

AGRICULTURE SECTOR WORKING GROUP – MEETING MINUTES

September 21, 2016 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

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Introduction/Updates

- The analysis phase is ongoing, but it is time to start putting some meat on the bones of our draft Lake Erie Domestic Action Plan
- First week of October: Great Lakes Public Forum – Minister Murray from MOECC is expected to speak and may lay out his expectations on timelines moving forward. It would be prudent for us to keep moving ahead.
- OMAFRA staff put together a 2-page awareness piece on Lake Erie, phosphorus, and the connection to agriculture that has been emailed to the Working Group and hard copies were made available.

Subcommittee Updates

- Winter spreading
 - Have met three times to talk about reducing winter spreading, but have agreed to shift focus to spreading “at the right time.”
 - Another meeting next week on key messages for this winter
 - It’s not just about manure, but about all nutrients
 - Presence at Outdoor Farm Show and Plowing Match
 - Backdrop, poster, postcard
 - Good conversations about phosphorus and the Great Lakes with farmers attending
- Cover crops
 - The committee has met once
 - Looking at getting a third party to come in with a long-term plan for increasing cover crop acres
 - Educational post cards developed guiding producers on how to plant cover crops after early harvest and late harvest

- Cover crops “bar” at the Outdoor Farm Show for farmers to trial out cover crop mixes
- 4Rs Stewardship
 - OABA, Fertilizer Canada and OMAFRA have a Memorandum of Cooperation to implement 4Rs in Ontario
 - Fertilizer Canada has created 4R designation criteria and on-line testing for farm supply service providers at the national level. There are 10 criteria and successful service providers are able to designate acres as implementing 4R stewardship strategies. The uptake has limited success nationally and Ontario is looking for a more robust system.
 - OABA has built upon the Fertilizer Canada program in Ontario by piloting a retailer certification program modeled on the Ohio experience. The accountability for 4R designated acres would be shared by the retailer and the farmer with documentation validated at the retailer and audited by a 3rd party.
 - At this point in time, 2 of 4 volunteer retailers have been audited by the Ohio professionals. Feedback has been positive, the retailers believe they can achieve standards with increased documentation and some of the 41 guidelines customized to Ontario science standards. The other 2 audits will occur the week of September 26, 2016.
 - If OABA decides to move forward with the Ohio type certification of retailer, a lot of work will need to happen very quickly to be able to offer this service to Ontario farmers for the 2017 crop season.
 - 65 Ontario CCAs wrote the 4R specialty exam in August; 49 passed the exam. In all of the U.S. a total of 133 CCAs are certified. Ontario is well ahead of other jurisdictions and has proactively trained professionals to help implement the 4R stewardship strategies.

Grow Ontario Together

Main Points:

- Group of commodity leaders came together 6 months ago to start thinking outside the box
 - Anyone is welcome to join
- How can we approach government in a different way?
- Agriculture is part of the solution, and we believe the issues are important
 - Producers are more engaged when industry is positioned as leading the conversation
- We’ve reached out to different Environmental NGOs (ENGOS)
 - Have started conversations on common values
 - Connecting with a whole new set of influencers, including ENGOS but also the public
- Talked with Ministers Murray (MOECC) and Leal (OMAFRA)
- Phosphorus in Lake Erie is the focus of Grow Ontario Together currently
 - The model can be expanded to other cases in the future
- Each one of our organizations can have conversations with their membership about solutions
- We are working on a policy paper right now that we will submit as a group on the different things that we think we can do and our approach to doing them
- Communication strategy is a big part of this: coordinated and consistent effort

Q&A Summary:

- Amy Cronin will send out a Terms of Reference for the group
- What are your measuring sticks for success along the way?
 - We believe in benchmarking, but not all of that is in play yet
 - Initially, it's about reactions to conversations and getting into new places
 - How are those relationships advancing and evolving?

Preliminary OMAFRA Impact Analysis

Main Points:

- Research questions:
 - What is the potential for increased adoption of the BMPs?
 - What is the estimated phosphorus reduction that could be achieved?
- Analyzed existing data for 4 BMPs: cover crops, nutrient stewardship for commercial fertilizer and manure, riparian buffer strips (Thames River only)
- There are some assumptions and limitations to the approach; used conservative but positive values
 - As we get better data, estimates can be refined
 - Estimates are based on edge-of-field reductions, not what we see at the lake
 - At this stage, not differentiating between particulate and dissolved phosphorus
- General methodology: use total applicable area estimates, current adoption estimates, baseline phosphorus loss estimates, and reduction coefficients to estimate phosphorus reductions for each BMP under a few different adoption scenarios
- Results are preliminary and were presented at the meeting
 - Caution: results are preliminary estimates
 - These give us an idea of order of magnitude of reduction only
- Next steps:
 - Small subgroup to engage more directly for feedback into this work
 - Group will look at additional BMPs, multiple BMPs and costs
 - Continued improvement of estimates, incorporating new data and improved understanding

Q&A Summary:

- Where can we provide more input?
 - A smaller subset of this group could join into more specific discussions
- Where did the BMP definitions come from?
 - BMPs in this exercise are popular candidates for the Domestic Action Plan (DAP)
 - However, BMPs as defined for the purposes of this exercise were defined in such a way as to make estimates possible. The definitions used here are NOT the way BMPs would necessarily be articulated in a DAP
- Suggestion to use AgriCorp data
- What is the impact of counting each BMP as a stand-alone rather than a systems approach?

- Reductions should not be considered additive
- Ultimately, this analysis needs to go into how these BMPs work in combination (e.g. modeling exercises)
- What about other BMPs that were not covered?
 - We had to start somewhere and we felt we had data to make decent estimates on these
 - We will incorporate more BMPs in the next phase
 - The BMPs chosen were those most often discussed by this group
- What is the cost per ton of implementation on this?
 - Cost was not factored into this analysis. It is a factor that needs to be considered

Straw Dog Presentation

Main Points:

- Potential draft actions based on what we've heard from you, and what staff have heard from various boards and committees
- There will be opportunities to provide formal feedback; this is an informal working group response: it's still a work in progress
- We reviewed what we have heard in this group (we are asking for feedback on whether we covered it all – see discussion question)
- 4 areas of focus to reduce phosphorus: nutrient management, soil management, water management, wastewater infrastructure (agriculture plays a key role in the first 3 areas)
 - For each one of these, we looked at we want to achieve
- OMAFRA proposes to:
 - Adaptive management: support actions with evidence
 - Improve research and monitoring
 - Work in partnership with industry in leading change
 - Target action with greatest potential and areas at highest risk
 - Minimize burden to agricultural sector, while delivering results on phosphorus loading
 - Multi-barrier, whole-farm approach to BMP adoption
- Specific potential actions were proposed across four areas:
 - Awareness, education and planning
 - Stewardship funding
 - Policy
 - Research, information and performance management
- Industry input and leadership is key across all these areas
- Timeline:
 - September: Ag Sector Working Group input
 - October: Great Lakes Public Forum
 - October: Ag Sector Working Group input
 - Spring 2017: proposed release of draft Action Plan for formal consultation
 - February 2018: Deadline for release of Canada-Ontario Action Plan for Lake Erie

Q&A Summary:

- Is there a working group on water management?
 - We are looking internally at drainage policy
 - Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative update from Don McCabe
 - Received Agriculture Adaptation Council approval to establish linkages to weigh into drainage side
 - Looking at \$10K in-kind from 10 different organizations
 - Work with ECCC to turn water monitoring stations back on

Straw Dog Discussion and Feedback

Do you have any comments on the “what we heard”?

- Target to highest risk but also cost-benefit to society and farms should be considered
- Highest benefit (in addition to highest risk) should also be considered
- Add to highest risk:
 - Greatest benefit
 - Award innovation
 - Control cost (implement most cost-effective)

What is your initial response to the proposed actions? (what do you agree/disagree with? What is missing? Anything you want to expand upon?)

- Group 1:
 - Environmental Farm Plan is limited in usefulness
 - Farmland Health Check-Up is moving in the right direction because it's customized
 - We should see a winter spreading regulation
 - The more we can have integrated approaches and customized approaches where they actually get some advice, the better
 - Should be working with the local stewardship councils because they have experience
 - A lot of skill and expertise built up in source water protection committees
 - Work with the livestock sector on expanding the nutrient management approach
 - Build organic matter and resilient soils
 - Cover crops are not practical in every cropping system
 - Soil erosion is public enemy number one
 - Yes, we need adequate funding
 - Risk Insurance for cover crops sounds like a good idea
 - Research new cover crops
 - More research on when and where BMPs work
 - Discovery Farms type program: a few farms that are monitored intensively over years
 - How do we build better BMPs over time?

- Maybe we should have top three things to do rather than a laundry list: need for framework to prioritize activities
- Your assumptions are only as good as the quality of the data you start with: what is the ongoing strategy to improve the data? Flesh out what adaptive management means
- Group 2:
 - Missing:
 - Cost-effectiveness
 - Logistical burden
 - Form of phosphorus loss (total versus dissolved)
 - Ongoing research
 - Like:
 - Digital elevation model
 - Risk assurance for cover crops (P reduction practices)
- Group 3:
 - Some actions are vague – need to be fleshed out
 - Award idea has value
 - Putting onus on manure brokers and not just producers
 - Encourage farmers to share information with each other
 - Develop a support system: “Cover Crops Anonymous”
 - How do we enable farmer support?
 - Boots on the ground: expand on Farm Health Check-Up model specific to each farm
 - What is the most meaningful action to take on their farm
 - There is so much conflicting information: have one trusted source
 - What programs are there for me?
 - Role for Certified Crop Advisors?
 - We like streamlining and harmonizing planning tools
 - Better data collection: plan what you need, how do you share the data
 - How do you measure performance? Say there is another large/high profile algal bloom in the coming years, we need to be able to demonstrate what we have been doing
 - We need to be able to get data from nutrient management plans
- Group 4:
 - Target highest risk, along with highest benefit
 - Incentive funding should be focused on innovation more than early adopters, and not on “bad actors”; highest kg reduction/\$
 - Need more LIDAR
 - Recognition e.g. award for innovation: but actual financial award
 - Ensure it’s fair and equitable to all
 - You could force implementation of a broad-stroke program to get a small reduction in phosphorus loss versus a targeted approach that would not waste as much money
 - Use a survey or some sort of information collection
 - There are many tools we are using already to collect data and do risk assessments

- Those can be used to inform where a BMP may be most effective
 - Adaptive management: move from qualitative to quantitative
- Group 5:
 - Like: streamlining existing planning tools, whole-farm approach
 - Do we have an appropriate (easy to use) phosphorus loss risk assessment tool?
 - Both funding and staffing will be an issue?
 - How do we get farmers on board?
 - Is there an acceptable level of phosphorus loss?
 - What is the target for an individual farm?
- Group 6:
 - No real surprises in what was seen: high level enough so as not to be shocking
 - Awareness and education will be key
 - If industry is going to be the leader, they need to have the opportunity to get some market demand for some of the initiatives
 - Let industry lead as much as possible
 - Digital Elevation Model sounds great: supports modeling at different levels
 - Harmonizing planning tools: this is a good idea. Perhaps Conservation Authority programs could be included: simplify local municipal/CA clean water program eligibility
 - New cost-share programs: this can be short-term, we would like long-term incentives
 - Soil tests should be funded
- Group 7:
 - 4Rs will require a new way of doing things
 - Precision agriculture is important and needs to be incentivized
 - The amount of improvement we have to make is relatively small but farmers don't know that and are afraid

Wrap-Up & Next Steps

- We would appreciate if you could engage folks in your organizations; we can help!
- Keep your eye out for discussions at the Great Lakes Forum in Toronto this October
- If you want to put something on paper and send it to us, it would be much appreciated
- The future may hold a brainstorming session with Conservation Authorities
- Reminder to consider a subgroup to give more direct input into the phosphorus reduction estimation activities
- Next meeting will be late October