

AGRICULTURE SECTOR WORKING GROUP – MEETING MINUTES

October 24, 2016 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

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Introduction/Updates

- Main objective: stimulate additional ideas, discussion and input
- According to our Terms of Reference, we are well on track:
 - Provide a forum to share information
 - Provide input into the Lake Erie Domestic Action Plan
 - Form technical sub-committees
 - Right time group
 - Evidence/research group
 - Cover crops group
- Thank you for taking a leadership role within your organization on this issue

Updates

- MOECC published the EBR posting, which has been sent out as part of the appointment. The deadline for submissions is November 20th
 - Please submit your comments. We also encourage you to share your comments with us directly as you post to the EBR because the turn-around from comments closing to draft Domestic Action Plan due date in December is quite fast
- George has presented to preliminary policy options deck to OFA and overall feedback was positive.
- We have set up a date for a brainstorming session with Conservation Authorities in November
- Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities/OFA Initiative update:
 - We received conditional funding to go ahead with the project
 - The condition is to get additional funding and participation from other groups. We have till December 1st, 2016 to confirm that we have our partners. So, you will be hearing from us soon on contributions – both monetary and sitting on the board

- Scope of project: second phase of a five- to seven-year project
 - Develop board of directors
 - Background literature review of Best Management Practices on the farm, especially mitigating phosphorus during non-growing season and high-intensity storms
- Cover crops group update:
 - The group met in early September to talk about long-term goals and strategies
 - We will be hiring University of Guelph (Ridgetown) to develop long-term engagement strategies

Expectations for the DAP – ENGO Perspective

Main Points:

- Freshwater Future is a U.S. based NGO, with an office in Toronto
 - Working inside a “Lake Erie Collective” of ENGOs, including two Canadian groups: Canadian Freshwater Alliance and Environmental Defence
- Working together by:
 - Sharing information and ideas
 - Strategy development and implementation
 - Build support for action –education and outreach
 - Define the type of change we want to see
 - Sharing resources and expertise. For example, we apply for funding together.
 - Tracking success: Are we moving the dial regionally?
- From the NGO perspective, the issue is complicated and multi-faceted. The players are not all on the same page on how exactly to move forward. Because of that, there is a need to come together and have conversations, like you are doing in your forums, and we are doing in our forums.
- We need solutions across different land uses and across political boundaries in the long term
- Purpose of the Domestic Action Plan (DAP) Expectations Document:
 - Proactive influence on what should be in the DAP
 - Communication tool for public agencies and education tool for stakeholders
 - Will be used as a tool to evaluate draft DAPs as they are released
- We based our analysis on the Table of Contents from the DAP, which we obtained about a year ago from government agencies
- What is in our document:
 - A suballocation model: setting “mini” phosphorus targets in priority subwatersheds. We recognize there is probably not enough information to take this approach right now, but DAPs could outline an approach for acquiring this data. This does not necessarily mean 40% reduction for each subwatershed.
 - Tracking, adaptive management and reporting: we like the idea of trigger mechanisms, and we want annual progress reports to support adaptive management

- Tactics to meet targets: should be proportional to contributing sources. Agriculture is a significant part. Tactics need to be as specific as possible (e.g. budgets) as an important part of accountability.
- Key take-aways:
 - DAP need to synthesize existing programs and policies
 - We need to be strategic in leveraging existing capacity
 - Action needs to come from public and private sectors
 - DAP should include timelines, roles and responsibilities, success measures, and funding needs

Q&A Summary:

- Are there any jurisdictions you are worried about?
 - Indiana is a big gap. They didn't sign on to the Collaborative Agreement. We also don't have strong relationships there, but we at least have the big players around the table. When you look at contributions, Ohio is the biggest player. Are there things that Ontario can do to leverage further action in Ohio?
- How do you see Ontario's role?
 - Ontario farmers have done a lot. There is a history of things like the Nutrient Management Act. There are still major gaps. Ohio and Michigan are putting much more funding into to their Best Management Practices, and they have much more extensive monitoring. In some ways, Ontario is doing better, and in other ways Ohio is doing better.
 - It would be good to do a comparative policy analysis of Ontario vs. Michigan and Ohio
- Question for OMAFRA: will our efforts to move to a reduction actually be measures or modelled?
 - It will likely be a combination of both.
 - There are information gaps right now in terms of what is happening at a subwatershed level.
 - We are progressing on a number of fronts:
 - What is happening on the land? BMP efficacy and level of adoption
 - Increase monitoring at subwatershed level
 - Build better watershed models
 - Ultimately for agriculture we need to be able to tell a strong story of what is happening on the land, and then work with our colleagues to understand how that translates to the water
- The cost of monitoring does not decrease with smaller watersheds. Your thinking should include the cost of what you are proposing.
 - We would love to work with some people who could help us estimate costs
 - We acknowledge we are asking for the ideal and will work from there.
- You mentioned major gaps in Ontario, could you articulate those? Knowing what gaps are being talked about is important to us. This is a good opportunity to all come together around outcomes.
 - There is still application of manure on frozen or snow covered ground. We see that as a gap. What is the best way to prevent that from happening.
 - Thinking about the water in your own backyard, flowing through streams and ditches, is also important.

Grow Ontario Together Paper

Main Points:

- The Grow Ontario Together collective is a collaboration between a number of commodity groups across the province, as well as a number of other groups.
 - This sector has historically worked in silos, but it's an agriculture issue.
 - The agriculture sector will live up to its responsibility and take a leadership role. Farmers do care about healthy soils and clean water at a personal, community and business level.
- The paper proposes a policy framework, around 4 principles:
 - Build in existing monitoring and research
 - Clear and proportional targets
 - Cost/benefit analysis is critical
 - Adaptive management
- Six strategies: adaptive management; watershed approach; stewardship and community action; source-specific actions; monitoring and compliance; research, modeling and innovation
- Includes short-, intermediate- and long-term goals
- Growing consensus on adaptive management approach and ongoing research plus modeling
 - Bias towards actions that support outcomes based on our best available data
- Greenhouse actions overview
 - Since 2011, OGVG, FCO, MOECC and OMAFRA has been working together through the Ontario Greenhouse Environmental Strategy group to implement their share vision
 - Over 90% of the acreage represented by OGVG recirculates
 - Since 2010, Ontario's greenhouse farmers have reduce their fertilizer consumption by 58% on a per acre basis
 - OGVG outreach: 44% of the greenhouse acreage in the Lake Erie priority watershed has been directly contacted
 - In addition, also working on: storm water compliance (55 applications started), educational materials, adaptive management/sampling feedback, good news stories (with Farm & Food Care), contingency planning, and sanitary sewer expansion (Kingsville and Leamington)
- Livestock actions overview
 - The high-level theme is let's find a way to build on existing strengths: regulated sector under the Nutrient Management Act. There are opportunities to build on this. There are thousands of farms already doing nutrient planning on an annual basis.
 - Our response to the DAP should be framed under the Nutrient Management Act approach
 - Nutrient Management is our societal insurance tool. It would be inconsistent for government to not try to find a way to build on that
 - There are some gaps currently within the existing policy: e.g. application on frozen and snow-covered ground
 - Producer outreach – awareness sessions on Great Lakes
 - We've put dollars towards research: e.g. how can we reduce phosphorus in the manure through precipitating out phosphorus.

- Compliance: looking to utilize existing strong legislative and regulatory framework
 - Familiarity
 - Public service infrastructure
 - Adaptive management on the compliance side

Comments:

- We will need to do some modeling. But some models are not very good. They need investment to be improved. So we should focus on asking for “credible modeling.”
- We appreciate the Growing Ontario Together group putting some ideas on paper. It helps to give concrete ideas for the draft Domestic Action Plan.

Update from BMP Evidence/Research Sub-Committee

Main Points:

- A big theme from our meetings so far has been that data and evidence should drive our actions. An industry-government partnership needs to include a common understanding of the evidence
- Some expertise from this group has joined the sub-committee. However, we continue to welcome any additional interest and members
- The sub-committee has had its first meeting
 - We talked about our short and long-term focus. Initially, we will focus on strengthening our evidence base to inform the immediate need for research and monitoring priorities to go into the Domestic Action Plan
 - We had a good discussion on developing risk and decision-making support tools in the long term, as well as field-scale evidence
- We will strengthen the work done on phosphorus reduction estimates for different Best Management Practices
 - Strengthen existing analysis and methodology, and tightening the ranges of estimates
 - Analyze additional Best Management Practices
- There is a meeting next week amongst all the DAP agencies on what elements we need to build into progress tracking on land and in the water
 - We will report back to this group on meeting outcomes

Q&A Summary

- Will we have any formal process on deciding on our next round of Best Management Practices?
 - Members from the team can bring it back to their own membership
 - Internal thinking within OMAFRA and AAFC
 - Will bring these discussions back to the Ag Sector Working Group at the next meeting

EBR Posting & Next Steps

- EBR Registry Number: 0128760. Link: <https://www.ebr.gov.on.ca/ERS-WEB-External/displaynoticecontent.do?noticeId=MTMwMjM2&statusId=MTk3MzY5&language=en>
 - Submit your comments through the comment button, email, or by mail
- On October 6, MOECC posted a notice on the EBR for public input. It is open till Nov. 20th
 - Signaling to the public and stakeholders that we are interested in what you have to say
- One of the items in the posting is an affirmation of the binational target as the target that will be used by Ontario
- Actions are organized by point source, non-point source, agriculture, and natural heritage actions
 - Point sources (about 10-15% of loads):
 - Lower the discharges for specific sewage treatment plants
 - Upgrade capacity to tertiary level of treatment for these plants
 - Optimize sewage treatment
 - Reductions in the greenhouse sector, acknowledging work already done
 - Non-agricultural non-point sources (about 5% of loads)
 - Promote green infrastructure and low-impact development
 - Develop green standards
 - Enhance and clarify regional requirements for septic systems
 - Update policy framework for managing hauled sewage
 - Agricultural sources (a significant contributor, as it accounts for about 75% of Lake Erie Basin land use):
 - Agricultural soil conservation strategy development
 - Continue to work on 4Rs
 - Considering tighter restrictions on spreading manure on frozen and snow-covered ground
 - Promoting cover crops
 - Supporting further adoption of Best Management Practices
 - Existing efforts under programs like the Great Lakes Agricultural Stewardship Initiative (GLASI)
 - LiDAR work to develop a digital elevation model for the Lake Erie Basin
 - Natural heritage: reduce net loss of wetlands, and wetland rehabilitation and restoration
- The posting also includes items on enhanced monitoring, reporting, and annual updates

Q&A Summary

- You mentioned that Minister Murray announced the draft Domestic Action Plan will be released in December. What will and will not be included in this draft Plan?
 - It will be a lot of background information, as well as a suite of actions
 - There will still be some gaps, which we anticipate to be things like performance measurement, governance and reporting

Wrap-Up & Next Steps

- In mid-November, we will have a brain storming session with Conservation Authorities
- Our sub-committees will continue to meet
 - We welcome input on the research and monitoring priorities for the Domestic Action Plan
- Next group meeting: January 2017
 - We may want to set up some additional sub-committees to flesh out the ideas discussed so far by the larger group
 - We will take another stab at a newsletter. We may also discuss alternate methods for having this discussion.