



**ECOLOGICAL FARMERS  
ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO**

**STRATEGIC PLAN  
2020 - 2025**

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## Executive Summary

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**T**he Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario was founded in 1979 by innovative and forward-looking farmers at the cutting edge of developing ecological farming practices.

Now, more than forty years later, many of these practices are firmly in the mainstream. It is now widely accepted, both within the farming community and among the general public, that ecological farming practices are essential to combatting the climate crisis, and to ensuring that we have abundant, healthy and nutritious food, clean water, biodiverse landscapes and better livelihoods for farmers.

The growing recognition of the importance of ecological agriculture has coincided with an increase in the size, capacity and organizational health of EFAO. Our organization has never been in better shape. We have diverse and stable sources of funding. The range and quality of our programming and services continues to expand. Our membership has grown by over 35 per cent in the last year. And because we have farmers who can speak knowledgeably about the need for ecological and regenerative farming practices, staff who have a deep understanding of agricultural science, decades of experience in farmer-to-farmer training and more recent expertise in farmer-led research, we have become a trusted voice for ecological agriculture and innovative farming programs in Ontario and across the country.

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*The strategic impact of this plan will be to double the number of ecological farmers and acres under ecological management by 2025.*

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EFAO is a strong and growing organization, but we still have a very long way to go to realize our vision of an Ontario where thriving ecological farms are the foundation of our food system, and where agriculture protects our resources, increases biodiversity, mitigates climate change, and cultivates resilient, diverse, equitable communities.. Ecological farms still represent a tiny fraction of the agricultural landscape. Soil health continues to degrade across the province. Systemic racism and inequality prevail. The monumental environmental damage caused by agriculture will take decades to undo.

This five-year Strategic Plan will help guide our organization as we build on past successes, and as we confront the daunting challenges of the future. The strategic impact of this plan

will be to double the number of ecological farmers and acres under ecological management by 2025.

To achieve this ambitious goal, EFAO must move beyond our traditional focus on capacity building and education for our member farmers, and work to create the conditions for broader adoption of ecological practices. We will therefore focus on three **Strategic Outcomes**:

- **Support EFAO members to run profitable, resilient ecological farms;**
- **Broaden adoption of ecological agriculture among other farmers; and**
- **Achieve provincial and federal policies that support ecological agriculture.**

These outcomes will result from five Strategic Activities, some of which EFAO has been delivering for decades, and some that are new for the organization:

1. Education
2. Research
3. Outreach
4. Incentives
5. Policy

Together, these strategic impacts, outcomes and activities provide a high-level strategy for the next five years of EFAO's growth and development. This strategy will be supported by strong Financial and Human Resources Plans, and a commitment to taking action on anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusion in our work. A robust and comprehensive Evaluation Strategy will ensure that our programs and activities are leading to the impacts and objectives we have identified, and allow us to make continual improvement in our program delivery.

Figure 1 offers a visual representation of the Strategic Plan and Figures 2 and 3 provide an overview of current EFAO programs and activities. This Strategic Plan is a living document that will be reviewed and adapted on an annual basis.

This Strategic Plan will help EFAO to make meaningful change at a large scale. The scale and urgency of the threat to our climate, environment and society demands that we act quickly and boldly. We know that our staff, board, donors and member farmers are ready for such bold action. Now is the time for transformative change.

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2025



## EDUCATION

Events and resources for farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing



### Vision

We envision an Ontario where thriving ecological farms are the foundation of our food system, and where agriculture protects our resources, increases biodiversity, mitigates climate change, and cultivates resilient, diverse, equitable communities.

### Mission

EFAO supports farmers to build resilient ecological farms and grow a strong knowledge sharing community.

## OUTREACH

Promoting ecological agriculture in the wider farming community



## ACTIVITIES

## OUTCOMES

## IMPACTS 2025

**2x** the number of farmers practicing ecological agriculture  
**2x** the number of acres under ecological agriculture

Support EFAO members to run profitable, resilient ecological farms  
*Scaling deep*



Broaden adoption of ecological agriculture among other farmers  
*Scaling out*



Achieve provincial and federal policies that support ecological agriculture  
*Scaling up*



## RESEARCH

Farmer-led research as a tool for innovation and adoption



## POLICY

Advocating for government policies and programs



## INCENTIVES

Start-up grants for new farmers and payments for ecological practices



2020

2025



Figure 1: Strategic Plan 2020-2025

# EFAO PROGRAMS & ACTIVITIES 2020-2025

## Vision

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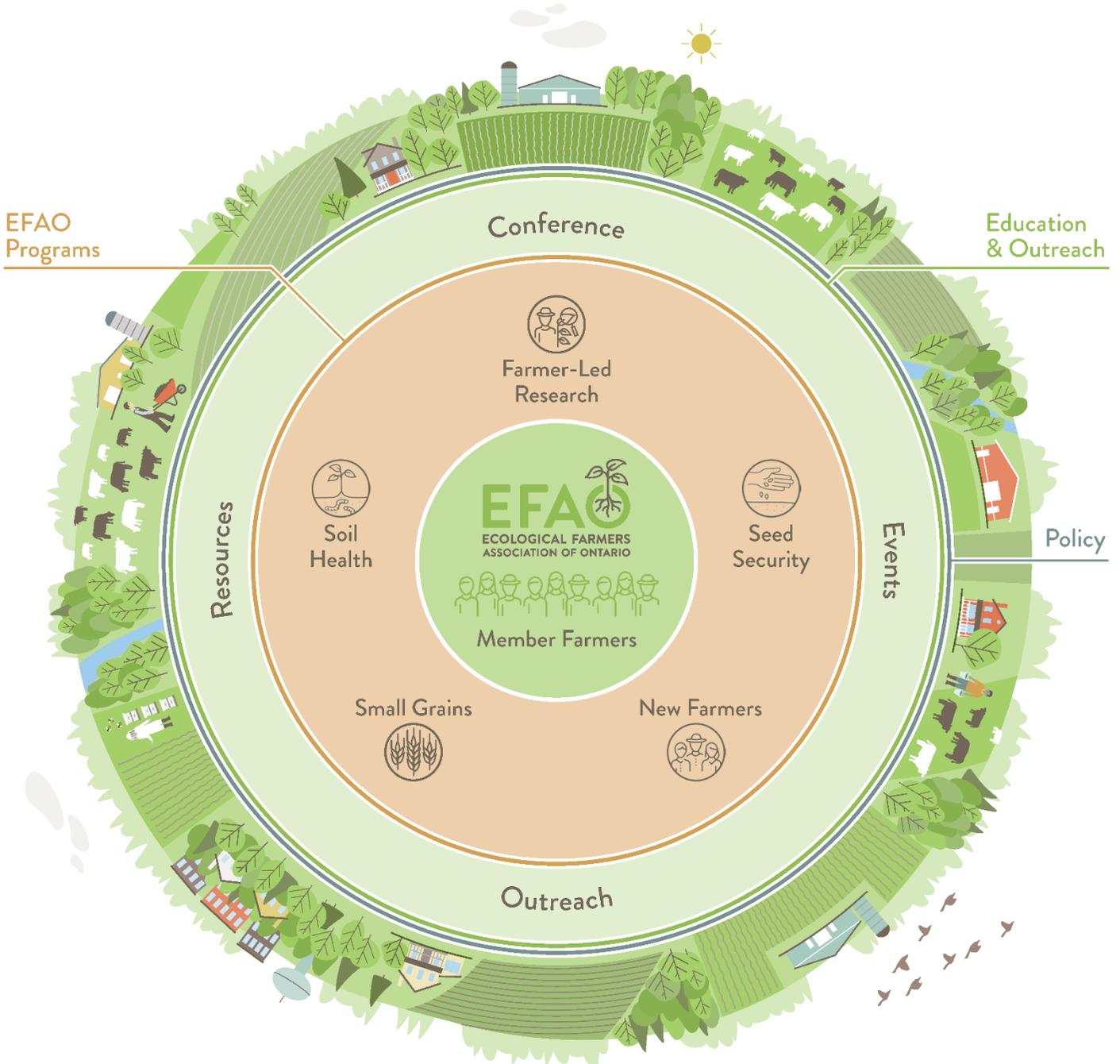


Figure 2: EFAO Programs & Activities 2020-2025

## Programs

All programs include a strong farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing component.



**Farmer-Led Research:** This program helps farmers answer their most challenging questions by providing technical and financial support for on-farm research.



**New Farmers:** This program offers training, mentorship and start-up grants to new and aspiring ecological farmers.



**Seed Security:** The Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security (BFICSS) is a national program advancing on-farm seed production work through education and on-farm research. EFAO is proud to host the BFICSS in Ontario.



**Small Grains:** This program supports farmers to diversify their crop rotation with a small grain and legume cover crop, by providing per acre payments combined with educational and peer support.



**Soil Health:** This program helps farmers improve their soil health management by providing comprehensive soil testing combined with educational and peer support.

## Education & Outreach

These farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing and community building opportunities are woven into all of the above programs.

**Events:** These include field days, workshops, meet-ups and webinars.

**Resources:** These include a quarterly print publication, farmer-to-farmer Advisory Service, and online Community Forum.

**Annual Conference:** This annual event draws farmers and supporters across the food system for four days of intensive learning, networking and celebration.

**Outreach:** EFAO promotes ecological agriculture across Ontario through the website, email lists, traditional and social media, staff outreach, attending trade shows, and supporting experienced member-farmers as educators and advocates.

## Policy

EFAO is a founding member of Farmers for Climate Solutions (FCS), a national campaign to promote climate-friendly agricultural policies at both the federal and provincial levels.

### Figure 3: EFAO Programs & Activities Ctd.

# Strategic Activities

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## Strategic Activity 1: Education

### Overview

Providing opportunities for farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing, and the community building that results, has been at the heart of EFAO's work for the past forty years. We know that farmers learn best from other farmers. We also see clearly that fostering a strong community of ecological farmers helps individual farms become more resilient.

One of the most significant barriers farmers face in adopting ecological practices is a lack of knowledge and support. Until the 1980s, extension or agrology services in Canada were publicly delivered. Since then, however, they have been largely defunded, leaving a void predominantly filled by private industry. These seed, crop and input advisors have private interests, and information shared tends to be biased towards practices that favour their products. Farmers' most trusted source of information is other farmers; and farmer-to-farmer training programs, such as those offered by EFAO, are critical to providing farmers with trusted and practical information.

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*A farmer's most trusted source of information is other farmers.*

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Throughout the year EFAO offers a wide variety of educational events that are led by experienced farmers (many EFAO members), and are open to all, making them a great way to introduce farmers to ecological agriculture and EFAO. Events include field days, workshops, meet-ups and webinars on a broad range of topics for farmers of all scales, types and levels of experience. EFAO's educational calendar culminates with an annual conference that takes place in early December each year. Between 2013 and 2018, EFAO facilitated 5,640 farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchanges through five conferences, 93 workshops, and a variety of other events.

EFAO also offers a host of other resources, including its quarterly print publication Ecological Farming in Ontario, a farmer-to-farmer Advisory Service, an online Resource Library, and an online Community Forum. Many of these resources are the benefits of membership.

Key to the success of EFAO's educational programming are the partnerships that fuel and support them. EFAO excels at finding creative ways of working with other organizations to offer high caliber events that meet the various needs of Ontario farmers as they adopt and improve ecological practices on their farms.

Deepening and expanding EFAO's educational offerings will support members in running profitable, resilient farms. It will also help broaden adoption of ecological agriculture among other farmers, by providing farmer-to-farmer education and community building in tandem with EFAO's outreach, research, incentives and policy work.



**A field day presented by Heather Coffey of Fiddlehead Farm in Prince Edward County.**

## Strategic Objectives

- Develop new ways of seeking member input to create relevant, innovative and accessible training and resources that are farmer-led and meet the needs of a diverse membership.
- Continue to expand the variety and reach of EFAO's educational offerings, including the annual conference, by strategically combining both in-person and online formats.
- Expand educational offerings to reach new audiences such as field crop farmers, new farmers, and farmers who are Black, Indigenous and other peoples of colour (BIPOC), by developing new events, resources, and partnerships with other organizations.
- Develop creative new communication strategies for increasing member engagement in EFAO events and resources.
- Increase the number of Black, Indigenous and other people of colour as speakers at the EFAO conference and events, and contributors to the print publication.
- Confirm, through EFAO's new evaluation strategy, the extent to which programming increases knowledge of ecological agriculture and supports farmers in adopting and adapting ecological practices on their farms.
- Expand opportunities for members to share their knowledge and expertise — from field days and webinars, to mentorship arrangements and print articles.

## Strategic Activities

### Year One

- Move all education programming online (e.g. conference, virtual field days, online meet-ups, webinars).
- Offer programming for new farmers by partnering on the Ignatius New Farmer Training Program.
- Redesign the print publication and increase quality and quantity of content.
- Offer targeted programming in northern Ontario.

## Year Two

- Offer and evaluate ongoing programming (virtual and some in-person if possible). E.g. conference, field days, meet-ups, webinars.
- Hold program roundtables with influencers and engaged members to help inform programming.
- Measure and better understand member engagement; develop strategies and targets for increasing it.
- Launch Online Farm Planning Course webinar series.
- Develop an online resource page, including a “virtual tool shed”.
- Launch annual Small Grains mini-conference (virtual) with over 100 participants.
- Build relationships with Black, Indigenous and other farmers of colour interested in teaching and mentoring, develop targeted programming for these communities, and begin to integrate an equity lens into all programming.
- Establish a financial support program to increase the accessibility of events.
- Develop an online member map to support connection, advocacy, and community.

## Years Three to Five

- Continue to offer, evaluate and adapt programming (in-person and virtual). E.g. field days, meet-ups, webinars, annual conference, new farmer gathering, small grains mini-conference.
- Design and distribute a Field Day Guide to promote in-season events.
- Launch annual New Farmer gathering (virtual) with over 100 participants.
- Implement targeted communications and other strategies to increase member engagement.
- Re-vamp and expand the farmer-to-farmer Advisory Service.
- Develop and promote farm business enterprise benchmarks and case studies.
- Incorporate equity values into all programming.

## Strategic Activity 2: Research

### Overview

Farming systems need more than one-size-fits-all solutions. Farmer-led on-farm research cultivates a culture of curiosity around ecological farming and puts farmers in the driver's seat of on-farm innovation. As a result, farmers rapidly and effectively develop locally appropriate technical innovations and locally adapted varieties. They experience livelihood impacts at the individual and community level through research networks and increased confidence to make decisions that fit their farming methods and goals.

Deepening and expanding EFAO's research work will support members in running profitable, resilient farms, broaden adoption of ecological agriculture, and support our policy work by providing evidence to support the use of ecological farming practices.

### Farmer-Led Research

At the heart of EFAO's research work is the Farmer-Led Research Program (FLRP). Launched in 2016 and modelled on Practical Farmers of Iowa's highly successful Cooperators' Program, it is the first of its kind in Canada. The program helps farmers combine curiosity with rigour to answer their most challenging on-farm questions. Farmers lead the process, posing the questions and conducting the research, and EFAO provides technical, financial and logistical support. ***Since 2016, more than 70 different farmer-researchers have received funding and support to conduct over 100 trials on their farms.*** To learn more about EFAO's Farmer-Led Research Program, [watch this short video](#).

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***Farmer-led on-farm research cultivates a culture of curiosity around ecological farming and puts farmers in the driver's seat of on-farm innovation.***

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Results from these trials not only empower farmers to adopt and adapt ecological practices - the influence goes well beyond the farm gate. Their research is shared freely with other farmers at field days, workshops, and an annual Research Symposium; published in reports and academic manuscripts; available in EFAO's open access online Research Library; featured in the media; and is a source of fodder for conversation within the farming community. Because farmers are connected to a community of trusted peers, knowledge dissemination of findings happens very quickly, making farmer-led research a powerful mechanism for driving widespread adoption of ecological agriculture.

The Farmer-Led Research Program has garnered unprecedented mainstream recognition for EFAO and ecological agriculture. In 2018 it was cited in Ontario's Agricultural Soil Health and Conservation Strategy as a "triple win" combining scientific rigour, practical applications and soil health. ***In 2019, the program was awarded the inaugural Excellence in Agriculture Award from the Ontario Ministry Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.***

In 2021, EFAO became one of six organizations to lead Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's (AAFC) Ontario Living Labs initiative. This three-year collaboration between AAFC scientists and farm organizations in Ontario is designed to support on-farm research and increased adoption of soil health Best Management Practices. EFAO is coordinating on-farm research trials and demonstrations related to organic no-till vegetable production and organic field crop production.

### *Seed Program*

In 2019, EFAO began working with the Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security (BFICSS) to collaborate with farmers, seed producers, researchers, and partners across Canada. EFAO is proud to be the home of BFICSS in Ontario. The partnership centres around EFAO's Seed Program, that works with farmers across Ontario to increase the quality, quantity, and diversity of ecological seed grown, while honouring the wisdom of farmers. This is done by organizing educational programming on basic-to-advanced seed production; and supporting EFAO members to select crops that are best suited to ecological growing conditions through rigorous variety trials and to improve and create new ecologically adapted grain and vegetable seeds.

For example, as part of the BFICSS's Canadian Organic Vegetable Improvement (CANOVI) Project, EFAO's Seed Program supports farmers in Ontario to grow and evaluate vegetable crops that are suitable to ecological farming conditions in Canada. The Seed Program also supports farmers as early-generation plant breeders, selecting for varieties that are adapted to their regional climate and farm needs. The program, part of the BFICSS's national programming in collaboration with the University of Manitoba, is focused on wheat, oat, and potatoes.

### *Soil Health Program*

More recently in 2020, EFAO partnered with Seeds of Diversity Canada to support farmers to grow rare and locally adapted varieties from the Seeds of Diversity Canada seed library so the seeds will be available for future growers.

EFAO is also working to expand its 2019 Soil Health Benchmark Study into a full Soil Health Program to support farmers in improving their soil health management by providing comprehensive soil testing combined with education and peer support.

EFAO has also partnered with Dr. Erin Nelson at the University of Guelph, and other farm organizations (Ontario Soil Network and Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association), on a 3-year collaborative research project, the Healthy Soils Project, to explore the benefits of farmer networks on the adoption of soil health BMPs.

### **Strategic Objectives (2020–2025)**

- Develop and implement new ways of supporting members to effectively conduct research that is relevant to their farms and the broader community.
- Develop creative new approaches for increasing awareness of EFAO's Farmer-Led Research Program, and sharing findings that come out of the program.
- Develop new research initiatives and tools (e.g. online database for soil and enterprise benchmarking) to support members in innovating and improving the profitability and resilience of their farms.
- Increase seed security on member farms through EFAO's work with the BFICSS.
- Broaden engagement with farmer-led research by supporting audiences of farmers that have been less involved with the program, such as field crop producers and BIPOC farmers.
- Expand the capacity of EFAO's research work through the creation of new staff positions and by developing a Research and Breeding Hub to showcase and evaluate farmer-bred grain and vegetable varieties and regionally-produced seed, and replicate other significant farmer-led research trials.
- Pursue strategic partnerships and outreach opportunities to bring attention and resources to farmer-led research across the agricultural sector.

### **Strategic Activities**

#### **Year One**

- Support 40 farmers to conduct 30 research trials.
- Publish 12 English language research reports and two French language research reports and 10 audio summaries.

- Receive funding from the prestigious Organic Farming Research Foundation (US) to support six members to conduct three farmer-led breeding trials.
- Twelve farmer-researchers present at the Symposium or Conference.
- Five farmer-researchers present at other events.
- Co-develop Living Labs project in Ontario with AAFC and partner organizations.
- Launch first annual “Call for Curiosity” to broaden engagement with the Farmer-Led Research Program and encourage applications, including the [Call for Curiosity video](#).
- Evaluate findings from pilot 2019 Soil Health Benchmark Study.
- Collaborate on launch of SeedHeads podcast telling the story of Canadian seed heroes.

### Year Two

- Support at least 30 farmers and 30 research trials.
- Promote the seed work being done through EFAO in collaboration with the Bauta Family Initiative, to members and other farmers.
- Increase the number of on-farm visits to farmer-researcher farms, and coordinate field days as COVID-19 restrictions permit.
- Increase support for farmer-researchers through literature searches, partnerships with academic advisors, development of a primer for farmers, and group meet-ups.
- Host a virtual Five-Year Retrospective on EFAO’s Farmer-Led Research Program to increase awareness and engagement of funders and academic partners.
- Hire and train a Research & Soil Health Program Coordinator to increase staff capacity of Farmer-Led Research Program and expand the Soil Health Program
- Continue Call for Curiosity, and broaden outreach through partner organizations.

### Years Three to Five

- Ongoing support of farmer-led research trials, seed work, Living Labs on-farm research, and opportunities for farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing.
- Continue to expand opportunities for promoting research programs and sharing findings.
- Support 5–10 farmer-researchers to present at other events.
- Launch Soil Health Program in year three, supporting farmers to measure and analyze soil health and provide opportunities for farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing.

- Create an online database of soil health data in year three to allow for benchmarking and knowledge sharing.
- Expand online database to include enterprise benchmarks in years four and five.
- Complete Living Labs project in year three and identify opportunities for furthering that work.
- Fundraise and establish a Research and Breeding Hub to showcase and evaluate farmer-bred grain and vegetable varieties and regionally-produced seed; and replicate other significant farmer-led research trials.
- Document stories of farmer-led research from previous years and gather data on ecological and economic benefits as a result of farmer-led research.
- Review progress over the first 3 years, including evaluation findings, and update plans for years 4 and 5 accordingly.



**EFAO's Seed Program Manager, Rebecca Ivanoff, observes a zucchini trial.**

## Strategic Activity 3: Incentives

### Overview

Incentive programs for farmers, especially when combined with education and peer networks, are an effective tool for encouraging the adoption of new ecological farming practices. In Ontario, agri-environmental incentives have largely been delivered through government cost-share programs, with a focus on expanding the adoption of cover crops. Now EFAO is creating new incentive opportunities aimed at a wide range of farmers.

Inspired by the success of Practical Farmers of Iowa's Small Grains Cost-Share Program, EFAO launched a pilot Small Grains Program in 2020 that is supporting Ontario farmers to diversify their crop rotation by adding a small grain followed by a legume cover crop.

Adding small grains such as wheat, spelt, oats, barley, rye or triticale to a two-year corn/soybean rotation not only supports higher corn and soybean yields and profitability, but also improves soil health and water quality, reduces inputs, diversifies farm income and labour requirements, and increases resilience of Ontario's rural communities. In its pilot year, the Small Grains Program is supporting farmers to diversify their rotation with payments of \$40/acre up to 100 acres combined with training and support around small grains production and marketing. The launch of the pilot was very well received, with demand far exceeding the pilot capacity. For the 2021 harvest season, EFAO is supporting eight farmers to grow 600 acres of new small grains in Ontario. EFAO also welcomed more than 100 other farmers to the Small Grains Network, which is providing farmer-to-farmer training and information about small grains production and marketing.

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*Adding small grains to a two-year corn/soybean rotation supports higher yields and profitability, improves soil health and water quality, and reduces inputs.*

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We plan to expand the program and number of acres and farmers supported across Ontario over the coming years. Expanding the Small Grains Program is a critical component of EFAO's strategy to increase adoption of ecological farming practiced by farmers outside of the current membership. While the program is relatively easy to scale up, a key ingredient to the program's success will be the establishment of strong partnerships with stakeholders in the supply chain, such as buyers interested in purchasing small grains.

In 2021 EFAO will pilot a Northern New Farmer Start-up Grant, providing 8-10 new ecological farm businesses in northern Ontario with cost-shared start-up funding for capital costs. Informed by the program's evaluation, EFAO will seek funding to expand this program to new and/or young farmers across Ontario, placing priority on supporting Black, Indigenous and other new farmers of colour.

### **Strategic Objectives (2020–2025)**

- Develop a program that combines payments to farmers with education, to support extended field crop rotations through the adoption of small grains plus legume cover crops.
- Build new partnerships and develop creative outreach strategies to engage and support farmers who are new to EFAO.
- Use farmer input to drive program development and education activities; and to inform, in combination with an economic analysis, the program payment price.
- Develop relationships with potential small grain buyers, and support new market access opportunities for farmers producing small grains.
- Pilot and expand a program that reduces financial barriers to new and young farmers through start-up capital grants.

### **Strategic Activities**

#### **Year One**

- Conduct extensive consultations to inform Small Grains program development.
- Develop, launch and promote the Small Grains Program.
- Receive applications; identify selection criteria and selected farmers to receive payment for acres.
- Launch Small Grains Network for applicants who were not selected and open to all, and hold two educational events (e.g. meet-ups, webinars).

#### **Year Two**

- Conduct farmer focus groups to better understand farmer barriers and interests in relation to extended rotations.
- Commission an economic analysis to identify the most effective payment rate to encourage adoption by different types of producers.

- Establish an Advisory Committee of farmers and sector experts to advise on the program's payment rate and delivery.
- Provide ongoing educational opportunities through monthly Small Grains meet-ups, and workshops sponsored and offered at other agricultural conferences.
- Launch annual Small Grains Conference with over 100 participants.
- Identify program mentors to support new small grains producers.
- Secure funding for the Small Grains Program's continuation and expansion.
- Promote program applications for 2022 growing season.
- Pilot Northern New Farmer Start-up Grants and provide 8-10 new, ecological farm businesses in northern Ontario with access to start-up funding.

### Years Three to Five

- Expand Small Grains Program across Ontario to 2,000 acres in 2022 and 10,000 acres by 2024.
- Provide ongoing support of program participants, and educational and farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing opportunities through the Small Grains Network.
- Continue partnership development with buyers and small grains value chain.
- Continue outreach and promotion of Small Grains Program.
- Evaluate success of Northern New Farmer Start-up Grants and secure funding for the expansion of the program to the rest of Ontario.
- Research and seek funding to pilot an incentive program that encourages the adoption of intensive rotational grazing of livestock.

## Strategic Activity 4: Outreach

### Overview

EFAO promotes ecological agriculture and engagement by farmers with the organization through events and trade shows, a website, email lists, traditional and social media, staff outreach and partnerships, and supporting member-farmers as educators and advocates. Farmers have been and will continue to be EFAO's main target audience for outreach, but over the next five years we intend to broaden this audience to include environmental organizations, government officials, donors, and other stakeholders.

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*Expanding this activity area is critical to EFAO's strategic goal of broadening adoption of ecological agriculture.*

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Expanding this activity area is critical to EFAO's strategic goal of "broadening adoption of ecological agriculture among other farmers" and reaching the target of doubling the number of farmers and acres under ecological agriculture by 2025.

Throughout EFAO's history, our main outreach tool has been the community of innovative and knowledgeable farmer-members who can speak from decades of experience. Over the past five years, EFAO's Farmer-Led Research Program has expanded the organization's reach, credibility, and exposure within the wider agricultural sector. The program has led to significant media coverage, opportunities for farmer-researchers to share their findings, and numerous invitations for EFAO staff to participate and share their experience through government, research, and agricultural events and committees. Similarly, EFAO's new Small Grains Program is garnering attention from the media and conventional agriculture groups, and attracting a new audience of field crop farmers to the organization.

In order to expand our outreach capacity over the next five years, we will create a new program for members to become spokespeople on ecological agriculture, to conduct outreach both within the farming community, and also to the broader public. This work will be done in collaboration with partner organizations involved in Farmers for Climate Solutions. EFAO will also continue to leverage its innovative programs and unique expertise, seeking opportunities to collaborate with and support other farm organizations, as it has never been clearer that we are stronger and more effective if we work together.

EFAO's Outreach activities include a combination of new program development, targeted relationship building and communications, attendance and partnerships at events and trade shows, and increased staff capacity.

### **Strategic Objectives (2020–2025)**

- Increase communication and outreach about EFAO and ecological agriculture to farmers and other audiences.
- Seek input from farmers outside of the EFAO membership.
- Seek out partnerships and collaborations with other farm organizations, including conventional and “mainstream” farm groups.
- Intentionally build relationships with, and seek input from, farmers who have been excluded or marginalized from the organization, including BIPOC and LGBTQ2S+ farmers, and those with diverse abilities.
- Offer programming that addresses needs and barriers to participation and encourages engagement of farmers from outside the membership.
- Leverage EFAO's expertise and experience with farmer-led research and incentives (e.g. Small Grains Program) to increase visibility and engagement.
- Increase EFAO's capacity and reach in northern and eastern Ontario.
- Create a training program for EFAO members to become spokespeople on ecological agriculture for outreach to the farming and non-farming communities.
- Seek opportunities and provide training for EFAO staff and members to speak at farm conferences.

### **Strategic Activities**

#### **Year One**

- Develop outreach materials (e.g. web pages, pamphlets, banners, trade show booth).
- Implement a one-year “trial membership” as a way of introducing new audiences (including BIPOC and field crop farmers) to EFAO.
- Redesign EFAO's e-news and print publication to better communicate EFAO programs, activities and membership.
- Launch EFAO merchandise line to help promote the EFAO brand.

- Hire Outreach Consultants in five districts of northern Ontario to boost awareness in the North.
- Support farmer-researchers and staff to speak at external farm conferences and events.
- Develop and launch the Small Grains Program, targeted at field crop farmers, and partner with the Ignatius New Farmer Training Program, targeted at new farmers.

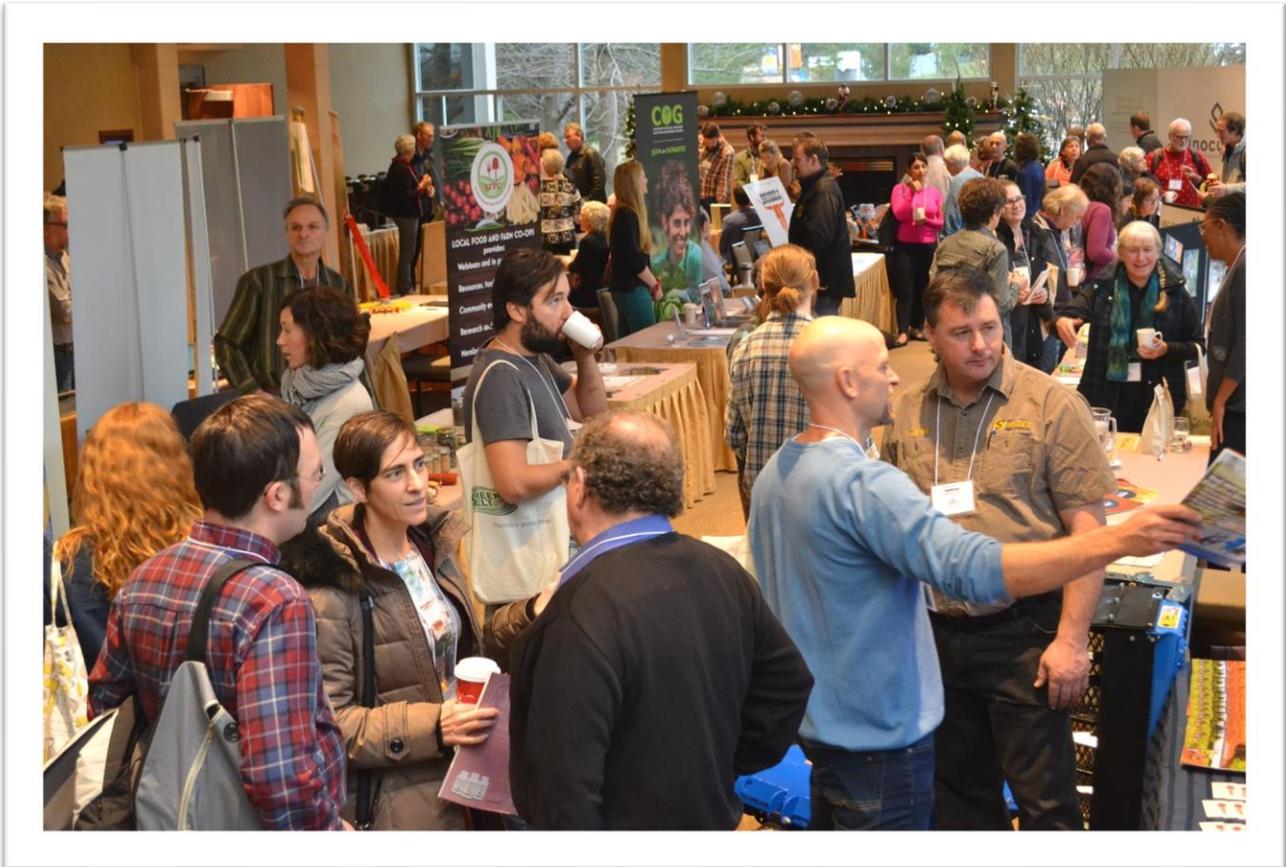
## Year Two

- Hire a Communications Manager to increase external communications (e.g. social media, E-news, media pieces) about programs and events, and overall awareness about ecological agriculture and EFAO.
- Develop a northern Ontario promotional campaign.
- Increase staff and member-representative attendance at external conferences, trade shows and events; attend 1–2 new Trade Shows.
- Develop 2–3 relationships with BIPOC agriculture and food organizations; develop a BIPOC Equity & Accountability Advisory Committee.
- Develop and launch a Farm Planning Course targeted at new farmers.
- Partner with organizations and groups involved in new farmer training to improve and expand new farmer training in Ontario.
- Continued expansion of field crop offerings through the Small Grains Program.

## Years Three to Five

- Develop and launch a “Speakers Bureau” program to support EFAO member-farmers to speak about the benefits of ecological agriculture to an audience of farmers and other stakeholders (10 events in year three; 25 events in year five).
- Expand presence at farming conferences (through workshops and by exhibiting at Trade Shows once restrictions allow). Attend 1–2 new Trade Shows per year and track engagement.
- Develop a strategy to use EFAO’s print publication as an outreach tool.
- Hire an Eastern Ontario Coordinator and engage farmers and partners in eastern Ontario.
- Expand merchandise strategy and offerings.

- Develop 2–3 new relationships with BIPOC ag/food organizations per year.
- Continue to develop and expand programs and events targeted at different communities and areas of interest.



EFAO Conference Trade Show, 2017

## Strategic Activity 5: Policy

### Overview

The EFAO board and membership has for several years expressed a desire to advocate for government policies and programs that promote ecological agriculture. It is clear that realizing EFAO's overall vision will require more than just supporting our members — there is a need to rapidly broaden adoption of ecological practices in the wider farming community. Policy advocacy is therefore necessary to “scale up” ecological agriculture.

EFAO launched its policy work in late 2019 by helping to create Farmers for Climate Solutions (FCS), a national coalition to promote climate-friendly agricultural policies at both the federal and provincial levels. FCS includes several allied organizations that EFAO has worked with in the past, including the National Farmers Union and SeedChange, some of which have many years of experience in policy advocacy and government relations. By working in concert with more experienced organizations, EFAO can develop advocacy and government relations capacity while amplifying our voice. EFAO now serves as a member of the Coordinating Body of FCS.

In the short term, EFAO will hire a Communications and Government Relations Manager to coordinate policy advocacy activities. Work with FCS at the federal level will continue, with increasing emphasis on provincial government relations. It is anticipated that EFAO will take the lead on engaging the Government of Ontario on behalf of FCS. Because agriculture policy is a shared federal/provincial jurisdiction, it is essential that advocacy work at the federal and provincial levels be tightly coordinated.

### Strategic Objectives

- Work in coalition with allied organizations across Canada to strengthen and amplify EFAO's policy advocacy.
- Advocate for an increase in federal funding for agri-environmental programming and support for ecological practices.
- Ensure the Next Framework includes support for ecological practices and a comprehensive climate plan.
- Ensure that Ontario provincial agricultural policy includes support for EFAO priorities, such as soil health, equity, increased biodiversity and climate action.

## Strategic Activities

### Year One

- Work with Farmers for Climate Solutions to develop initial policy positions, governance structures, work plans and fundraising strategies, and to recruit new coalition members.
- Hire an EFAO Communications and Government Relations Manager.
- Engage with elected and government officials at the federal level to begin the policy development process.
- Initiate engagement with Ontario government officials.

### Year Two

- With FCS, develop comprehensive policy proposals, including proposals for the Next Policy Framework.
- Build on the success of FCS's 2021 budget campaign, working with the FCS team and AAFC staff to guide the development and implementation of agriculture programs that will support farmers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Engage with elected and government officials in Ontario to coordinate policy advocacy with federal efforts.
- Continue FCS efforts to recruit new coalition members and encourage farm organizations to promote ecological farming practices.
- Develop communications strategies to promote ecological agriculture to farmers, decision-makers and the general public.

### Years Three to Five

- Continue advocacy, outreach and communications efforts at the federal and provincial level.
- Conduct an intensive government and public advocacy campaign to influence the Next Policy Framework.

## Financial Resources

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This section describes the financial trajectory of the organization from 2020 to 2025, provides operating budgets for the first three years, and describes EFAO's financial sustainability plan.

### Five Years of Development and Growth

Below is a summary of the financial milestones and priorities over these five years.

#### Year One: Strategic Planning & New Opportunities

- In September 2019, EFAO received \$750,000 (\$150,000/year over five years) of funding from the Brian and Joanna Lawson Family Foundation. This long-term flexible funding has been a game changer for the organization. In line with the goals of this funding, this first year will focus on:
  - Stabilizing core funding and providing job security and full time work for staff.
  - Supporting ongoing projects such as EFAO's Farmer Led Research Program.
  - Increasing the organization's capacity for strategic planning (e.g. two board retreats and significant staff time).
  - Playing a leadership role in establishing Farmers for Climate Solutions.
- Two other new and significant funding opportunities include:
  - The Weston Family Foundation provided EFAO with two years of funding (\$100,000/year) to pilot a Small Grains Program.
  - Ontario Living Labs is a three-year project (\$150,000/year) funded by the federal government (Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada) that is enabling EFAO to support innovative on-farm research.

#### Years Two & Three: Increasing Program Capacity & Reach

2021 and 2022 will be defined by an expansion in programs and impacts:

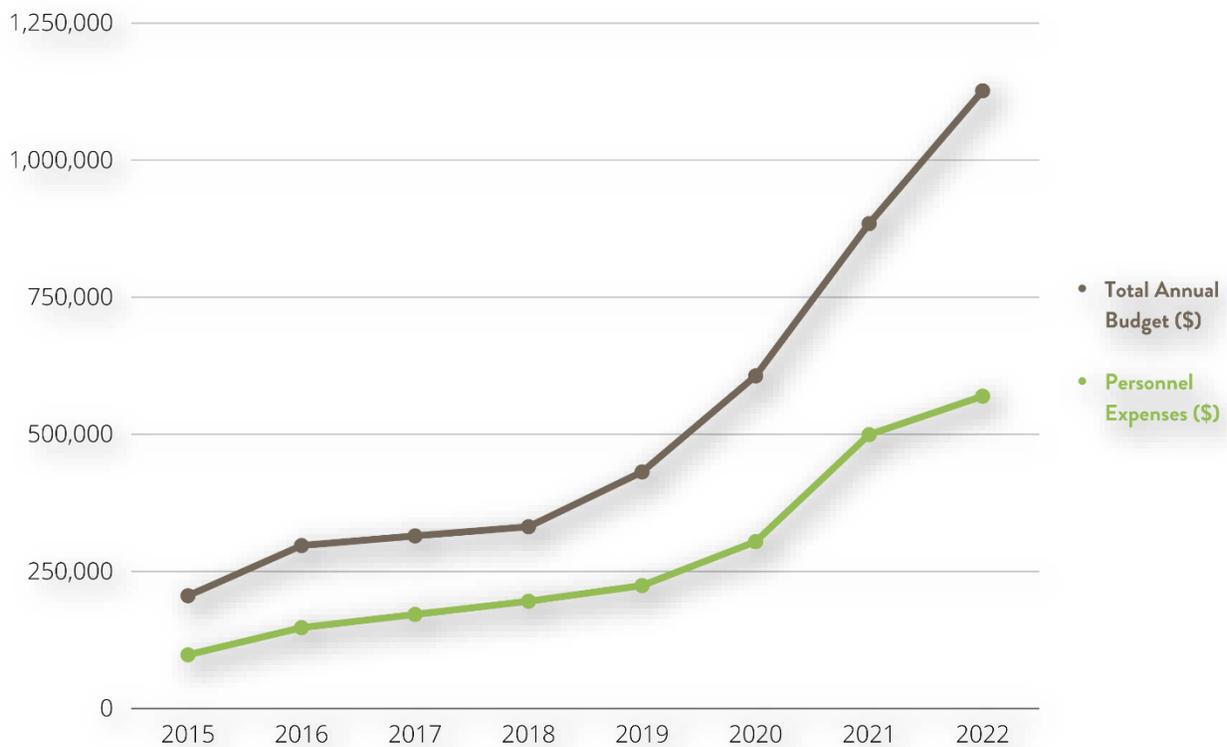
- The Small Grains Program pilot will be completed at the end of 2021. A priority will be securing funding for the program's expansion in 2022 and beyond.
- A donation from the Arrell Family Foundation will support EFAO's Farmer-Led Research Program and allow us to design a new Soil Health Program with the hiring

of a Research & Soil Health Coordinator. EFAO will seek multi-year funding to continue and expand the program.

- EFAO will develop new capacity for outreach and advocacy by hiring a Communications & Government Relations Manager. EFAO will seek ongoing funding, in partnership with Farmers for Climate Solutions, to continue this work.
- EFAO will seek government project and employment grants to help expand educational and outreach initiatives with two new coordinator positions (Events & Outreach Coordinator, Eastern Ontario Coordinator).

### Years Four & Five: Evaluation & Next Steps

EFAO's Strategic Plan will be revisited and adapted in response to evaluation findings, new opportunities that arise, and EFAO's success in securing funding to maintain and expand a diversity of programs and resources. Given EFAO's strong track record, the organization's 30–40 per cent annual growth between 2018 and 2021 (see Figure 4 below), and the increasing interest in our work from farmers, the general public and funders; we anticipate a 20–30 per cent growth in EFAO activities and budget over these two years. The Small Grains Program is the area of EFAO's work most poised for significant growth.



**Figure 4: Annual Budget and Personnel Expenses Over Time**

## EFAO Operating Budget 2019–2022

	2019-2020 Actual	2020-2021 Budget	2021-2022 Budget
<b>INCOME</b>			
Grant Revenue - confirmed	428,164	665,162	633,984
Grant Revenue - required	N/A	28,000	289,466
Membership	40,843	42,200	49,618
Program Revenues*	82,630	44,890	67,550
Advertising	4,303	7,200	8,000
Fundraising	53,614	55,750	60,000
Sponsorships	10,408	12,500	15,000
Trade Show*	9,980	5,000	0
Merchandise*	8,604	4,302	4,000
Endowment	18,667	19,000	18,667
Partnerships	0	2,472	15,000
Other**	0	25,000	0
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>657,213</b>	<b>911,476</b>	<b>1,161,285</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>			
Operating	83,148	78,259	83,584
Personnel	323,181	524,438	569,616
Meetings and Conferences +	87,806	46,897	62,806
Research and Payments ++	46,659	91,880	254,120
Marketing and Promotion	35,074	70,333	44,100
Professional Services +++	30,654	66,200	112,225
Other		6,300	20,000
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>606,522</b>	<b>884,306</b>	<b>1,139,450</b>
<b>NET INCOME</b>	<b>50,691</b>	<b>27,169</b>	<b>21,835</b>

\*Reduced revenue from programs reflects lower registration fees in a virtual conference format. There are also fewer merchandise sales with fewer in-person events. No trade show is anticipated for the year three virtual conference.

\*\*Funds from Year One carried over to Year Two.

+Year one higher because of in-person conference.

++ Year three expansion of Small Grains incentive payments and new farmer grants.

+++Year three increase with new Living Labs research coordinator and project management consultant.

## EFAO Operating Budget 2020–2021

	Operations & Evaluation	Outreach & Member Engagement	Policy	Education	Research	Small Grains	Total
<b>INCOME</b>							
Grants - confirmed*	88,402	80,933	20,493	157,103	235,112	83,119	665,162
Grants - required	5,000			2,667	20,333	0	28,000
Membership	13,736			28,464			42,200
Programming				44,890			44,890
Advertising				7,200			7,200
Fundraising	45,000	10,000		750			55,750
Sponsorships				12,500			12,500
Trade Show				5,000			5,000
Merchandise	4,302						4,302
Endowment	19,000						19,000
Partnerships				2,472			2,472
Other	25,000						25,000
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>200,440</b>	<b>90,933</b>	<b>20,493</b>	<b>258,574</b>	<b>255,446</b>	<b>83,119</b>	<b>911,476</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>							
Operating	37,106	3,950	825	17,506	15,972	2,900	78,259
Personnel	109,135	45,834	19,167	138,502	159,580	52,219	524,438
Meetings & Conferences	2,000	11,500	500	30,397	2,000	500	46,897
Research & Payments				1,920	62,460	27,500	91,880
Marketing & Promotion	22,000	5,000.00	0	37,900	5,433	0	70,333
Professional Services	30,200	22,500	0	3,500	10,000	0	66,200
Other	0	0	0	6,300	0	0	6,300
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>200,441</b>	<b>88,784</b>	<b>20,492</b>	<b>236,025</b>	<b>255,445</b>	<b>83,119</b>	<b>884,306</b>
<b>NET INCOME</b>	<b>(0)</b>	<b>2,148</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>22,549</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(0)</b>	<b>27,169</b>

\*Includes \$150k Brian and Joannah Lawson Foundation, \$150k Living Labs, \$112 Weston Family Foundation, \$60k Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security, \$50k SeedChange, \$24k Canadian Agricultural Partnership, \$92k FedNor/ Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation, \$19k Organic Farming Research Foundation.

## EFAO Operating Budget 2021–2022

	Operations & Evaluation	Outreach & Member Engagement	Policy	Education	Research	Small Grains	TOTAL
<b>INCOME</b>							
Grants - confirmed*	114,514	33,385	0	143,602	285,944	56,540	633,984
Grants - required**	55,014	22,614	22,975	82,696	26,167	80,000	289,466
Membership	25,000			24,618			49,618
Program Revenues				67,550			67,550
Advertising				8,000			8,000
Fundraising	25,000	30,000			5,000		60,000
Sponsorships				15,000			15,000
Trade Show							0
Merchandise	4,000						4,000
Partnerships	5,000			10,000			15,000
Endowment	13,000	3,600		2,067			18,667
Other							0
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>241,528</b>	<b>89,598</b>	<b>22,975</b>	<b>353,533</b>	<b>317,111</b>	<b>136,540</b>	<b>1,161,285</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>							
Operating	38,106	1,000	900	28,406	15,272	2,900	86,584
Personnel	115,722	47,999	21,575	141,166	180,014	53,140	559,616
Meetings and Conferences	1,500	15,600	500	43,206	1,500	500	62,806
Research and Payments				85,920	88,200	80,000	254,120
Marketing and Promotion	21,000	5,000.00		13,000	5,100		44,100
Professional Services	65,200	20,000			27,025		112,225
Other				20,000			20,000
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>241,528</b>	<b>89,599</b>	<b>22,975</b>	<b>331,697</b>	<b>317,111</b>	<b>136,540</b>	<b>1,139,450</b>
<b>NET INCOME</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>(0)</b>	<b>(0)</b>	<b>21,836</b>	<b>(0)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>21,835</b>

\*Includes \$150k Brian and Joannah Lawson Foundation, \$150k Living Labs, \$88k Weston Family Foundation, \$60k Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security, \$156k FedNor/Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation.

\*\*Pending grants will be confirmed or denied by September 2021.

## Financial Sustainability Plan

EFAO has never been in a more financially healthy position. At the end of the 2020 fiscal year, EFAO has \$112,565 in net assets, which represents the organization’s unrestricted funds that can be used for “rainy days” and which helps for managing cash flow. EFAO’s annual budget includes a \$15–\$20k contribution toward this reserve. Our goal is to increase this fund to \$200,000 by 2025.

Over the next five years EFAO’s financial goals are tied to meeting the outcomes and impacts articulated in this Strategic Plan, and ensuring financial stability and resilience. At the heart of this strategy are efforts to 1) diversify funding sources, 2) prioritize sources of unrestricted funding and become less dependent on government grants (which are often inflexible, rarely contribute to ongoing projects or overhead, and require onerous administration), and 3) develop meaningful relationships with foundations whose interests align with EFAO’s goals and work.

EFAO has various sources of existing and potential funding, listed below. Some of these sources are new and will help the organization diversify its funding approach, while other existing sources will be increased or maintained at a similar level. Table 1 shows how EFAO’s different sources of revenue have contributed, and are anticipated to contribute, to EFAO’s overall budget.

**Table 1: Percentage of annual revenue by source**

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total revenue	338,912	335,620	438,459	657,213	886,476	1,161,285
Grants	59.0	54.7	56.1	65.1	78.2	79.5
% gvt	64.4	77.3	65.2	42.7	39.6	38.3
% private	35.6	22.7	34.8	57.3	60.4	61.7
Endowment	9.0	11.4	10.1	2.8	2.1	1.6
Membership	11.1	9.8	6.8	6.2	4.8	4.3
Goods and Services*	16.4	20.1	19.8	15.6	6.9	6.9
Donations	1.3	2.1	4.1	8.2	6.3	5.2
Sponsorship	2.2	1.8	3.1	1.6	1.4	1.3
Other	1.0	0.0	0.1	0.4	0.3	1.3

\* Includes conference registration, program revenue, advertising, merchandise, exhibitors. The decrease in revenue in 2021 and 2022 reflects reduced registration fees from the annual conference moving to a virtual format due to COVID-19.

### Revenue Diversification:

- **Corporate Donors:** This has been a negligible source of revenue for EFAO to date, but a recent large donation has highlighted the increasing interest from corporations in climate change and regenerative agriculture. We will foster this interest with a dedicated web page focusing on climate change and ecological agriculture, and through a new outreach program. We are projecting a 25 per cent increase in donors (private and corporate) each year.
- **End of Life Giving Program:** This program seeks to connect with long-time EFAO members who may want to contribute to the organization in this way. To be established and launched in 2022.
- **Restaurants:** Modelled on the Zero Footprint initiative in California, EFAO in collaboration with Farmers for Climate Solutions (FCS) has been exploring the possibility of creating a partnership with restaurants to fund regenerative and climate-friendly agriculture in Ontario. Restaurants would collect a one per cent charge on all bills and donate the proceeds to FCS to fund projects by member organizations that promote and support climate-friendly farming practices. The pilot, intended for 2021, is delayed due to the impacts of COVID-19. We hope to be able to further this idea over the coming years.

### Revenue Increase:

- **Private Donors:** EFAO has seen significant growth in private donations in recent years. This has previously been a very small source of revenue for EFAO. We plan to gradually increase this source of revenue by exploring new ways of connecting with donors (e.g. Farmer Advocate outreach program, an annual ask through our members to their customers). A more formal Major Gifts program will be established in years three and four.
- **Foundations:** In 2019 and 2020, support from foundations has been EFAO's most significant source of increase in funding. This has included a combination of largely unrestricted and project funding. The flexibility of this funding, combined with several multi-year commitments, has been at the heart of EFAO's increased capacity and impact. EFAO will continue to nurture the current relationships it has with those foundations that have shown a real interest and commitment to our work, and also seek their guidance and connections to new foundations that may be interested in EFAO's work. EFAO is

specifically looking for partners interested in providing multi-year funding for the Farmer-Led Research Program, the Soil Health Program, the Small Grains Program and EFAO's Farmer-to-Farmer Advisory Service.

- **Membership:** We anticipate increasing our membership by approximately 100 members each year, thereby doubling the EFAO membership in five years. This will be accomplished by an increase in programs and outreach, an increase in membership retention, and the development of a targeted Member Engagement Strategy.
- **Conference Sponsorship:** Relying on input suppliers as our main conference sponsors is not a sustainable strategy, given that ecological agriculture is seeking to reduce many agricultural inputs. We will expand beyond input suppliers to seek sponsorship from foundations, environmental groups and corporations interested in supporting EFAO's Mission and Vision. We have experienced a decrease in sponsorship during COVID-19.
- **Advertising:** As the quality of EFAO's print publication continues to increase, there has been growing interest from advertisers. The goal is to cover 75 per cent of EFAO's print publication costs through advertising. This will require doubling the number of current advertisers, which EFAO plans to accomplish in the first two years.
- **Merchandise:** EFAO launched a line of branded merchandise in 2019 and we project a gradual expansion each year. This small source of revenue contributes to the organization's outreach and membership loyalty goals.
- **Partnerships:** Collaborations, especially with larger organizations that have strong administrative capacity (e.g. SeedChange, Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association), has proven to be a significant source of funding and growth for the organization. We will continue to foster opportunities for collaborative projects and fundraising with farm organizations and academic partners, and seek to diversify by collaborating with environmental groups.

#### **Revenue Maintained:**

- **Endowment:** Since 2015 EFAO has received an annual endowment of approximately \$20k per year from a deceased long-time EFAO member.

- **Trade Show:** We expect to maintain a similar level of revenue from conference exhibitors (when in-person) due to space limitations. Trade Show revenue will remain negligible during the COVID-19 pandemic with the virtual conference format.
- **Program Revenue:** We will continue to operate our educational programs on a cost-recovery basis, with the goal of 10–20% in net revenues going toward program staffing. Conference registration is EFAO's largest source of program revenue, and it has decreased during COVID-19 with the conference moving to a virtual format.



**Staff Zoom Selfie, Spring  
2020**

## Human Resources

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EFAO has an incredible staff of dedicated professionals who have a deep understanding of ecological agriculture and strong connections to the farming community. The EFAO Board of Directors brings together passionate and skilled members with both farming and organizational expertise. EFAO takes a human-centered approach to its work, focusing on the needs of staff and Board to remain engaged and adapt to change in positive and constructive ways.

Figure 5 is an organizational chart that represents existing personnel as well organizational growth between 2020 and 2025, as new positions are created in order to provide EFAO with the capacity to achieve its strategic goals and impact.

## Strategic Growth

The development of new staff roles at EFAO is critical to supporting and enhancing the organization's three strategic goals:

### **Supporting EFAO members to run profitable, resilient, ecological farms**

All EFAO staff working on Education, Outreach, Research, and Incentives are responsible for delivering programs and activities that meet the needs of EFAO members. Leadership for this work comes from the Research Director, Northern Outreach & New Farmer Program Director, and Events & Resources Manager. Hiring additional support staff (e.g. Research & Soil Health Program Coordinator, Events & Outreach Coordinator) will allow EFAO to deepen the quality and diversity of its programs and services for members.

### **Broadening adoption of ecological agriculture among other farmers**

EFAO's work in broadening adoption is achieved primarily through its Incentives and Outreach work. The new Small Grains Program with its incentive payments is focused on supporting a new audience of conventional farmers to adopt ecological farming practices. The program is delivered by the Small Grains Program Coordinator, with the addition of an On-Farm Incentives Manager as the program expands. The addition of new outreach staff (e.g. Events & Outreach Coordinator, and Eastern Ontario Coordinator), combined with a

new Communications Manager, will also provide the organization with increased capacity to promote and support ecological agriculture beyond EFAO's existing membership.

### **Achieving provincial and federal policies that support ecological agriculture**

The hiring of a Government Relations Manager will enable EFAO to further engage in policy work, which is currently being led by EFAO's Board President and supported by the organization's senior staff team.

### **Operations and Evaluation**

EFAO has strong operational processes and capacity, and these will need to expand as the organization grows. New project management software and systems are being established to help the organization successfully manage a growing number of projects and staff. An Operations Manager will also be hired once funding permits.

At the heart of this Strategic Plan is a robust Evaluation Strategy that will help EFAO measure the impact of its work, and learn and adapt along the way. The framework for this strategy has been developed by a Board member with expertise in evaluation, in collaboration with the senior staff team. An Evaluation Consultant will also be contracted to support data analysis and reporting. Collaboration with academic and organizational partners will also be sought to measure longer term impacts of EFAO's work as well as sector-wide trends.

### **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion**

The EFAO Board and staff are committed to taking action on diversity, equity, and inclusion within the organization and the broader agricultural sector. An Anti-Racism & Equity Consultant will support this work (see pg. 38), which will be guided by a BIPOC Equity & Accountability Committee made up of Board members, other EFAO members and partners.

# EFAO HUMAN RESOURCES 2020-2025



EFAO members have described the organization's board and staff team as akin to the soil microbiome - facilitating farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing (i.e nutrient cycling), which strengthens the community of farmers (i.e roots) to help them build resilient farms (i.e plants).



Figure 5: EFAO Human Resources 2020-2025

## Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

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Agriculture has historically been, and continues to be, rife with systemic racism and inequality. We cannot talk about building resilient ecological farms and communities without paying attention to the systemic racism and oppression that are embedded within Ontario's agricultural sector, society and the culture within which EFAO operates.

EFAO Board and Staff are committed to increasing their understanding around anti-racism toward Black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC), and to better meeting the needs of farmers and members who are currently underrepresented in the organization and the ecological farming movement at large. This is new work for EFAO. We recognize that we have a lot to learn and that this must be a long-term and ongoing effort.

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*We cannot talk about building resilient ecological farms and communities without paying attention to systemic racism and oppression.*

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EFAO's progress in meeting its anti-racism and equity goals will be updated regularly at [efao.ca/anti-racism](https://efao.ca/anti-racism), as a mechanism to stay action-oriented and foster accountability.

### Strategic Activities

#### Year One and Two

- Hire a BIPOC consultant to help with this work.
- Develop an Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan, Statement and Policy, with associated timelines and evaluation plans.
- Build relationships with and receive feedback from BIPOC members and farmers.
- Increase the number of BIPOC speakers at the conference, events, and contributors in the print publication.
- Ensure that there are Black, Indigenous and people of colour on the EFAO Board; nurture a Board culture that is open and welcoming; and develop a more inclusive and open Board recruitment process.
- Form a BIPOC Farmer Network for EFAO members and other interested farmers, support regular meet-ups in 2021, and develop a map to foster connections between farmers.

- Commit to ongoing staff and board training in anti-racism.
- Offer and encourage anti-racism training for members.
- Survey and better understand member demographics to help inform EFAO's work and assess progress.
- Develop a BIPOC Equity & Accountability Committee to help guide this work.
- Develop a racially just hiring policy.
- Identify BIPOC-led organizations and initiatives that EFAO can support, ally and engage with.

### **Years Three to Five**

- Ongoing accountability in this work through the development of an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Evaluation Strategy with targets and milestones, and leadership from the BIPOC Equity & Accountability Committee.
- Ongoing anti-racism training for Board, staff members and EFAO members.
- Ongoing relationship building and receiving feedback from BIPOC members and farmers, and BIPOC-led organizations.
- Ensure that a minimum of 30% of speakers at the conference and events are BIPOC, and that there are a minimum of 2 BIPOC contributors per issue in the print publication.
- Achieve a minimum of 25% BIPOC representation on the Board as well as BIPOC representation on staff.
- Ongoing coordination of the BIPOC Farmer Network, including development of requested educational and community building opportunities.
- Identify, seek funding, and develop programs and initiatives that support the needs and address barriers of BIPOC members.

# Evaluation Strategy

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## Introduction

Supporting farmers to build resilient ecological farms takes time and a combination of actions that contribute to our goal. Changing behaviour means engaging with farmers to help them become aware of options, gain confidence and capacity to change practices, and receive confirmation from community and peers about the innovations. This process is not linear and it is often unpredictable. However, our Strategic Plan (see Fig. 1, p. 5) provides us with a map of where we are heading, and our two Theories of Change (pgs. 50 & 51) provide a rationale for how we anticipate change will occur, with milestones along the way, and a framework for evaluating and learning from our experiences.

Our first Theory of Change (p. 50) explains the different stages we anticipate in pursuit of our Strategic Goals to 1) Support EFAO members to run profitable, resilient ecological farms and 2) Broaden adoption of ecological agriculture among other farmers. Our second Theory of Change (p.51) illustrates the pathway we anticipate to 3) Achieve provincial and federal policies that support ecological agriculture.

## Approach

EFAO's mission is complex, and meeting our strategic goals will require ongoing evidence and feedback. Our evaluation approach is learning-oriented, and is based on established evaluation practices that emphasize the practical utilization of data. We lean on concepts and tools from: Utilization-Focused Evaluation (UFE), Outcome Mapping, Developmental Evaluation, and Contribution Analysis, among others.

UFE is a decision making framework that emphasizes evaluation use by primary intended users: in other words, the process needs to be practical and relevant to those who can use the evidence. Outcome Mapping stresses that the changes we seek to achieve tend to unfold in stages, often thanks to multiple factors beyond our immediate control. Contribution Analysis signals the importance of seeking to verify how much of the changes we measure can be traced back to our actions and Theory of Change. Lastly, Developmental Evaluation is appropriate to systematically track a model-in-the-making; it will help us course-correct when working in new ways or developing innovations that have not been tested. Employing these

evaluation methods reflects EFAO’s commitment to continually adapt and respond to farmers’ changing needs with appropriate, cutting edge programming.

## Evaluation Users

The evaluation ‘users’ are the owners of the evaluation design. Our evaluation approach focuses on EFAO Staff, Board, and member committees as the primary evaluation users. The staff and Board design and adjust the evaluation approach, its purposes, and the associated key evaluation questions. Our members, partners, and funders are among our evaluation report audiences. However, we are open to engaging funders and other partners in developing evaluation purposes or uses specific to their own interests.

## Evaluation Uses & Key Evaluation Questions

The EFAO evaluation approach focuses on two broad uses: **documenting our achievements**, and **improving how we work**. These two uses are relevant to our three Strategic Goals and to internal organizational performance. Documenting achievements is also a requirement in our reporting to funders on deliverables. We expect that our evaluation strategy may at times need to be adapted based on changing circumstances, as well as the needs and expectations of funders. Below are lists of the Key Evaluation Questions that connect directly with our Theories of Change and guide our methodology, data collection, analysis and reporting plans. The legend below is based on Outcome Mapping to acknowledge the level of changing attribution vs contribution that is possible when evaluating the expected benefits to farmers from our work over just a few seasons.

### Legend:

Immediate outputs	Immediate change resulting from an activity. (E.g. number of events offered; number attendees at each training event)
Short-term outcome	A short-term effect we expect to see. (E.g. changes in knowledge and attitude acquired during a workshop; these changes can be directly attributed to EFAO)
Mid-term outcome	A “would- like-to-see” change that happens after the EFAO activity is delivered, where the outcome will depend on other factors. EFAO will be able to claim a limited level of attribution when the outcomes are confirmed. (E.g. the number of small grains program participants who continue to include small grains in their crop rotation; this outcome

	depends on factors outside of EFAO's control, such as market demand, yields, perceived benefits, etc.)
Long-term outcome or result	A "would-love-to-see" change that is associated with the result or goal. These changes can take time and EFAO may be able to claim some level of contribution when the outcomes are confirmed. (E.g. the number of farmers who achieve good levels of profitability and resilience, which may be associated with EFAO programs and activities but will also depend on many outside factors)

## Overview of Evaluation Uses & Key Evaluation Questions

Below is a summary of our key evaluation questions and methodology for data collection and reporting. Our evaluation strategy includes a more detailed table that outlines for each evaluation question, the specific evidence and information needed, the method of data collection and frequency, and the type of analysis and reporting it will contribute towards. Please contact EFAO if you are interested in seeing the full table.

The two evaluation uses, **documenting our achievements** and **improving how we work**, are complementary; they demonstrate EFAO's commitment to remain a nimble, learning organization.

### Evaluation Use #1.1: Documenting Achievements of EFAO Members

How EFAO supports members to run profitable, resilient, ecological farms.

#### Key Evaluation Questions:

1. To what extent are our programs and resources delivering the outcomes we expect?
2. To what extent are we enabling members to give input about their needs and interests?
3. To what extent are we enabling members to engage in EFAO programs and activities?
4. To what extent are we enabling members to increase their confidence in and knowledge of ecological agriculture?
5. To what extent do members adopt or adapt ecological practices and technologies?
6. To what extent do members embed ecological practices and technologies?
7. To what extent do members have increased farm resilience, productivity, and financial viability?

8. To what extent do members influence their peers and networks?

**Timeline and Priorities:** Data for all of these questions will be captured on an annual basis.

### **Evaluation Use #1.2: Documenting Achievements of Other Farmers**

How EFAO broadens adoption of ecological agriculture among other farmers.

#### **Key Evaluation Questions:**

1. To what extent are we increasing farmer interest in ecological agriculture and enabling farmers to express their interests and needs?
2. To what extent are we enabling farmers to engage in EFAO programs and activities?
3. To what extent are we enabling farmers to have increased confidence in and knowledge of ecological agriculture?
4. To what extent do farmers adopt or adapt ecological practices and technologies?
5. To what extent do farmers embed ecological practices and technologies?
6. To what extent do farmers have increased farm resilience, productivity, and financial viability?
7. To what extent do members influence their peers and networks?

**Timeline and Priorities:** Data for questions 1–3 will be captured on an annual basis. Questions 4–7 will be addressed through a five-year sector survey, pending partnerships and resources for this work.

### **Evaluation Use #1.3: Documenting Achievements in Policy Development**

How EFAO achieves provincial and federal policies that support ecological agriculture

#### **Key Evaluation Questions:**

1. How responsive are leading farm organizations to EFAO's promotion of ecological farm policies?
2. Do EFAO's track record and program results promote positive reactions within the agriculture sector?
3. To what extent is EFAO given a place at the table to comment and respond to proposed policy changes?

4. To what extent does EFAO's provincial government relations strategy strengthen FCS efforts at the Federal level?
5. To what extent do Provincial and Federal government policies reflect EFAO/FCS priorities?

**Timeline and Priorities:** This data will be captured every two years (in 2022 and 2024).

### **Evaluation Use #2: Improving our Work**

Verifying how well our model is working and how to improve it.

#### **Key Evaluation Questions:**

1. To what extent are our programs addressing farmers' most important challenges and opportunities in ecological agriculture?
2. In what ways can our programs and outreach activities continue supporting EFAO members while also attracting new members?
3. To what extent are our programs and initiatives meeting the needs of diverse communities that are currently under-represented in agriculture?
4. To what extent are our programs and activities working effectively for the different farmers and different types and scales of farm systems across the province?
5. How can we best prepare our members to adapt to climate change and other external threats (e.g. pandemics)?
6. What combination of actions is best achieving our policy impact goals?
7. To what extent is our organization influencing the broader agricultural sector (e.g. other ag groups and organizations)?

**Timeline and Priorities:** Data for questions 1–4 will be captured on an annual basis. Questions 5–7 will be addressed in the future depending on resources and capacity.

## Methodology

### Data Collection

We will collect data using the following methods (methods in orange have not yet been developed or implemented):

On-going Collection	Yearly Collection	Every Five Years
Event feedback forms Input form on website for event topics <i>Member conversations</i> <i>Narrative accounts</i> <i>Cost-benefit case studies</i> <i>Enterprise benchmarking studies</i>	Annual member survey (new in 2021) Individual program evaluation/surveys Individual program evaluation/surveys "Input Drive" (social media/e-news) for event topics and programming "Call for Curiosity" for research input AGM input activity Event tracking spreadsheet (including partnership events, speakers' bureau) NeonCRM reports: Member engagement in events, demographics <i>Website, e-news tracking/report</i> <i>Communications and outreach tracking spreadsheet/report</i> <i>Roundtable Sessions with "Lead Advisors"</i>	<i>Sector-wide survey</i>

- Initial engagement of farmers will be measured through social media and E-news metrics, as well as participation and responses at trade show events.
- Membership and event registration forms will be used to capture demographic information.
- Feedback surveys at events or upon participating in EFAO activities will be used to assess the degree to which events are meeting target outcomes and increases in knowledge.
- A new Annual Membership Survey will gauge EFAO member experience/engagement and collect demographic data on EFAO's membership base.
- Verbal and written feedback will be documented, including narratives from stakeholders expressing an interest or providing ideas based on our work.

- Interviews will be conducted with key stakeholders who participate in our activities; especially to answer some of the key evaluation questions that are more difficult to answer, such as policy influence (this will require partnerships and/or funding) \*
- Cost-benefit analyses will be conducted for particular practices where a demonstration of savings or an increase in net revenues is important for wide-spread adoption (done internally or commissioned) \*
- Case studies, where possible, will be used to capture the complex impact trajectory of our work, this may focus on our Farmer-led Research program, New Farmer Program and/or the evolution of our Small Grains Programs\*

Data collection is expensive and we continue to find the most cost-effective means of collecting the data that is most relevant. This means updating the data collection tools, the frequency of data collection events, and the data analysis procedures on an ongoing basis. We are also aware of “survey fatigue” and will adjust data collection as needed to ensure that it does not interfere with a positive stakeholder experience.

\*These approaches will not take place on an annual basis, and will require new partnerships and/or funding to implement.

## Evaluation Reporting

**Internal:** Internal reporting will mainly consist of tracking spreadsheet analysis (e.g. event tracking spreadsheet in Airtable, feedback spreadsheets, etc.), internal reports completed for each of EFAO’s programs, and opportunities for staff reflection.

- Response rates of various input collection methods (e.g. Annual Member Survey, “Call for Curiosity,” etc.).
- Member demographics (e.g. % members from under-represented and marginalized communities).
- Percentage of members vs. non-members at events, providing input and applying for programs.
- Responsiveness to sector needs and barriers to engagement, (e.g. how often have we taken action to address expressed needs/concerns [addressed through staff documentation and reflection]).

- Outreach analysis and evaluation of communications strategy and approach (e.g. # website views, social media analytics, # media articles, # articles in conventional farming media, # trade shows attended, # of exchanges at trade shows)

**External:** For communicating our evaluation results and impacts outside of our organization, we will utilize:

**Annual Report**, presented at EFAO's Annual General Meeting, which will highlight:

- Program participation and major outcomes (e.g. # of research trials conducted)
- Member engagement in programs and activities, correlated to demographic data (e.g. region, farm type)
- Highlights of the Annual Member Survey (e.g. # and variety of farming practices within membership, # farmers reporting levels of profitability and resilience).
- Member and stakeholder testimonials
- Outreach metrics

**Three-Year Impact Document**, distributed to members, partner organizations, funders and donors, which will highlight key strides that EFAO has made in achieving targets and goals, including:

- Knowledge change as a result of events, programs and services (e.g. % event and program participants who report increased knowledge and awareness).
- Adoption of ecological practices and technologies as a result of events, programs and services (e.g. % event and program participants who intend to adopt/adapt and make changes on their farm, the type of practices adopted and # acres, # of Seed Program participants who continue with the variety they trial or breed).
- Increased farm resiliency as a result of events, programs and services (e.g. % event and program participants who express feeling better prepared for external threats as a result of programming).
- Factors supporting and barriers to adoption and adaptation of ecological practices and technologies.
- Influencing change (e.g. # members who report influencing neighbours and other farmers).

**Five-Year Sector Survey Report**, which will give important insight into the broader ecological agriculture sector, beyond the EFAO membership, including:

- Resiliency and viability of ecological agriculture (e.g. comparison of net income of ecological farmers to the agriculture sector as a whole).
- Top barriers faced, and top opportunities to explore within the ecological agriculture sector.

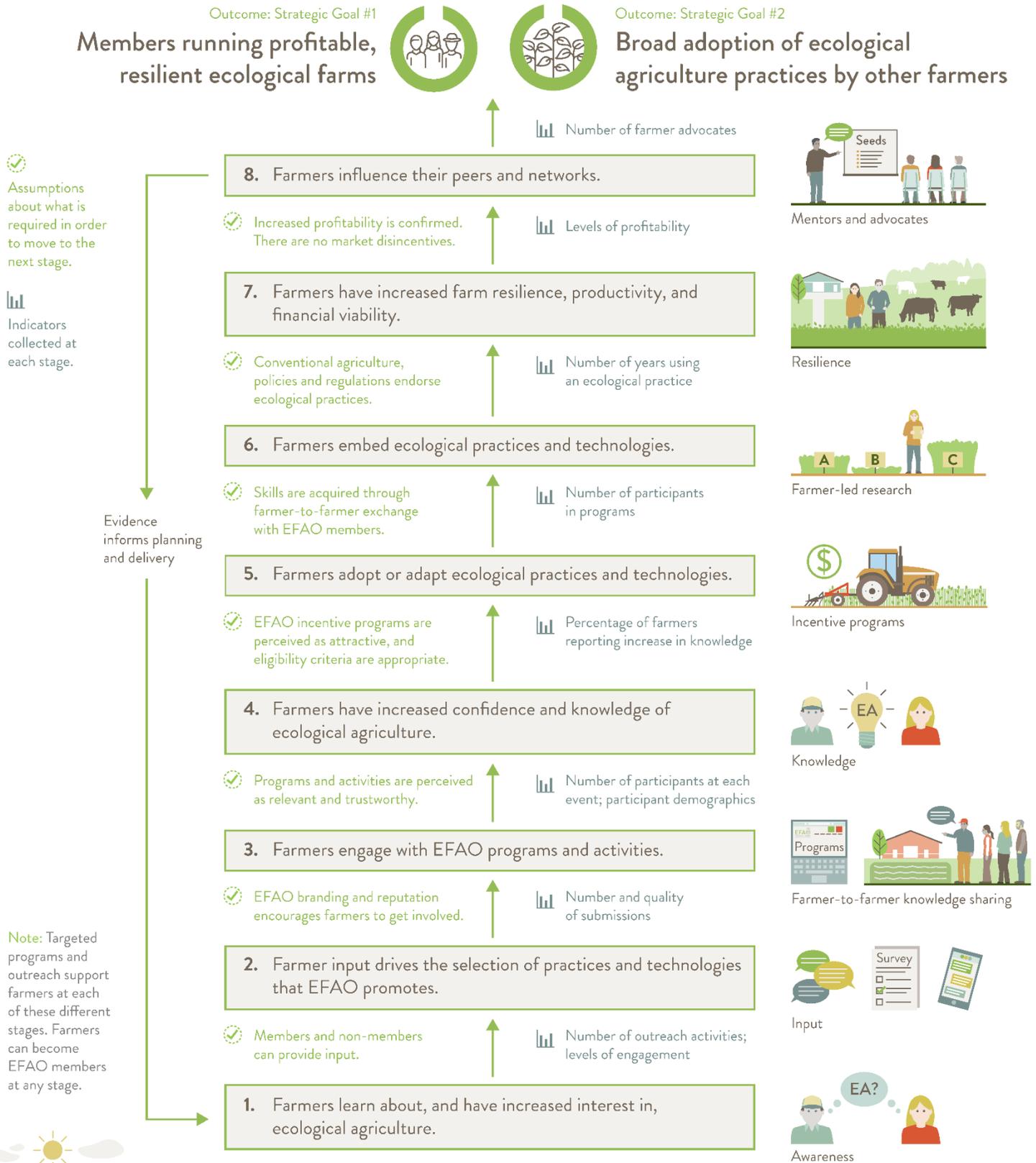
**Sample enterprise budgets, case studies, and benchmarking infographics/reports** will be used to provide evidence in support of ecological agriculture. (e.g. evolution of soil organic matter on ecological farms).



**EFAO board member Brett Israel talks with his father Jamie and grandfather Carl.**

# THEORY OF CHANGE: SUPPORTING MEMBERS & BROADENING ADOPTION

This Theory of Change explains how EFAO is working towards the strategic goals of 1) supporting members to run profitable, resilient ecological farms and 2) broadening adoption of ecological agriculture.



Note: Targeted programs and outreach support farmers at each of these different stages. Farmers can become EFAO members at any stage.



# THEORY OF CHANGE: POLICY

This Theory of Change explains how EFAO is advocating for government policies and programs that promote and “scale up” ecological agriculture.

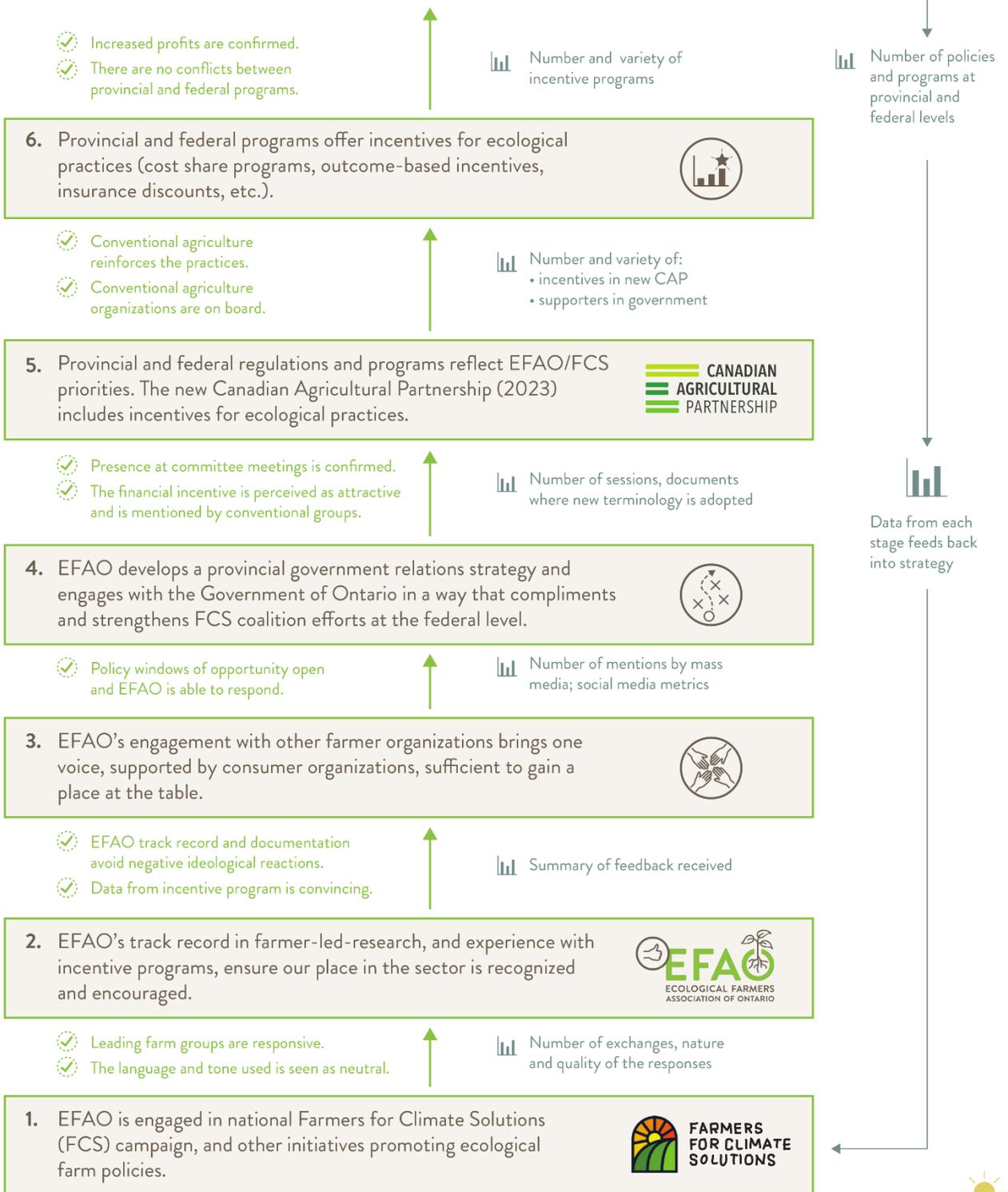


Outcome: Strategic Goal #3

## Achieve provincial and federal policies that support ecological agriculture

Assumptions about what is required in order to move to the next stage.

Indicators collected at each stage.



## Ecological Agriculture

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Established in 1979 by farmers for farmers, the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario is a membership organization that focuses on farmer-led education, research and community building. EFAO brings farmers together so they can learn from each other and improve the health of their soils, crops, livestock and the environment, while running profitable farm businesses.

**Vision:** We envision an Ontario where thriving ecological farms are the foundation of our food system, and where agriculture protects our resources, increases biodiversity, mitigates climate change, and cultivates resilient, diverse, equitable communities.

**Mission:** EFAO supports farmers to build resilient ecological farms and grow a strong knowledge-sharing community.

### What is Ecological Agriculture?

- Regenerative, organic and other holistic practices that improve soil health, protect vital resources such as water and biodiversity, reduce synthetic inputs and prioritize renewable energy sources.
- Socially engaged practices that ensure that farming communities are diverse, vibrant, and resilient, while making healthy agricultural products accessible.
- Forward-looking practices that are knowledge-intensive and regionally specific, and embrace the potential benefits that innovation and technology provide.

Ecological agriculture draws on a rich body of literature in sustainable agriculture, agroecology and conservation agriculture, but practically, is reflected in the on-the-ground practices and innovations of forward-looking farmers who are implementing and adapting practices and technologies that meet the specific needs and realities of their farms and businesses.

EFAO recognizes that there is a spectrum of ecological practices and farming philosophies. We welcome all farmers to engage with the organization and participate in our programs and activities, and strive to help farmers adopt and adapt the ecological farming practices that are relevant to their current operation.

## A Growing Membership

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The Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario is a membership organization that welcomes farmers of all scales, production types and levels of experience, and works to develop programs and resources to meet the needs of current and potential members. This includes ecological and organic farmers, conventional farmers looking to learn more about ecological farming methods, and new farmers who are just entering the profession. EFAO is also committed to better meeting the needs and interests of farmers who have historically been underserved by our organization, and who face greater barriers in agriculture.

Over the past 10 years, EFAO's membership has remained relatively stable at around 500 members. Over the course of this Strategic Plan, EFAO is working to double its membership to 1,000 members. This will serve as the main indicator for the overarching intended impact of doubling the number of farmers practicing ecological agriculture. In 2020, EFAO had a total of 747 members, an increase of more than 200 members from the previous year. This represents approximately 1.5 per cent of Ontario farms.

Through a comprehensive Evaluation Strategy and Theory of Change (pg. 41-51), we will document and further our understanding of how EFAO can most effectively support its members in running profitable, resilient ecological farms.

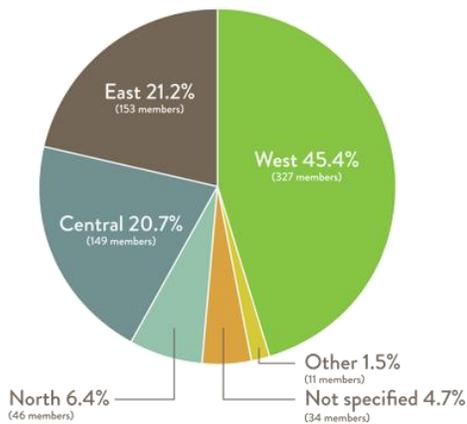
### Who are EFAO's members?

Data from EFAO's 2020 membership tells us that EFAO members are:

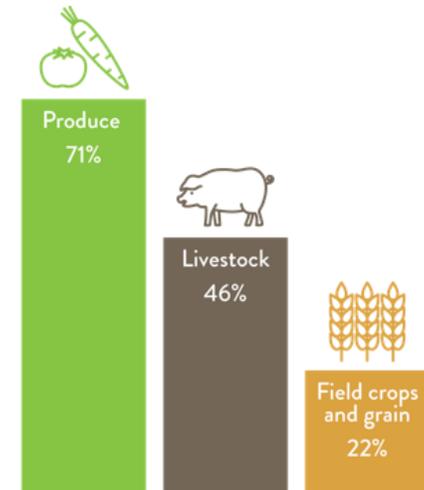
- Mostly between the age of 30–55 years.
- In large part new farmers, with about a quarter self-describing as aspiring farmers, and another quarter having farmed for less than five years.
- Spread throughout Ontario, with the majority of members residing in southwestern Ontario.
- Predominantly using organic growing methods (whether certified, in-transition or non-certified).
- The majority are growing vegetables, fruit or both, with many also raising livestock on their farms, indicating that a very large percentage of EFAO members operate mixed,

diverse farms. Just over a quarter of EFAO's 2020 membership grows grains or other field crops.

- Most members direct-market their products to consumers.



**Figure 6: Regional Distribution of Membership (2020)**



**Figure 7: Membership by Type of Production (2020)**

## Strategic Objectives

- Double EFAO's membership from 500 to 1,000 members by 2025.
- Increase the membership renewal rate from 75% to 85%.
- Increase organizational knowledge of member demographics, experience levels and farm types.
- Create consistent opportunities for members to provide input.
- Base program content and new program development on member input.
- Intentionally seek input from members who are Black, Indigenous or people of colour.
- Increase member engagement and enhance "member experience" within the organization.

## Strategic Activities

### Year One

- Implement a new member management database to facilitate engagement with events and membership renewal.
- Redesign website, E-news and print publication to support member engagement with the organization.
- Launch EFAO merchandise to help support EFAO brand and loyalty.

### Year Two

- Design and launch an annual member survey that is informed by the Evaluation Strategy and data collection priorities.
- Develop a BIPOC Equity & Accountability Committee to help inform programs and activities.
- Develop annual roundtable conversations to learn from different groups of farmers and help inform programming (e.g. Livestock Roundtable).
- Implement a one-year “trial membership” as a way of introducing new audiences (including BIPOC and field crop farmers) to EFAO.
- Develop a Member Engagement Strategy with targets for engagement and satisfaction.
- Develop an online member map to support connection, advocacy, and community.

### Years Three to Five

- Ongoing implementation of annual member survey, advisory committees and roundtables.
- Ongoing efforts to make EFAO membership and all events and programs accessible to members.
- Expand Member Engagement Strategy.
- Conduct an annual internal evaluation of responsiveness to member input.

## Appendix A: Environmental Scan

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This section provides some context for EFAO's work, including data from the last Census, and current issues, trends, challenges and opportunities.

### Agriculture in Ontario<sup>1</sup>

- Farm numbers continue to decline while the average acreage per farm continues to increase. There are 49,600 total farms in Ontario (4.5 per cent drop since 2011) representing 12,348,463 acres. Average farm size is 249 acres.
- 78 per cent of cropland is in field crops (mostly corn, soybeans and wheat), with 19% in hay, 1.5 per cent in vegetables, 0.6 per cent in fruit/berries/nuts, 0.5 per cent in sod and nursery.
- There has been a 35 per cent reduction in acres of oats, barley and mixed grain planted since 1995.
- Ontario is the largest provincial producer of poultry, and has the second largest number of pigs in the country. Dairy, beef and sheep production have decreased since the last census.
- Ontario is home to two-thirds of the national greenhouse vegetable area.
- 15.1 per cent of farms reported selling agricultural products directly to consumers.
- While soil health continues to deteriorate at alarming rates, with Soil Organic Matter (SOM) levels now decreasing on 82 per cent of Ontario farmland<sup>2</sup>, more farmers are planting cover crops. The percentage of farmers using cover crops doubled (12 per cent to 25 per cent) between 2011 and 2016.

### Organic Agriculture in Ontario

- The proportion of farms producing organic products in Ontario is approximately 1.7%<sup>1</sup>
- In 2018, 161,970 acres were under organic production (53% field crops, 44% forages/green manures/natural areas; 4% fruit and vegetables)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [2016 Census of Agriculture, Statistics Canada](#)

<sup>2</sup> [New Horizons: Ontario's Agricultural Soil Health and Conservation Strategy](#)

<sup>3</sup> Canada Organic Trade Association. Organic Agriculture by the Numbers (2018 Data)

- In 2018 there were approximately 955 organic crop producers, 222 livestock producers, and 528 organic processors<sup>3</sup>

## New Farmers

With the average age of Canadian farmers at 55 years old, and less than 10 per cent of farmers having a succession plan, Canada is facing a serious succession crisis in agriculture<sup>4</sup>. However, there is an emerging demographic of new farmers — one that is very different from those who came before them. A 2015 survey of 1300 Canadian farmers by the National New Farmers Coalition<sup>5</sup> found that 68 per cent of new farmers (less than 10 years

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*With the average age of Canadian farmers at 55 years old, and less than 10 per cent of farmers having a succession plan, Canada is facing a serious succession crisis in agriculture.*

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experience) did not grow up on a farm. Without the benefit of knowledge, land and equipment handed down from the previous generation, these new farmers need training and mentorship from experienced farmers to succeed. In addition, the survey found that these new farmers were more likely to use ecological production practices.

The number one barrier mentioned in this survey was the affordability of land ownership. With farmland prices continuing to rise, it is clear that given the large percentage of EFAO's membership that identify as new or aspiring farmers, this is an issue that we need to further engage with. Real traction will most likely involve policy work through a national coalition.

## Who's Doing What?

### Within the Organic Agriculture Sector

EFAO has long had strong partnerships with organic focused organizations like the Organic Council of Ontario (OCO) and the Canadian Organic Growers (COG); as well as the National Farmers Union – Ontario (NFU-O) and the Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security (BFICSS).

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<sup>4</sup> [Aging farmers with no succession plans put future of Canadian family farms at risk](#)

<sup>5</sup> Laforge, J., Fenton, A., Lavalee-picard, V., and McLauchlan, S. 2018. New Farmers and Food Policy in Canada. Canadian Food Studies. 5(3): 128-152.

- OCO is working toward an Ontario organic regulation and an industry-driven funding solution that would generate revenue through partnerships with commodity organizations, some of which could go toward education and research in organic agriculture through EFAO.
- COG provides education and advocacy in organics at a national level. EFAO partners with COG on provincial educational events, and there may be opportunities for EFAO to become a delivery agent for COG programming in Ontario (e.g. a transition to organic program).
- EFAO hosts the BFICSS's on-farm research and education work in Ontario, which is very complimentary to EFAO's Farmer-Led Research Program.
- The Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada (OACC) continues to administer funding for organic research led by academic institutions. EFAO staff have participated on the review committee.

### **Within the Broader Agriculture Sector**

EFAO's Farmer-led Research Program has garnered the attention of the broader agricultural sector as well as the media. This, combined with increased general interest in soil health — a bridge building topic between organic and conventional agricultural groups — has provided EFAO with many opportunities to partner and build new relationships with farming organizations and other stakeholders.

The Ontario Soil Network (OSN), the Innovative Farmers Association of Ontario (IFAO) and the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA) are all groups working to support adoption of soil health best management practices through on-farm research and farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing. Their members largely include large scale conventional field crop farmers. IFAO and OSN work with similar numbers of farmers to EFAO, though they have less capacity and fewer programs and staff. Whereas OSCIA is the delivery agent for the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs' (OMAFRA) stewardship and cost-share programs, and has a membership of around 4,000 farmers.

- In addition to farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing, OSN also provides its mentors with leadership and presentation skills training. EFAO has participated on many of the organization's committees since its inception and collaborates regularly.
- EFAO is also partnering with OSCIA (as the lead organization), IFAO, and OSN on a three-year Living Labs project funded by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, to support on-farm demonstrations and trials focused on no-till and continuous cover.

- In 2020 OSCIA announced funding from OMAFRA for a On-Farm Applied Research and Monitoring (ONFARM) project, a \$5.75M initiative to develop on-farm demonstration sites looking at soil health BMPs. EFAO is participating on the stakeholder steering committee.
- OMAFRA continues to engage industry organizations around soil health policy and program development. EFAO sits on OMAFRA's Soil Action Group, the advisory body that is developing the implementation plan for Ontario's Soil Health Strategy. EFAO has also recently joined the Cover Crops Steering Committee to help inform and implement the province's Cover Crop Action Plan.
- OSCIA has long been the leading organization in Ontario delivering stewardship programs to Ontario farmers on behalf of the provincial government, including incentive-type cost-share programs to encourage the adoption of cover crops and other ecological practices.
- ALUS Canada is a not-for-profit that is helping farmers across the country with on-farm stewardship and conservation efforts, by providing payments to farmers for projects such as restoring wetlands, reforestation, and planting windbreaks.

## Issues and Trends

- Soil health, climate action and regenerative agriculture are the defining issues and trends influencing EFAO's work. This is seen across stakeholders – from the Ontario government's focus on soil health and water quality to public interest (e.g. Regeneration Canada, Kiss the Ground) and corporate investment in regenerative agriculture (e.g General Mills, Patagonia)
- On the political front, the NFU recently launched their report, "Tackling the Farm Crisis and the Climate Crisis" that has informed policy recommendations by Farmers for Climate Solutions.
- Within the not-for-profit sector, critical topical areas include COVID-19 recovery, support of social enterprises, decent work, and equity, diversity and inclusion.
- Field-scale on-farm research that involves farmer-cooperators, appears as a priority under the new provincial ONFARM initiative, as well as the federal Living Labs program. Knowledge Translation and Transfer (KTT) is a priority for all agricultural research coming out of academic institutions.

- Interest in outcome measurements in agriculture is gaining ground, with growing interest in measuring and compensating farmers for carbon sequestration efforts. The Savoury Institute's Land to Market label and the Rodale Institute's Regenerative Organic Certification have developed as ways of marketing products grown regeneratively.

## Funding Landscape

- Provincial government funding under the Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP, 2018–2023), is the most obvious source of government funding for EFAO's work. This program requires 50% in matching funding and has prioritized projects that support soil health and water quality in the Lake Erie basin.
- There has been an overall decrease in available funding under the current provincial government (e.g. reduced intakes with CAP, reduced funding through the Ontario Trillium Foundation).
- There are new sources of federal funding with themes such as water quality, youth, diversity and inclusion, which may present opportunities for EFAO, but projects are often required to take place at the federal level and so require partnerships.
- There is growing donor and corporate interest in funding to support climate action, with increasing understanding that ecological agriculture can play an important part of the solution.
- Overall funding opportunities are looking for evidence-based proposals and quantifiable measurements of impacts.

## Opportunities

- The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a bright light on the importance of regional and local food production in times of crisis. This will likely translate into increased support for local farms and agriculture.
- The positive response from the federal government to Farmers for Climate Solutions' budget 2021 recommendations suggests that funding may be made available for EFAO's work.
- There is an opportunity to continue to grow as a leader in farmer-led research and soil health education for farmers.

- Increasing interest from donors (private and corporate) in regenerative agriculture could offer diverse benefits and opportunities.
- Opportunities to offer and model programs and supports that are not offered by other groups (e.g farmer-led research, payment incentives) for conventional farmers looking to adopt more ecological farming practices.
- There is presently a growing recognition of the role that extending crop rotations has in mitigating climate change and regenerating soils<sup>6</sup>. Simultaneously, there has been a growing interest in small grains from multinational manufacturers and artisan bakers and brewers. EFAO's Small Grains Program could have a real impact on Ontario agriculture if it can be leveraged to influence policy and program development through our work with Farmers for Climate Solutions. It will also likely have a big impact on our membership (Practical Farmers of Iowa doubled their membership over four years and attribute much of that to their small grain cost-share program).
- There may be an opportunity for EFAO to partner with academic institutions on organic research in the next OACC funding round.
- There is an opportunity for an expanded national new farmer coalition and campaign, of which EFAO could play an important role given our experience with new farmer training and support.

## Challenges

One possible challenge we face is that the increasing interest in soil health and regenerative agriculture from numerous groups and stakeholders could overshadow the work that EFAO has been doing for decades. The flipside challenge is that, as our society comes to terms with the urgent need to bring about systemic changes in the ways we grow food, EFAO will be required to respond very quickly to the opportunities and demands that are placed upon us.

We are at a crucial turning point, both as an organization and society. The urgent reality of climate change poses huge challenges, but also an opportunity for a radical and long overdue restructuring of our food system.

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<sup>6</sup> DeLonge M, Perry Stillerman K. 2019. [Champions of Breakfast: How Cereal-Makers Can Help Save Our Soil, Support Farmers, and Take a Bite out of Climate Change](#). Union of Concerned Scientists.