

2024



Outreach & Engagement Strategy

Prepared By: ONFARM KTT Advisory Committee

Date: March 31, 2024



The Project

The On-Farm Applied Research and Monitoring (ONFARM) program is a nine-year applied research initiative that supports soil health and water quality research on farms across Ontario.

The program is currently funded by the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a five-year federal-provincial-territorial initiative. Developed by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) and delivered by the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA), ONFARM builds on work accomplished under the Great Lakes Agricultural Stewardship Initiative's (GLASI) Priority Sub-watershed Project with an expanded emphasis on soil health. The program encompasses a range of activities, including rigorous monitoring of soil health and water quality on working farms across the province and examining the effectiveness of different agricultural best management practices (BMPs) through paired trials and how they impact soil health, water quality and productivity.

ONFARM has three primary objectives:

1. Evaluate novel soil health indicators and test BMPs through continued paired plot trials at sites across Ontario.
2. Study impacts of BMPs on in-field soil-water dynamics and water quality.
3. Engage with farmers and stakeholders to transfer knowledge on BMP implementation and impact.

With the success of ONFARM's initial phase from 2019-2023, the program has recently been renewed for continuation through 2028.

The program's renewal will allow for the continued collection of critical data supporting BMP outcomes from the long-term soil health trial and edge-of-field water quality monitoring sites. This will enable a deeper understanding of the impacts of BMPs, such as cover cropping and organic amendment application, and the novel soil health indicators being tested.

Additionally, the program's extension aims to uncover insights into how these BMPs support good soil-water dynamics for crop resilience and learn more about how profitability and site-specific agronomy can support farmers' management decisions.

KTT Advisory Committee

The ONFARM KTT Advisory Committee has been brought together to enhance collaboration amongst Ontario's agriculture sector organizations that are involved in on-farm applied research, monitoring and demonstration initiatives that relate to agri-environmental stewardship, focused on water quality and soil health. The committee will help to shape and collaborate on engagement and communication activities, including the creation of an Outreach and Engagement Strategy, which will be reviewed and updated annually.

The ONFARM Project has successfully engaged the following organizations through membership on the KTT Advisory Committee. This is an important strength, as these organizations have existing networks that can be leveraged for engagement.

- Conservation Ontario
- Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario
- Grain Farmers of Ontario
- Beef Farmers of Ontario
- Livestock Research Innovation Corporation
- Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance
- Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs
- Ontario Soil Network
- Soils at Guelph

The composition of the KTT Advisory Committee is not static: it may increase in size or shift in membership as the scope of the project advances.

Objectives & Approach

The objectives of this strategy are derived from the short, medium, and long-term outcomes of the ONFARM KTT (see page 4). The engagement and outreach strategy activities:

1. Provide accessible evidence-based solutions to Ontario farmers for improving soil health and reducing nutrient loss, promoting adoption of BMPs.
2. Share experiences and strategies of successful soil health pioneers to encourage farmers and advisors to embrace new BMPs.
3. Foster collaboration among farmers, advisors, researchers, and other partners to enhance access to information and support for water quality and soil health initiatives.
4. Elevate ONFARM's profile to generate opportunities (e.g., funding) for long-term soil health and water quality research and increase shared responsibility between government and industry.

Outreach Partners and Collaborations

The ONFARM project will collaborate with several groups, in addition to those represented on the KTT Advisory Committee, to strengthen the reach of the project and build strong partnerships to advance common goals. These groups may include:

- Innovative Farmers of Ontario
- Academic institutions
- Other jurisdictions with similar programming such as the Midwest Cover Crops Council, Cornell University, Practical Farmers of Iowa, Vermont Healthy Soils Coalition, and University of Wisconsin (Wisconsin Discovery Farm Model)
- Industry groups (i.e., Ontario Certified Crop Advisor Association, Ontario Agri Business Association, Ontario Federation of Agriculture)
- Stakeholders for various watersheds impacted by the ONFARM project (e.g., conservation authorities, other stewardship groups)

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- Other provincial soil health and water quality initiatives (Grain Farmers of Ontario's applied research activities, Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario's farmer-led research program, Ontario Soil Network Challenge, ALUS, Greenbelt Foundation Soil Health Program, etc.)

Target Audiences

The target audience refers to those stakeholders that the activities below are aimed to engage and that will be end-users of KTT products and ONFARM data.

Farmers

Farmers, specifically on-farm decision-makers, are the primary target audience of the activities below. These farmers are actively seeking regionally specific information to inform their management practices. Farmers and other stakeholders who are interested in learning about what other farmers are doing should be able to engage with the ONFARM project in an accessible way. Additionally, farmers who do not actively engage with agricultural organizations or initiatives should be able to engage with the project, as outreach and engagement activities should reflect the diversity of needs, knowledge, and methods of seeking information and learning.

Government and Conservation Authorities

Government and conservation authority audiences must also be engaged. This is a key step in terms of ensuring the success of the ONFARM project by creating positive outcomes through effective knowledge transfer to the public sector, which has the capacity to keep the project viable beyond its funding agreement. Conservation Authorities also have an ongoing interest in soil health and water quality research. These groups can help drive interest on a regional and watershed level.

Agri-food, Agribusiness, Related Organizations, and Non-Traditional Partners

Some organizations are already engaged through membership on the KTT Advisory Committee. Additional organizations should be engaged to complement ONFARM and leverage existing networks to engage the broader farming sector, such as Federations of Agriculture (provincial and local), 4-H Ontario and municipal Agricultural Advisory Committees. Non-traditional partners might include ag financial institutions or for-profit companies such as seed, fertilizer, and equipment dealers. These organizations might have an interest in investing in ONFARM activities (financial and in-kind) and often employ on-farm influencers such as Certified Crop Advisors. Such involvement will increase the reach of engagement activities for effective knowledge mobilization across the sector.

Research & Academia

This audience will be informed with new knowledge of interest regarding soil health, water quality and the BMPs being evaluated. Researchers will benefit from the knowledge generated from this research as it may guide and/or inform future research in these areas. Keeping them up to date on ONFARM findings and activities will foster opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing. Some research programs, such as Living Lab – Ontario, have overlap with ONFARM in terms of cooperating farmers. Finding efficiencies and opportunities to collaborate will reduce cooperator burden, extend resources, and increase reach.

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Evaluation Measuring Success

Evaluation is a critical component to the strategy's implementation and will enable the project team to improve KTT offerings and meet producers' needs. To support this process, OSCIA will record, collect and share feedback on outreach and engagement activities and its impacts on project outcomes. Evaluation will be conducted through:

- Project team/KTT Advisory Team debriefs.
- Participant evaluation surveys integrated into all in-person and online outreach activities, including questions on practice change and knowledge gained.
- Annual review and updating of the Outreach & Engagement strategy.

Measuring Success

Program outcomes are inspired by the objectives outlined above and are separated into short, medium, and long-term measures of success.

Short Term

Short-term measures of success will mostly consider participation rates in engagement activities. These measures include targets of:

- 6 events per year, with 10-25 participants at each event
- 80-100 participants at the annual Forum
- Increased engagement on social media
- Increased engagement with KTT products developed and with the ONFARM dataset
- 500 ONFARM webpage visits and 50 downloads of various reports annually

Medium Term

Medium-term success will look beyond participation in the ONFARM engagement activities and focus more on awareness and uptake of BMPs. Measures include targets of:

- 4-8 contributing partners across all cooperator sites
- 15% leveraged investment (in-kind and financial) at cooperator sites
- Increased percentage of farmers who indicate net positive change in understanding/knowledge of soil health and water quality BMPs
- Increased percentage of farmers who indicate intention to adopt soil health and water quality BMP strategies
- Number of farmers reporting increased acreage of soil health and water quality BMPs through surveys
- Increased collaboration amongst Ontario's agriculture sector organizations that are involved in on-farm applied research, monitoring and demonstration initiatives focused on water quality and soil health

Long Term

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Measuring long-term success can be more challenging without baseline metrics. ONFARM will monitor the landscape for opportunities to leverage this type of data from other Ontario-based initiatives. While long-term success may not be directly attributed to the ONFARM project, it is important to include larger goals for the project to work towards, including:

- Improved soil health and water quality on farms across the province resulting from improved confidence in and access to data for BMPs evaluated through ONFARM
- National (or international) recognition of ONFARM as a model for on-farm research success

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Outreach Implementation Work Plan

The following list of activities will help to engage stakeholders across Ontario to achieve the goals of this strategy. The KTT Advisory Committee will work with OSCIA to contribute to these activities and their outcomes. KTT and producer engagement will recognize the diversity of needs, knowledge, and methods of seeking information and learning, and will include but not be limited to:

| Raising Awareness - Communication & Marketing | | | | | |
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| Activity | Description/Notes | Timeline | Target | Progress | Audience |
| Social Media | Elevate profile of ONFARM, communicate key project milestones and outcomes, drive engagement with KTT products and events primarily through X (formally Twitter) and Facebook. Use relevant hashtags (e.g., #OntAg) to reach target audiences. | Y1-Y5 | | Ongoing | Farmers, Industry, Crop Advisors, Researchers & Academia |
| Media Articles/Media Releases | Highlight ONFARM outcomes, milestones, and activities in the farm media (e.g., Ontario Farmer, Farmtario, Better Farming) and industry publications. | Y2-Y5 | | | Farmers, Industry, Crop Advisors, Researchers & Academia |
| TBD | Announce expansion and selection of ONFARM sites in Northeastern Ontario. | Y2 | 2-3 publications | | |
| Newsletters | | | | | Mixed |
| Grassroots Matters | Short articles will be used to drive engagement with reports, KTT products developed and registration for events. | Opportunities Bi-Weekly | | | OSCIA members |
| The Innovator | Longer articles will highlight key project milestones and findings. | Opportunities Quarterly | | | OSCIA members |

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| Partner & Collaborator Newsletters | Share targeted/relevant cooperator profiles, case studies, reports and event registration information with partner and collaborator networks. | | | | |
| Webpage | Update landing page for the project which will host KTT products, Data Dashboard and partner recognition. | Y1 Q4 | 500 visits, 50 downloads annually | January 2024, Ongoing | Mixed |
| Update interactive map | The ONFARM webpage was recently moved and updated. The interactive map must be updated to reflect new sites (TBA) and migrated over to the new webpage. The update should include cooperator profiles and redirect to the Data Dashboard. | Y2 | | | |
| Field Signs | ONFARM cooperators have expressed interest in semi-permanent field signs which highlight their involvement in initiatives that align with values of neighbours and the public. Signs could redirect to ONFARM website. | Y2 | | | Farmers, public |
| Branded Materials | | | | | Mixed |
| ONFARM Apparel | Cooperators and researchers will receive ONFARM branded apparel to elevate the programs profile organically and function as a conversation starter at farm meetings and other events | Y1-Q4 | | In progress | Farmers |
| Tradeshow/Conference Display | Design and print display materials for use at agricultural meetings, conferences and tradeshows including retractable banners. | Y2 | | In progress | All |
| Telling the Story – Knowledge Transfer Products | | | | | |
| Activity | Description/Notes | Timeline | Target | Progress | Audience |

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| Profiles/Case Studies | Create short, high-level and consistent profiles for all ONFARM sites. Users will navigate to profiles from the interactive map. Profiles can be enhanced by addition of high-quality photos (see Photo Library) | Y2-Y5 | Minimum three (3) knowledge transfer products annually | | Farmers, Government, Conservation Authorities |
| Videos | | Y2-Y5 | | | Farmers |
| Monitoring Soil Health with ONFARM | Short overview of the soil health monitoring occurring at ONFARM paired BMP trial sites. | | | Posted in 2023 | |
| Photo Library | Enhance communications and KTT products by building library of high-quality images of BMPs and ONFARM cooperators/researchers. | Y2-Y3 | | | Partners and Collaborators |
| Knowledge Transfer & Engagement – Online Outreach | | | | | |
| Activity | Description/Notes | Timeline | Target | Progress | Audience |
| Webinars | | Y2-Y5 | | | Mixed |
| On-Farm Research ‘How-To’ Workshop | Appetite from OSCIA membership for a “How-To” workshop about setting up on-farm research trials for farmers or crop advisors less familiar with best practices. This would compliment the On-Farm Research guidebook developed in the initial phase of ONFARM. The workshop could take place in multiple regions and/or be offered online through a webinar or webinar series. A recording could act as a continuous resource. | Y2 | | | Farmers, Crop Advisors |

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| Annual Forum | The Forum is an opportunity to reflect on ONFARM progress and results, identify knowledge gaps and solutions, and highlight complimentary research initiatives. | Y1-Y5 | 80-100 participants annually | Forum on 02/08/2024 | Farmers, Government, Conservation Authority staff, Certified Crop Advisors, Academia |
| Data Dashboard | Data Dashboards are a public space to access the ONFARM data and results. Users can explore well-known soil health measurements such as organic matter alongside more novel indicators, like Solvita CO2-Burst and active carbon, to see how relationships between indicators may change over time or by BMP treatment. Users can also compare soil samples from their own farms to see how their soil health might compare to other farms in the region or across Ontario. | | | Ongoing | Farmers, Academia |
| Knowledge Transfer & Engagement – In-person Outreach | | | | | |
| Activity | Description/Notes | Timeline | Target | Progress | Audience |
| Demonstration Events | On-farm events where participants can see research and BMPs in action. Where possible, collaborate with other like-minded programs or organizations, and non-traditional partners, to leverage funding and resources and reach a wider audience. Create value-add opportunities such as CEU credits for CCAs or KSEs for OFCAF applicants. | Y2-Y5 | 3 annually/25 participants (75) | | Mixed |

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| Latonnell Conservation Symposium (Field Trip) | ONFARM cooperator hosted one of the symposiums annual “field trips”, where participants were introduced to ONFARM, toured ONFARM trial site to learn more about soil health measurements and cover crops, and drone technology which will be used to enhance research at some sites in partnership with TerraNova UAV. This opportunity should be revisited in a later program year. | Y1, Y4/Y5 | | Field trip on 10/23/2023 | Conservation Authority staff |
| Farm Innovation Tours | Collaborate with LRIC on one of four annual “Farm Innovation” events at an ONFARM site hosted by a cooperator with livestock in their operation and a manure BMP trial. | Y2 or Y3 | | In progress | Government, Researchers |
| Displays at Farm Shows, Agricultural Conferences & Meetings | Establish ONFARM presence (e.g., booth) at agricultural conferences, meetings and farm shows attended by target audiences to build program awareness and share KTT products. | Y1-5 | | | Mixed |
| Canada’s Outdoor Farm Show (COFS) | Enhanced ONFARM display at the OSCIA/OMAFRA Booth | Y1-Y5 | | Booth at 2023 COFS | Farmers |
| Presentations | Present ONFARM activities and results at soil health and/or agronomic meetings and conferences | Y1-Y5 | 4 annually | | Mixed |
| CCA Soil & Water Day | Progress and results from initial phase of ONFARM with a focus on soil health | Y1 | | Presentation on 11/15/2023 | Certified Crop Advisors |
| Latonnell Conservation Symposium (Presentation) | Progress and results from initial phase of ONFARM with a focus on water quality monitoring and modelling | Y1 | | Presentation on 10/24/2023 | Conservation Authority staff |
| GFO Research Forum | Presentation on OSCIA-delivered applied research initiatives including ONFARM, Living Lab – Ontario and Grassroots Research Grants. | Y1 | | Presentation on 02/20/2024 | Industry, Farmers |

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| North West International Ag Expo | Potential opportunity to announce and/or highlight the new ONFARM sites located in Northern Ontario | Y2 (July 2024) | | | Farmers, Industry |
| OSCIA AGMs & Spring Meetings | Actively seek opportunities to present ONFARM activities and results to OSCIA member | Y2-Y5 | | | Farmers |
| Training/Knowledge Transfer Events | Workshops and small group sessions to facilitate knowledge development and sharing on selected BMPS or decision support tools. | Y2-Y5 | 3 annually/10 participants (30) | | Mixed |
| Crop Diagnostic Days | Leverage the success and captive audience present at Crop Diagnostic Days to elevate profile of ONFARM and share results/resources | Y2 | | | Farmers, Crop Advisors |
| On-Farm Research ‘How-To’ Workshop | Appetite from OSCIA membership for a “How-To” workshop about setting up on-farm research trials for farmers or crop advisors less familiar with best practices. This would compliment the On-Farm Research guidebook developed in the initial phase of ONFARM. The workshop could take place in multiple regions and/or be offered online. | Y2 | | | Farmers, Crop Advisors |
| Committees/Research Advisory Groups | Representation on committees/working groups with complimentary objectives to ONFARM (e.g., Soil Action Group, Ontario Soil Management Committee, Ontario Soil Network Farmer Engagement Committee) will ensure the program remains relevant and front of mind to members and promotes opportunities for collaboration | Y1-Y5 | | Ongoing | Government, Industry and Academia |