that abattoirs are important for a local livestock sector and the province should investigate the potential to expand and enhance conventional and mobile abattoirs.
- ✓ There is potential for Crown land to be cleared for livestock production. Clarification and simplification of this process would be welcomed by the farm community.

3

Think of the North in regional context



What is it?

The agricultural landscape in Northern Ontario is unique and the regional variations should be recognized and responded to. It is important to note that variation also exists within the Clay Belt Region, as the agricultural landscape in Hearst is quite distinct from Cochrane.

Why does it matter?

Given the uniqueness of the Clay Belt Region, the province can provide leadership in helping to recognize and develop the agricultural potential of this area.

What can the province do?

The Clay Belt region has a variety of unique agricultural challenges (e.g. predators, climate, access to markets and transportation) and opportunities (e.g. soil quality, land availability, cost of land). The province should work to help address the challenges and build upon the opportunities.

- ✓ There are a number of Northern farm organizations that operate within the Clay Belt region (e.g. Northeastern Community Network [NeCN], Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance [NOFIA], Ontario Federation of Agriculture [OFA]), and the province should build linkages with these organizations to understand and foster agricultural development in the Clay Belt.
- ✓ The Highway 11 corridor between Hearst and Cochrane has the potential to develop a robust agricultural sector. The province should recognize this potential and support local municipalities.



4

Enhance provincial efforts to build agriculture in the North



What is it?

The provincial government has an important role to play in supporting and encouraging agriculture in the Clay Belt.

Why does it matter?

Communities across the North have an economic opportunity connected to agriculture that is underdeveloped. These communities and the province benefit from agricultural development.

What can the province do?

The province can bring a strategic focus to their efforts and initiatives related to agricultural development.

- ✓ The farm community values the direct input of OMAFRA and other provincial ministries. As the farm sector grows, additional resources should be allocated to support the Clay Belt region.
- ✓ It may prove useful to have an advisory committee of knowledgeable Northern agricultural stakeholders to provide advice on decision making connected to Northern agriculture.
- ✓ OMAFRA should work to ensure that staff based in Southern Ontario have an appreciation for the potential for agriculture in the North and unique characteristics of the Clay Belt region.



5

Understand the challenges/limitations of livestock production



What is it?

There are unique challenges to livestock production in the North and the province can provide support to identify and address these challenges.

Why does it matter?

The viability of livestock production is enhanced by the resolution of certain key challenges.

What can the province do?

The province can provide support to Northern municipalities in understanding and addressing these challenges:

- ✓ The province should ensure that regulations regarding predator control are regionally specific.
- ✓ There are certain myths (e.g. social, economic and environmental) pertaining to livestock production generally within the province and specifically in Northern Ontario. The province should work to identify and dispel these myths.
- ✓ There are many success stories related to farming in the Clay Belt region. These success stories should be identified and profiled. This may address several needs, including dispelling myths and helping to attract new farmers to the North.



6

Assess agricultural opportunities for Crown land



What is it?

Crown land is generally undeveloped land that is held by the provincial and federal governments.

Why does it matter?

According to the provincial government, within Northern Ontario, more than 95% of the land base is Crown land¹ and within the Clay Belt, much of the Crown land has potential for agricultural development.

¹ Ontario (2019, April 9th). *A guide to cottage lot development on Crown land* [online]. Retrieved June 28th, 2019 from <https://www.ontario.ca/page/guide-cottage-lot-development-crown-land>

What can the province do?

Crown land in Ontario is managed by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. All applications for access to Crown land must align with appropriate land use planning directions.

- ✓ Farmers observed that the process for developing an application to access Crown land could be simplified and expedited to improve agricultural development of the Clay Belt region.
- ✓ The province should develop a guide for developing Crown land for agriculture, similar to the existing *A Guide to Cottage Lot Development on Crown Land*. Partners in this endeavour would include farm groups, municipalities, First Nations and other stakeholders.



7

Review and maintain funding and grants

What is it?

The province provides a variety of grant and funding opportunities for agricultural activities, infrastructure and economic development.

Why does it matter?

Across Ontario, farmers have access to a variety of provincial and federal grants and funding programs. Some of these resources benefit agriculture across the province, while other specific needs exist for development in the North.



What can the province do?

Farmers have expressed support for a number of existing programs and have made suggestions for new or enhanced programs.

- ✓ Information regarding funding programs should continue to be profiled and shared with farmers at the earliest possible opportunity. The province should continue to support Northern organizations, such as NOFIA, that work directly with the farm community to guide farmers through the application process.
- ✓ Existing tile drainage and land clearing programs were highly valued by the farm community and should be maintained and enhanced where possible. Funding for other infrastructure required for agriculture is also valued by the farm community.
- ✓ Farmers noted challenges with securing and affording certain required agricultural equipment. An existing federally funded program, the Sustainable New Agri-food Products and Productivity (SNAPP), is a good example of a funding program that assists with the purchase, modification and installation of a variety of agri-food equipment. Opportunities to offer similar provincial programs should be explored in order to further enhance economic development and on-farm diversification activities.
- ✓ The Farm Property Class Tax Rate Program continues to be supported by the farm community and should be maintained across the province. The province should help municipalities to understand the value of this program for the agricultural sector.

8

Support research related to Northern Ontario



What is it?

Research provides information that helps to address the specific needs of Northern agriculture.

Why does it matter?

Research seeks to address issues of productivity, profitability and sustainability, in order to enhance agriculture in Northern Ontario. There are perceived social, economic and environmental barriers to agricultural production in the Clay Belt and research can help to address these issues.

What can the province do?

The province can continue to support research projects that focus on Northern Ontario generally and the Clay Belt region specifically.

- ✓ The province can utilize their funding models to encourage research that would benefit Northern agriculture. For example, research regarding crops, livestock and rural communities has proven beneficial and should be encouraged.
- ✓ An inventory of existing research related to Northern agriculture would be helpful.

9

Support programs to assist new farmers

What is it?

Programs to assist new and beginning farmers should be established to ease the complexity of establishing an agricultural operation.

Why does it matter?

New and beginning farmers have specific needs that are different than existing farmers. These include high capital costs for land acquisition and drainage, knowledge barriers and adapting to life in the North.



What can the province do?

The province can create a variety of toolkits and information packages related to farming in the North (e.g. cost expectations, climate limitations, profitability and social dynamics).

- ✓ Prospective farmers will benefit from clear information regarding the uniqueness of Northern agriculture, including both barriers and opportunities. Beef Farmers of Ontario has created a guide through Beef North to assist new entrants into beef farming in Northern Ontario. The province has also established Farm North, which provides an excellent resource for both existing and new farm entrants. Farm North should be maintained.
- ✓ Any grants available to new and beginning farmers should be profiled to the farm sector and Northern municipalities.



10

Encourage partnerships



Image courtesy of Ferme GG Farm

What is it?

Partnerships provide opportunities for collaboration and help to achieve more with limited resources.

Why does it matter?

Given the geographic area of Northern Ontario, partnerships provide an opportunity to share resources and utilize expertise to accomplish enhanced agricultural development.

What can the province do?

The province has established relationships with a variety of diverse stakeholders and can provide a leadership role in developing these further.

- ✓ The farm community noted opportunities for enhanced partnerships with farm organizations, the province of Quebec, Indigenous communities and Old Order Mennonites. The province should work with the farm community and municipalities to help develop these relationships and establish partnerships.
- ✓ The educational system has the potential to profile agriculture and related employment opportunities in rural communities. Examples include field trips to local farms, promotion of co-op placements and entrepreneurship courses with a focus on agricultural opportunities.



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