

AGRICULTURE SECTOR WORKING GROUP – MEETING MINUTES

UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH ARBORETUM

MARCH 10, 2016

2:00 PM – 4:30 PM

Attachments

- Attendance sheet

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Introduction

Following introduction of the members of the working group, George McCaw, ministry co-chair of the group provided an over-view of the main objectives, reviewed the draft terms of reference and briefly discussed the need for an industry co-chair.

Over-view of Working Group

- Working Group is intended to be a discussion forum to provide advice to decision-makers in government and in farm organizations on potential actions to address phosphorous management in the Lake Erie basin, based on informed and science-based information.
- Future meetings will address specific issues and potential actions to address those issues, and will initially occur on a monthly basis.
- Membership is flexible, and each organization can put forward people of their choosing to participate.
- Current focus of the group is Lake Erie, and specifically the Central and Western Basins

- The working group is focused on agriculture, but similar work is being initiated in other sectors
- **Action Items / Decisions:**
 - Terms of Reference adopted as presented
 - Industry to discuss a co-chair – this occurred at the end of the meeting, and Bruce Kelly, Farm and Food Care Ontario was selected as the industry co-chair.

Presentations

Presentation 1: Lake Erie Nutrients – Towards a Lake Erie Domestic Action Plan (Cale Selby & Christine Brown)

Key points related to the presentation: The presentation generated a number of questions, and the following is a summary of the issues that were addressed.

- The total tonnes of phosphorous from non-point agricultural sources has not been calculated. We have seen a number of attempts trying to quantify these, and agriculture is always a significant contributor (it's never below 50%), and there is sufficient analysis to demonstrate we need to be a significant part of the solution.
- All sectors are looking at potential actions that can be taken. We are at the table with AAFC, ECCC, and MOECC, and they are all undertaking similar work towards the identification of actions in the sectors for which they're responsible.
- It will be absolutely essential that we can demonstrate that the sector is taking action now and that we are committed to making changes to improve the management of phosphorous, especially in the non-growing season. We have to look at how we model up what we can measure on the ground, to see results over time. For example, we will need to be able to demonstrate how effective 4Rs nutrient stewardship might be in managing the issue, and to do this we will need specific data (Note: Dr. Tom Bruulsema, International Plant Nutrition Institute reported that while they don't have any specific measurements as yet, there is a research project under way, which is in year 2 of a 5-year program. It is anticipated that the research could yield some results by 2019).
- To be able to convince farmers to undertake many of these practices we will need to have a good understanding of the economics to more readily talk to them about the return on investment. However, although we don't have numbers per se, interest among farmers is high, as the ability to get the same output with fewer inputs is an obvious cost-saving measure.
- There are a number of matters that will need to be addressed as part of a comprehensive solution, including winter spreading of manure, crop rotation, and drainage, including municipal drains.
- There are certain aspects that are beyond our control such as the weather, but we can explore actions that can improve agriculture's resiliency to climate change and extreme weather conditions.

Presentation 2: Highlights of Approaches in Key North American Jurisdictions (Beverly Alder)

Key points related to the presentation: The presentation generated a number of questions, and the following is a summary of the issues that were addressed.

- The Chesapeake Bay project is a good example of the challenge with the lag time between actions taken and measurable results in the natural environment. They are just now starting to see improvement in fish stocks in the Bay, and this is after 10 years of concerted effort.
- The people implementing the Chesapeake Bay project have also stressed that the social aspects of stewardship and the adoption of good practise is very important in promoting behavioural change, and shouldn't be ignored.
- OMAFRA maintains regular contact with key agencies and academic institutions in the U.S. to keep abreast of research and monitoring efforts, including performance measure development, and also has a substantial network of contacts through Annex 4 (Nutrients) under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.

Presentation 3: Responding to the Challenge – Helping Shape Agriculture's Response to Lake Erie Phosphorus Reduction Targets (Bruce Kelly)

- Presentations from the summer meetings are on Farm and Food Care Ontario's website.
- **Action Item:** Bruce Kelly to send link to Farm and Food Care's summer presentations.

Roundtable

- **Grain Farmers of Ontario:** GFO has been working with Fertilizer Canada, the Ontario Agri-Business Association (OABA), Certified Crop Advisors (CCAs) and OMAFRA on a 4R nutrient stewardship certification program
 - More details to follow this spring and summer
 - 8 research projects about movement and efficacy of BMPs presently underway
- **Action Item:** GFO to do a brief write-up of their different projects
- **Ontario Agri-Business Association:**
 - 4R program is intended to promote continuous improvement and sustainability, through an adaptive management approach
 - Developing a 4R specialty certification with CCAs, matching an initiative developed in U.S., with the intent of having an Ontario-specific 4R specialization
 - Program would identify and define certain 4R practices similarly to U.S. program
 - Third party certification is also being examined

- **Ontario Federation of Agriculture:**
 - 4Rs program is absolutely vital, and OFA is pleased to be a member of the steering committee
 - We need to recognize that we are not necessarily looking at reducing application of phosphorous, so much as reducing the loss from fields – improved management
 - Ontario’s Environmental Commissioner will be looking at phosphorous and we will need to be able to demonstrate that agriculture is doing its part, and be able to provide data to support that conclusion
 - Has signed a MOC with the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, and will be working collaboratively on the issue of drainage
 - Having successful discussions with Environmental Defence in the areas of land use and greenhouse gases
 - Is a member of the Great Lakes Guardian Council, which will meet on March 22, 2016
 - Supports the ministry’s soil strategy as we need good soil maps that are digitized

- **Dairy Farmers of Ontario:**
 - proAction program is currently being piloted
 - proAction initiative operates with six key modules. These modules are currently at different stages of development and implementation across the country
 - Dairy Farmers of Canada and members initiated the development of proAction to show how farmers responsibly produce milk - with proAction, farmers offer proof to customers that they work to ensure milk quality and safety, and to continually improve animal health and welfare as well as environmental stewardship.

- **Agriculture and Agri-food Canada:**
 - One size fits all is not going to work
 - Working with colleagues at OMAFRA to update the P index

- **Chicken Farmers of Ontario:**
 - Examining what we should be doing in the environment area beyond just what is required by legislation
 - 65% farmers in our area have indicated they have an Environmental Farm Plan

Discussion/Questions

- There was considerable discussion and interest related to the 4Rs nutrient stewardship program and there was agreement that this program should be discussed in more detail at a future meeting.
- There was some discussion concerning communications with the public and with members of the organizations at the table. It was stressed that communications / messaging needed to be consistent, and that this should be considered for a future meeting.
- **Action Item:** Invite FI and OABA to present the 4R program at a meeting in April or May