



Ontario farm and food groups charting the course for sustainability program

(Guelph) February 3, 2016 – *Farm, Food & Beyond: Our Commitment to Sustainability* is a collaboration of Ontario's farmers and food and beverage processors. Launched in 2015, its mandate is to create a sustainability initiative that builds upon the success of existing Ontario programs.

Retailers, food service companies and manufactures in the industry have been demanding greater transparency and advanced record keeping from producers and suppliers using environmental and social criteria. However, some international standards for sustainability are more suited to agriculture in developing countries and don't consider the higher social, environmental and economic standards in developed countries like Canada.

Farmers and manufacturers see a need for harmonizing duplicative standards to reduce the burden of reporting, while recognizing there is equivalency in many categories. *Farm, Food & Beyond's* intent is to limit redundancy. To that end, funding was secured from the Grand River Agricultural Society to complete a GAP analysis of 10 national and international sustainability programs compared to Ontario's current Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) and Growing Your Farm Profits (GYFP) programs. That report, prepared by Deloitte, is available for review [here](#). The raw data analysis of the GAP assessment, including specific questions and comparisons, is also available upon request.

From a content perspective, EFP/GYFP programs met or exceeded the other sustainability programs in 82 percent of identified performance areas. Dr. Gord Surgeoner, chair of the steering committee, said that he was encouraged by the findings.

Said Surgeoner: "We are very pleased with the results of this GAP analysis. We knew the Ontario programs would do well but they did very well when compared to international equivalents. The steering committee will now use these findings to design a program that provides solutions to the gaps identified through the research."

The next step in the project will be to hire a project manager using recently secured GF2 funding. This manager will be tasked to begin discussions with all levels of the supply chain (producers, processors, retailers, food service, NGOs and consumer groups) to obtain support and commitment for the program. A draft framework will then be designed based on the feedback received.

The initiative has been developed by the following supporters: The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), Christian Farmers' Federation of Ontario (CFFO), the Presidents' Council, Ontario Agri Food Technologies, the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA), Farm & Food Care Ontario, Provision Coalition and the Food Institute of the University of Guelph. Representatives from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada participate in an observer capacity.

A report entitled *Our Commitment to Sustainability*, which serves as a basis for the project, is now available online at www.sustainablefarms.ca.

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This project is funded in part through *Growing Forward 2 (GF2)*, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative. The Agricultural Adaptation Council and Ontario Agri Food Technologies assists in the delivery of *GF2* in Ontario.

For further information:

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