

AGRICULTURE SECTOR WORKING GROUP – MEETING MINUTES

July 12, 2016

1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

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Introduction/Updates

- OMAFRA is considering early actions based on what has been discussed to date
 - Cover crops: Initial meeting of GFO, OSCIA and OMAFRA staff. The question is: how do you get the message out to the farmers? GFO membership would like to see more GLASI-like programing. In the next GF magazine, there will be a postcard with information and contacts, as well as an article in the September issue. The group will further discuss what the social barriers to adoption are and work together to develop an outreach and persuasion campaign. They may be able to get some benchmarking data from GFO members in terms of current adoption.
 - Winter spreading: The discussion is preliminary, but a working group has been established. The purpose is to focus on communication and awareness, at least initially. Proposed actions under discussion include: a communications campaign, strategies to reach hard-to-reach producers, and developing a more comprehensive complaints response protocol. Complaint situations are opportunities to learn.
 - MOECC and OMAFRA have been discussing possible regulatory change on spreading of nutrients in the non-growing season
- May 10th meeting of farm leaders with the OMAFRA Minister: “Grow Ontario Together.” Members of this group met with Minister Leal (OMAFRA) and Minister Murray (MOECC) to let government know that industry is supportive of taking positive steps forward. The Ministers seem to be pleased with efforts so far.
- Ontario Pork held 4 regional meetings with their members to talk about phosphorus best practices as well as other issues. OMAFRA staff and scientists from the University of Guelph made presentations to inform discussion on policy issues such as nutrient management planning and strategies and winter spreading.

- Dairy Farmers of Ontario board meeting: Gabe Ferguson and George McCaw made a presentation; a similar presentation will be held at a Chicken Farmers meeting soon
 - OMAFRA's offer still stands if any organization wants to host a presentation
- MOECC and ECCC will be initiating multi-sector stakeholder group consultations to inform the domestic action planning efforts for Lake Erie starting tomorrow, including Conservation Authorities, Indigenous and Metis partners, municipalities, and others.
 - Does not include agriculture, which is happening through this working group and other ongoing efforts
- Farm & Food Care bus tour last weekend: summary available. 55 people on the bus, about 100 people involved. The tour visited Truly Green Farms in Chatham, Blake Vince's farm in Merlin, and McLean Conservation Lands in Rondeau. Lunch included presentations by farmers and agri-business.
 - General concerns: It was not necessarily understood that we were taking government people around. There were concerns about messages on the tour around farmers' commitments to cover crops. Views were communicated that are not always shared by other farmers. So we should have more up-front discussions when it comes to these politically sensitive issues

Presentation 1: Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative/OFA Project on Water Management & Drainage (Nicola Crawhall)

Key Points:

- Scope: improving water management at the *transportation* of nutrients
- Extension work will be aimed at two scales: farm level and communal drainage system level. The group will monitor progress and report publicly on results
- Funding and recognition programs will be established to offer incentives to undertake improvements
- Three watersheds were identified based on elevated levels of phosphorus and opportunity to use existing monitoring instrumentation to establish baseline, some of which overlap with the GLASI priority subwatersheds
- A lot of work remains to be done before we go out and talk to people. Proposed resources include a project manager and two drainage stewardship coordinators.
- The group may develop a website with "portal" interactive community and information on BMP

Q&A and Comments Summary:

- Best practices recommendations are currently being prepared by drainage experts. We especially need to do more work on the effect of concentrated weather events
- We expect some of the money will come from the drainage fees. We also want money coming in from the outside to look at treatment at the end-of-pipe.

- The group should consider aligning with existing programs. How do we package all these things together?
- There needs to be more conscious effort for all organizations to be included in the planning and implementation of this.
- Our messaging needs to be compelling because the program is entirely voluntary.
- The Drainage Act as it stands would allow for the kinds of activities the program is proposing.

Presentation 2: Drainage and Phosphorus (Sid Vander Veen)

Key Points:

- Water management and drainage is part of the answer, not the whole answer
- Runoff vs. drainage: runoff is over land surface. Runoff phosphorus is mostly attached to soil particles, while drainage phosphorus is mostly dissolved.
- Broad areas of drainage:
 - Field drainage: Agricultural Tile Drainage Act, but generally not much oversight
 - Natural watercourses: common law
 - Municipal drainage: Drainage Act
- Education: Best Management Practices and Environmental Farm Plan have been ongoing to raise awareness of improved drainage options
- Incentives: Agricultural Drainage Infrastructure Program, Tile Loan Program, Great Lakes Agricultural Stewardship Initiative (GLASI), Conservation Land Tax Incentive Program all offer forms of incentives that can support innovative drainage works that provide environmental benefit
- Benefits of managing runoff include reducing erosion, loadings and adverse effects of large storm events. It can also help profitability (e.g. better use of nutrients, soil health).
- A holistic solution requires design across the watershed, not ad hoc individual actions.

Q&A Summary:

- What are the opportunities within the context of drainage design once the phosphorus is in the channel? Some ideas are: constructed wetlands, sediment basins, buffer strips.
- We need to think about and improve how we manage surface inlets.

Presentation 3: Ohio's Collaborative Implementation Plan (Cale Selby)

Key Points:

- Collaborative Agreement signed by OH, MI, and ON committing to 40% reduction in P in the western basin by 2025

- MI Plan released this January and OH released draft plan released this June
- Ontario's plan will be the domestic action plan
- The OH Plan outlines areas of responsibility/accountability for all agencies and partners
- 5 key principles: implementation, verification, documentation, adaptability, accountability
- Plan has two timelines: the first 12 months (focused on planning) and 12-36 months (implementation)
- Specific actions for agriculture focus on cost incentives, education and enforcement of fertilizer and manure application restrictions, development of Farm Stewardship Certification, and the development of new drainage-related programs
- The Plan identifies 24 priority watersheds, including 12 new HUC12 watersheds through extensive modeling
 - Within the priority watersheds, the Plan identifies 4 implementation groups that exemplify similar land use and soil characteristics
- Link to the Plan: epa.ohio.gov/Portals/33/documents/WLEBCollaborative.pdf

Q&A Summary:

- Do we know what MI is doing on winter spreading? Currently, winter spreading is discouraged in Michigan (although not prohibited by law). The government recommends conservation practices, including vegetative buffers between surface waters and fields used for winter manure applications, and residue cover. Michigan made changes to the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit (required for Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations – CAFOs) last year to minimize potential runoff from winter spreading. Under the permit, CAFOs are only allowed to spread manure on frozen or snow covered grounds in limited circumstances (they have to do a field by field assessment and can only surface apply on frozen or snow covered ground if the Manure Application Risk Index is low).
- Can you speak to the funding involved? They are intending to continue funding their ongoing programs. In addition, as part of Plan activities, they will be developing a proposal for additional funding. Certainly, a lot of money has been allocated to the Great Lakes on the U.S. side, though of course they are the largest contributor

Breakout Discussion

What should we do differently to reduce the movement of phosphorus from field to lake?

Key points from the report-back:

- Group 1:
 - 4Rs: application of crop nutrients; standardize BMPs and creating a process for documenting them. Measure amount of acres under 4Rs
 - Implementation of cover crops potentially under GLASI. Extended coverage under insurance
 - Cross-compliance to require 4Rs or other practices, similar to EFP.

- Drainage: managed wetlands, voluntary provision of lands, green infrastructure funding, buffer strips
- Ban winter spreading on frozen and snow-covered ground. Programs to support e.g. storage.
- Apply before soil is saturated
- Group 2 (focussed on drainage)
 - Improvements within existing tiled fields: install header tiles to reduce erosion
 - Good housekeeping: where are your tile outlets? Markers. OFA and Cities Initiative may consider finding a private contractor to fund markers (with their logo on it)
 - Wetlands/ponds to collect tile water
 - Managing sediments from road culverts, pumping stations, dams, etc.
 - Buffer strips: mandatory 1.5 – 3m to stabilize banks
 - ALUS-type concept to pay for loss of land annually
 - Naturalize stream channels: more meandering and natural features to slow water flow
 - Do more under the Drainage Act: protect existing features when ownership changes
 - Increase field tile drainage to allow soil to act as water retention area (minimize overland flow) as long as surface inlets are minimized.
- Group 3:
 - Increase support of the basics: education of the 4Rs
 - Watershed: naturalize systems in creeks to retain P
 - Stabilize ditch and streambanks
 - Drainage: wetlands, improved incentives and policy linked to environmental and productivity outcomes
 - Can we trap P? No, not very well, because of the power with which the water comes through during the non-growing season
 - We need to understand the systems well in order to know how to prioritize in the landscape
 - All farms in areas need to participate
- Group 4:
 - Prioritizing geographies
 - Buffer setbacks in high risk areas, though they may be ineffective in some places at reducing P loss and we may not need them anywhere
 - Identifying BMPs
 - Social norms: level playing field
 - Need for greater collaboration from all players
 - Improved Information sharing
 - High-volume storms: our drains can't handle this
 - Control drainage should be explored more
 - Filters at the end of drains
 - Concerns about costs for retrofitting drainage

Next Steps

- Next step: develop a straw dog to discuss and review for the next meeting ... How do we target our limited resources more effectively?
- Plan for middle of September for our next meeting – will send out doddle poll
- Feel free to run ideas and information past George or Cale in the meantime. Documentation of proposals would be wonderful
- OMAFRA may send out an update report on activities