

Agriculture Sector Working Group Terms of Reference

Overview:

Lake Erie is exhibiting symptoms of extreme stress from an excess of phosphorus such as algal blooms which threaten drinking water quality, fish populations, beach quality, coastal recreation and the overall health of Lake Erie. Current efforts are insufficient – 2015 saw the largest algae bloom in history.

Ontario is committed to taking action to address excess levels of nutrients and reduce the frequency of algal blooms to improve and protect the overall health of Lake Erie. As such, Ontario has been actively participating in the binational process under the Canada-U.S. Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA) to establish phosphorus load reduction targets for Lake Erie by 2016 and a Domestic Action Plan (DAP) for Ontario by 2018. Ontario has also recently signed the Western Basin of Lake Erie Collaborative Agreement with the states of Michigan and Ohio. In this context, Ontario may decide to take early action before February 2018.

Agriculture in the Lake Erie basin is a significant contributor of phosphorus to the lake. Modern agricultural production practices, further complicated by climate change, are resulting in runoff from farm fields and other agricultural operations. This is contributing to phosphorus levels in Lake Erie, which are also compounded by other factors such as invasive species and changing lake dynamics. It is critical that the agriculture sector is fully engaged in the development of solutions and is committed to taking action to reduce the loss of phosphorus from agricultural sources. The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) is looking for leadership of key organizations to champion the sector's role in reducing loadings and achieving the targets that have been established under the GLWQA.

Purpose:

- The Agriculture Sector Working Group is being assembled to provide ongoing input to the development, engagement and implementation of agriculture actions for the Domestic Action Plan.
- These industry-government meetings will provide a forum to exchange information, provide advice on potential actions by the agriculture community and government to reduce phosphorus entering Lake Erie.
- The working group member would be expected to provide a leadership role within your organization on this issue, both with decision-makers and the full membership.
- Working group members would be asked to provide advice on:
 - potential actions for the agriculture sector, including the identification and assessment of such actions; and
 - how to measure the progress being made by sectors in managing nutrient run-off from agricultural operations and efforts.
- Subjects for discussion may include, but are not limited to agricultural best management practices, nutrient management, drainage, stewardship programs,

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4Rs, climate change and adaption, research and monitoring, costs, education and awareness, and effective methods for achieving adoption of practices.

- Focus of working group initially will be on sharing information/analysis before moving to policy options and eventually to implementation and measurement/assessment.

Meetings:

- Every effort will be made to send out meeting invitations and draft agenda 5 days in advance of meeting dates.
- Most face-to-face meetings would be held in the City of Guelph as many organizations are either located in the City, or are within close proximity to the City.

Members:

The working group will be co-chaired by Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and one representative selected by industry. The following organizations are members of the working group:

- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
- Beef Farmers of Ontario
- Farm and Food Care Ontario
- Chicken Farmers of Ontario
- Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario
- Dairy Farmers of Ontario
- Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario
- Egg Farmers of Ontario
- Grain Farmers of Ontario
- Innovative Farmers of Ontario Association
- Ontario Agri Business Association
- Ontario Federation of Agriculture
- Ontario Certified Crop Advisor Association
- Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers
- Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers
- Ontario Pork
- Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency
- Ontario Processing Vegetable Growers
- Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association
- Upper Thames River Conservation Authority
- Grand River Conservation Authority
- Essex Region Conservation Authority
- Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority
- St. Clair Region Conservation Authority
- Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (observer)

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Working Group Member Roles and Responsibilities

1. Members will serve as a vehicle to identify possible actions and opportunities related to the purpose and to act as a communications link between organizations.
2. Members shall address broad interests and issues that will advance the development of DAP and any early action.
3. Each Working Group member is expected to:
 - Support or continue the Working Group’s work between meetings, as needed
 - Share information with other Working Group members and provide guidance and advice as needed
 - Work within their organizations to attempt to reach consensus
4. The working group member would be expected to provide leadership within their organization on this issue, both with decision-makers and the full membership.
5. Members may not act as official spokespersons for the Working Group.
6. Members may publicly discuss matters noted in Working Group meeting minutes, which will serve as the official written record of the Working Group’s work.
7. Each organization will be responsible for covering any costs/expenses related to their member’s participation.
8. Work of the Working Group (e.g. reports, advice) that is in draft form shall not be shared beyond the Working Group.
9. The Working Group may establish technical subgroups, as needed, which could consist of appropriate knowledgeable individuals to address specific tasks or knowledge gaps.

B. Co-Chair

1. The role of the meeting co-chairs is to:
 - preside over meetings
 - preserve order and decide all questions of order
 - responsible for developing agenda and minutes
 - assign other roles to Working Group members, as appropriate

D. Provincial Government Decisions

1. The Working Group may be asked to provide advice on provincial and/or federal programs, policies or initiatives that could be implemented and/or amended to support the actions proposed, but it should be recognized by the members of this group, that any decisions concerning government programs, policies or initiatives, are solely the purview of the respective government and must follow established processes for consideration.
2. Individual organizations that are represented on the Working Group may form collaborative partnerships on projects of mutual interest relevant to the work of the

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Working Group. The potential for these collaborations may be discussed at the working group; however, any decisions would need to be made within each organization.

Secretariat

- OMAFRA will be providing secretariat services to the Agriculture Sector Working Group.
- The role of the Secretariat includes: scheduling and coordinating logistics for meetings, coordinating an agenda for each meeting, and preparing and circulating meeting minutes and facilitating communication between meetings. Meeting summaries will not attribute comments to specific individuals, unless they wish otherwise. Ministry staff could be asked to provide technical expertise to the Working Group as needed.