



**EFAO**  
ECOLOGICAL FARMERS  
ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

# Annual Report 2020



# Contents

Dear Members and Friends 3

About EFAO 5

Membership 6

Farmer-to-Farmer Knowledge Sharing 8

6th Annual Ecological Farmers of Ontario Conference 9

Cultivating Curiosity with Farmer-Led Research 10

Farmer-Led Research Projects - Started or Completed in 2020 11

Reduced Tillage with Cover Crops 13

A Rare Breed of Researchers in Ontario 15

The First 5 Years of Farmer-Led Research 16

Building Resilient Seed Systems 17

Diversifying with Small Grains 18

Putting Soil Health First 19

Advocating for Climate-Friendly Policy 20

2020 Financial Report 21

Outreach 22

Funding Partners 23

Organizational Partnerships 23

Thank You 24



This icon marks each online resource throughout the annual report



# Dear Members and Friends

This year has been one unlike any other. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected us all differently. Some farmers have faced perilous labour shortages and market closures, others have experienced unprecedented demand for local ecological food. All have had to adapt. As an organization it has also been a year of adaptation, and one defined by collaboration and strategic planning.

While there were challenges in pivoting all EFAO educational programming to online formats, it has been an invaluable learning opportunity that has garnered terrific engagement, thanks to partnerships with fellow farm organizations.

It has also been very exciting to work with the Weston Family Foundation this year to launch a pilot Small Grains Program, which has been received with great enthusiasm by farmers and the broader agricultural sector. The program will support farmers to diversify their crop rotations and provide training and farmer-to-farmer support through a Small Grains Network.

EFAO's Farmer-Led Research Program, now completing its fifth year, continues to engage the curiosity of members, advance our collective knowledge around ecological farming practices, and open the door to new opportunities for the organization within the broader agricultural sector. Since 2016, 60 different farmer-researchers have conducted over 70 on-farm trials in cooperation with EFAO.

In late 2019, EFAO dove head-first into policy advocacy when we helped create Farmers for Climate Solutions, a national coalition of farm organizations calling for governments to support climate-friendly practices on Canadian farms. The coalition has made rapid strides in its first year, engaging with elected officials, generating media attention across the country and securing a major commitment from the federal government to reduce emissions and increase resilience in agriculture.

The EFAO staff team was delighted to welcome Maureen Balsillie as Field Crop Coordinator, managing the new Small Grains Program; and near the end of the year, Laura Northey as Communications and Government Relations Manager. While staff has been working from home for much of the year, they have been finding new ways to connect and collaborate online that have enabled meaningful conversations around our strategic plan and how EFAO should engage in anti-racism work.

This past year has seen the EFAO board and staff take some long overdue first steps toward anti-racism work, and to becoming a more inclusive organization. As we look ahead, EFAO board and staff are committed to increasing their understanding of anti-racism towards Black, Indigenous and other people of colour, and to better meeting the needs of farmers and members who are currently underrepresented in the organization and the ecological farming movement at large.

As we look to the coming year, we are energized to put our Strategic Plan into action, and work to double the number of acres and farmers in ecological agriculture by 2025. New directions for the coming year will include:

- Expanding the Soil Health Program and Advisory Service, including soil test interpretation.
- Supporting farmer-members as spokespeople for ecological agriculture.
- Working with Farmers for Climate Solutions to influence federal and provincial agricultural policy.
- Working to become a more inclusive organization.
- Implementing a comprehensive evaluation strategy to ensure that we are moving in the right direction.

The year ahead will undoubtedly include new challenges and unknowns, yet our commitment to meeting the needs of our members has never been stronger. Please keep in touch; EFAO's strength is in its hands-in-the-soil membership of forward-looking and passionate farmers.

Thank you for everything you do!

Brent Preston, *Board President* and Ali English, *Executive Director*





# About EFAO

Established in 1979 by farmers for farmers, EFAO 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.

## Mission

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

## 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 fosters healthy, vibrant communities.

## Board of Directors

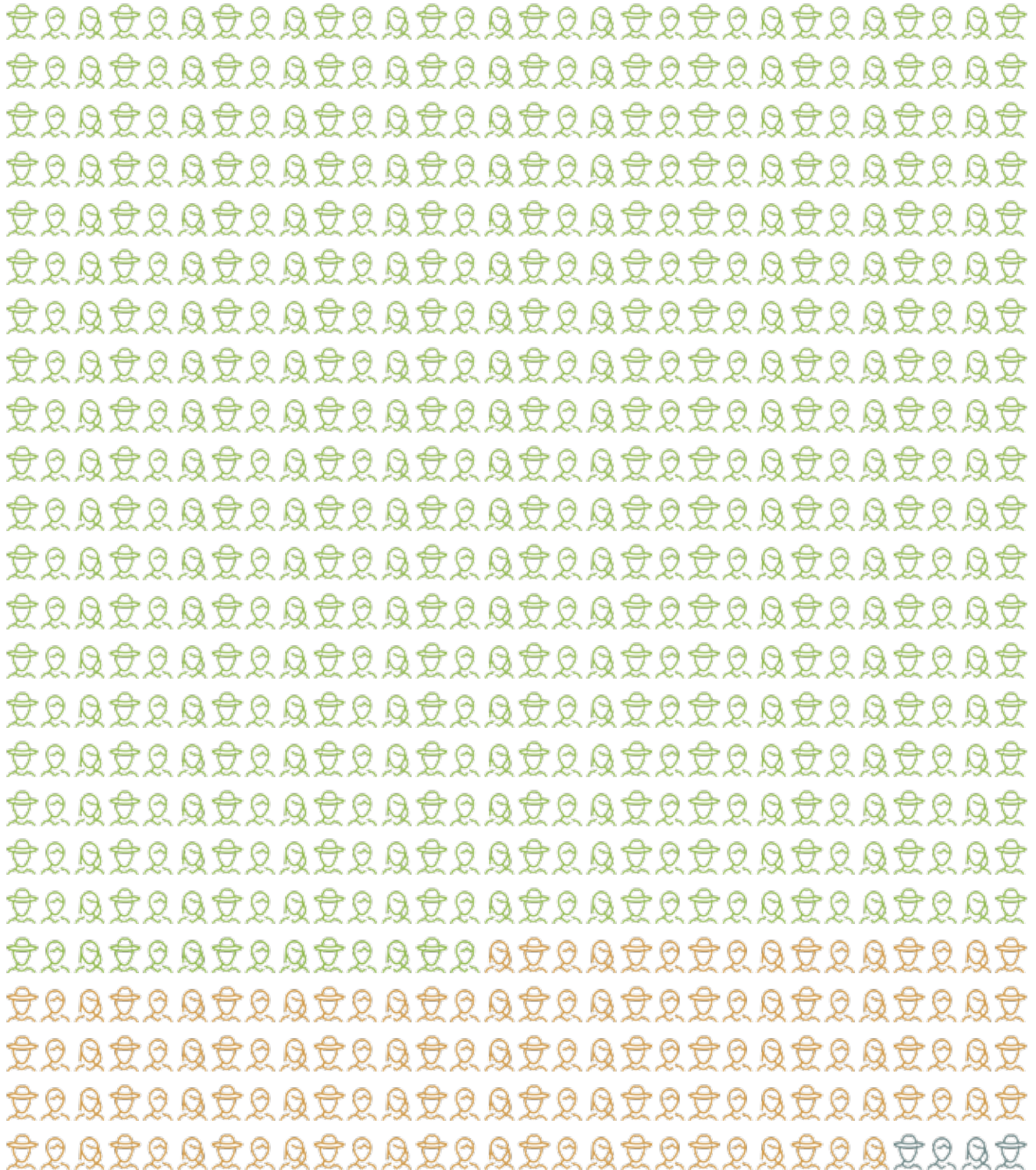
Brent Preston, *President*  
Jennifer Seilern\*, *Vice President*  
Melissa Watkins, *Treasurer*  
Crista Thor, *Secretary*  
Éric Blondin\*  
Brent Klassen  
Mike MacGillivray\*  
Katrina McQuail  
Eric Payseur  
Ricardo Ramírez  
Annie Richard  
\*Outgoing Director

## 2020 Staff

Ali English, *Executive Director*  
Sarah Hargreaves, *Research Director*  
Katie Baikie, *Education Director*  
Allison Muckle, *Northern Program Director*  
Martina Schaefer, *Administrative Manager*  
Rebecca Ivanoff, *Seed Program Manager*  
Ami Dehne, *Outreach Coordinator*  
Maureen Balsillie, *Field Crop Coordinator*  
Naomi Krucker, *Training and Resources Coordinator*  
Fiona Campbell, *Editor in Chief*  
Colleen Darrell, *Bookkeeper*

# Membership

720 members across Ontario



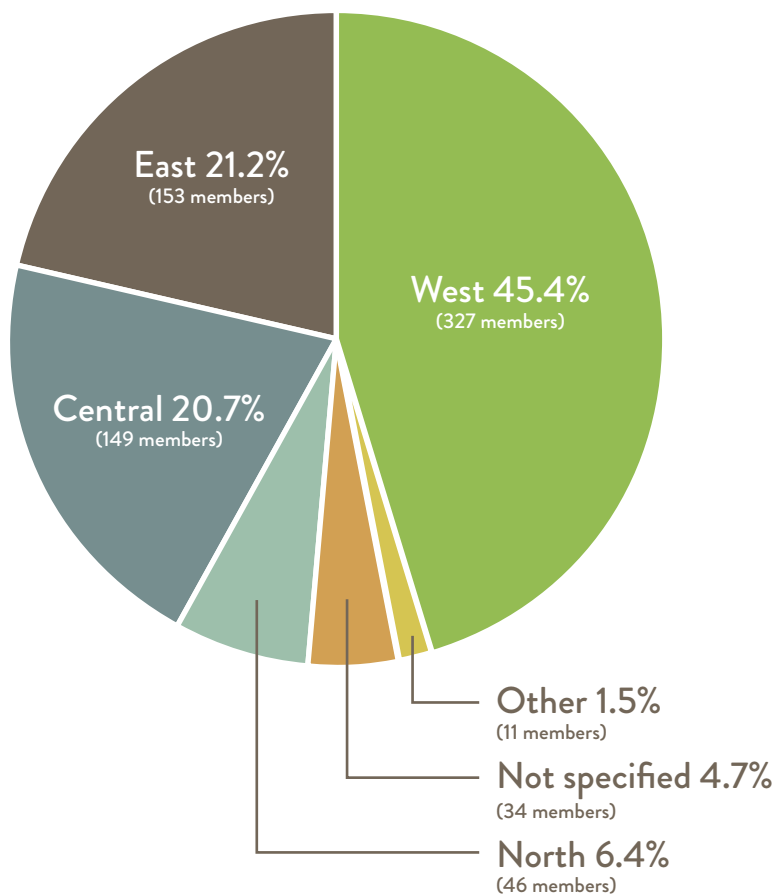
584 Full Members

132 Student/New Farmer Members

4 Lifetime Members

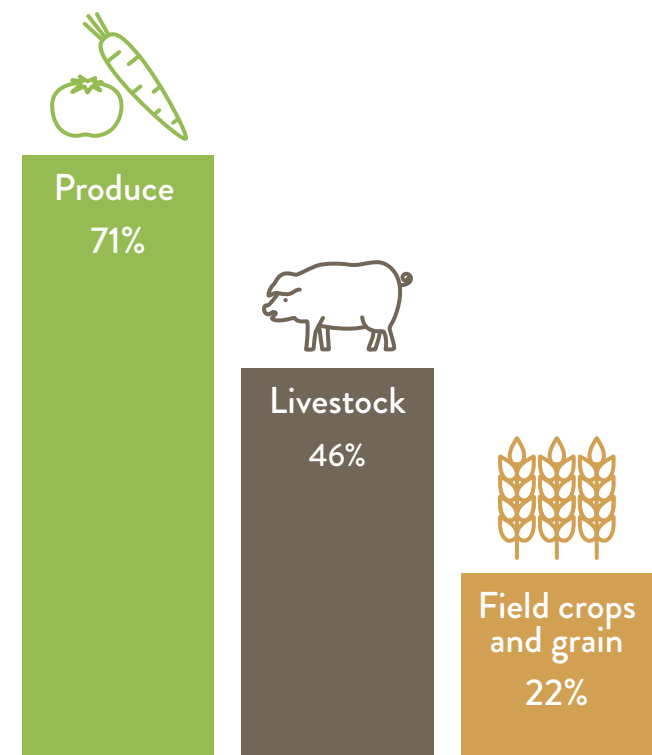
## Regional Distribution of Membership

2020



## Membership by Type of Production

2020



# Farmer-to-Farmer Knowledge Sharing

The foundation of EFAO’s work for over 40 years, farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing is a powerful tool for supporting farmers to build resilient farms and broadening adoption of ecological agriculture. It involves farmers sharing their practical knowledge, innovations, and challenges with each other, while building a community of supportive peers.

As an organization, this year has been defined by the move to online formats for training and farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing and connection. While we all greatly miss gathering in person, these new online opportunities have been well received, and have presented the chance to learn how we can effectively deliver engaging and accessible virtual events.



## Farmer-to-farmer education and relationship building:



74 members taught 1212 people at 80 events



Events included:



11 workshops



25 virtual field days



27 webinars



17 online meet-ups



40 of these virtual events were hosted in partnership with Ignatius Farm and Everdale as part of the Ignatius New Farmer Training Program



EFAO’s Online Forum has engaged 245 users in 302 discussions



28 members wrote articles for EFAO’s quarterly publication *Ecological Farming in Ontario*





# 6th Annual Ecological Farmers of Ontario Conference

Dec 2 - Dec 5, 2019 in Belleville, ON

EFAO's 6th annual conference, centred on the theme of Climate of Curiosity brought together 410 people to participate in over 40 workshops, keynote presentations, farm tours, community meetings, and much more.



40 EFAO members led 27 conference workshops, farm tours and community meetings!



# Cultivating Curiosity with Farmer-Led Research

EFAO is in its fifth year of supporting members to answer their specific on-farm questions with farmer-led research.

Farmers lead the process, posing the questions and conducting the research themselves. Results from these trials not only empower farmers to make decisions about their farm businesses; the influence goes well beyond the farm gate. Their research is published in reports and academic manuscripts, presented at events, featured in the media and is a source of fodder for conversation within the farming community.



To read this year's research reports, listen to audio summaries and watch videos from the trials, visit [efao.ca/research-2020](https://efao.ca/research-2020)



To learn more about research and innovations of EFAO farmer-members from the last five years, visit EFAO's open access Research Library at [efao.ca/research-library](https://efao.ca/research-library)

Since 2016, 60 different farmer-researchers have conducted over 70 on-farm trials in cooperation with EFAO.

In 2020,  
38 farmers  
conducted  
25 trials



## Farmer-Led Research Projects - Started or Completed in 2020



### Alternative Livestock Feed

- Performance of Chantecler chickens on a reduced protein grower ration | Heather Newman



### Disease & Pest Management

- Efficacy of mycorrhizal inoculants on vegetable transplants | Dianne Kretschmar



### Pasture Regeneration

- Assessing chronology of soil nutrient status in pastures across a topographic gradient | Andy MacDonald



### Seed Production, Varietal Selection & Breeding

- In search of short season northern grain amaranth varieties: A screening trial of grain amaranth (*Amaranthus* spp) | Ronaldo Eleazar Lec Ajcot and Myriam Legault
- Isolation distance for cosmos seed production | Kim Delaney
- Evaluation of winter-hardy field peas for use as a winter cover crop | Duane Falk
- Early yielding pea breeding project, Year 2 | Duane Falk
- In search of short season northern sweet potatoes: Variety trials of new sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*) crosses | Kate Garvie, Erin Richan, Lise-Anne Léveillé
- In Search of Short Season Northern Sweet Potato Varieties: Breeding of New Sweet Potato (*Ipomoea batatas*) Crosses | Kate Garvie and Jessica Gale
- Grafting for organic low-tech greenhouse tomatoes | R. Victor and Nathan Klassen
- Seedless English cucumber breeding | Nathan Klassen
- Summer and fall lettuce variety trials | Angie Koch, Ann Slater, Lise- Anne Léveillé, Harold Saunders, Jon Gagnon, Laurie and Corey Ahrens, Martina Schaefer, Norah Quast, Sarah Judd, and Hilary Moore
- Broccoli landrace breeding project, Year 1 | Greta Kryger
- Spinach variety trial for northwestern Ontario seed production | Evalisa McIlffaterick and Janna van Blyderveen
- Southern Ontario Pepper Breeding Project | Annie Richard, Kim Delaney, Rebecca Ivanoff, Greta Kryger and Kathy Rothermel



## Soil Health

- Regeneration of fallow fields for vegetable production | **Eric Barnhorst**
- Assessing methods for nutrient application to prevent chlorosis in chestnuts | **Derick Greenly**
- Direct seeding into compost mulch | **Jason Hayes**
- No-till tomatoes 3-ways | **Matt Jones**
- Effects of liquid and biological amendments on emergence and yield of no-till planted spring cereals | **Ken Laing**
- No-till Vegetable Trials | **Ken Laing**
- No-till sunflowers in northern Ontario | **Becky Porlier**
- No-till fall broccoli in northern Ontario | **Ryan Spence and Isabelle Spence-Legault**



## Weed control

- Weeding with a robot (Tertill) in hoophouses | **Jonathan Harris**



## Reduced Tillage with Cover Crops

This year, Matt Jones, Ken Laing, Ryan Spence and Isabelle Spence-Legault experimented with crimped cover crops as mulch to build soil and control weeds.



Matt compared using cover crops combined with compost and landscape fabric against other weed suppressants in his trial No-till tomatoes 3-ways. To crimp oats and peas, he used 4' of 1 1/2" slotted angle attached to 2"x2" wood to stand on with 2"x2" used for handles.

Ryan and Isabelle compared a high residue cover crop mulch for their fall broccoli. To crimp rye and hairy vetch, they used a disassembled crimper from an old haybine and modified it to fit onto the pallet forks of a tractor.



You can see Ryan and Isabelle's crimper in action: [efao.ca/no-till-fall-broccoli](http://efao.ca/no-till-fall-broccoli)





As part of EFAO's on-going no-till vegetable trials, Ken grew a high residue cover crop of rye for transplanted sweet corn, winter squash and tomatoes and seeded crops of green beans and sunflowers. To crimp, he used an I&J roller/crimper with a Case IH 75A tractor.

You can follow Ken's story about EFAO's ongoing no-till vegetable trials at: [efao.ca/no-till-vegetable-trials](https://efao.ca/no-till-vegetable-trials)



## A Rare Breed of Researchers in Ontario

A unique and important part of EFAO's Farmer-Led Research Program is its focus on varietal selection and breeding. This year, 6 members received funding from the prestigious Organic Farming Research Foundation in the US to conduct three farmer-led breeding projects.

By developing varieties of peppers, broccoli, and cucumber, Kim Delany, Rebecca Ivanoff, Nathan Klassen, Greta Kryger, Annie Richard and Kathy Rothermel are improving ecological farming in Ontario by providing novel and needed locally adapted varieties that are bred for low-input organic systems.

### Results so far

- Greta crossed 35 summer heading broccoli varieties to create a genetically diverse pool of seeds from which to breed from next year.
- Nathan is working on crossing Tyria F1 (female) with Hofstetter, a variety he selected and saved.
- The Southern Ontario Pepper Breeding Project is bringing their mass selected red pepper to market!



## The First 5 Years of Farmer-Led Research

Member input drives program inception and ongoing program development.



Farmer-researchers increase their knowledge and awareness of ecological agriculture.

- Farmer-researchers have confidence in their results; refined decision-making tools and a “common language” for evaluating on-farm challenges and adapting to climate change.



Farmer-researchers adopt, adapt and embed ecological agriculture practices on their farms.

- As a result of their trial in 2018, Brent Preston and Gillian Flies are using landscape fabric between succession plantings to reduce their tillage by over 80%.
- As a result of his trial in 2019, Eric Barnhorst is using grafting to make his organic heirloom tomato production more profitable.



Farmer-researchers share their findings freely and influence their peers at EFAO field days, symposia, and other agricultural events and workshops.



Farmer-researchers and results from the Farmer-Led Research Program are influencing the agricultural sector.

- 20+ print articles in mainstream media, academic publications, blogs, radio and podcast interviews.
- Notable reference in *New Horizons: Ontario's Agricultural Soil Health and Conservation Strategy*.
- Inaugural recipient of the Excellence in Agriculture Award in 2019.
- Funds leveraged for EFAO and fostered 7 new sector partnerships.





## Building Resilient Seed Systems



The Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security (The BFICSS) in Ontario is focused on advancing on-farm seed production work by supporting farmers to participate in on-farm research such as variety trialing and plant breeding, as well as facilitating farmer-to-farmer knowledge sharing opportunities. EFAO is proud to host The BFICSS in Ontario!

In addition to the plant breeding trials (listed on page 11):



153 farmers participated in webinars and virtual field days on seed production and breeding.



14 farmers in Ontario participated in the Canadian Organic Vegetable Improvement Project (CANOVI) variety trials on orange and red carrots, red bell peppers, rutabaga, and radicchio.



58 Ontario farmers participated in growing 82 seed varieties for Seeds of Diversity Canada's Seed Library.



15 farmers worked on breeding new varieties of wheat, oats and potatoes in collaboration with the Bauta Initiative and the University of Manitoba.



A new podcast, **SeedHeads** was launched!

To learn more and get involved visit: [efao.ca/seed-security](http://efao.ca/seed-security)





# Diversifying with Small Grains

Launched this summer, EFAO's pilot Small Grains Program is supporting Ontario farmers to diversify their crop rotation by adding a new small grain followed by a legume cover or forage crop. The pilot year will provide payments of \$40/acre for up to 100 acres, as well as participation in a Small Grains Network.

- The launch of the pilot was very well received and we are able to support 8 farmers to grow 600 acres of new small grains in Ontario for the 2021 season. These farmer-participants are growing winter wheat, spring wheat, spring rye, cereal rye, and oats in all regions of the province, and will follow the small grain with a legume cover crop.
- EFAO also welcomed 100+ other farmers to the Small Grains Network, that will provide training and farmer-to-farmer support and information about small grains production and marketing.

 **8**  
farmers

 **600**  
acres

 **100+**  
farmers



To learn more about the program and the benefits of small grains visit:  
[efao.ca/small-grains](http://efao.ca/small-grains)

#smallgrainbiggains

# Putting Soil Health First

In 2019 EFAO piloted a Soil Health Benchmark Study. The project was modelled off of Pasa Sustainable Agriculture's Soil Health Benchmark Study, and done in collaboration with NFU Local 316 for farmers in the Kingston area.

## How it worked:

31 farmer-participants took baseline soil health samples from three fields or areas of interest. They chose three representative plots in each area for a total of 9 plots. Using kits sent from EFAO, farmers sampled soil from each of their 9 plots after they sowed a fall cover crop, finished fall field operations or their final rotation for the season. They mailed their samples to A&L Canada Laboratories Inc. in London for analysis of organic matter and active carbon; and conducted water infiltration in-field. EFAO staff crunched the numbers this spring and sent Soil Health Benchmark Reports to each participant farmer.

## What we found:

The group's data revealed that organic matter was the most useful indicator followed by active carbon. Water infiltration was useful on only one farm and, in general, farmer-participants noted frustrations taking infiltration measurements including long and variable infiltration times.



To learn more about results from EFAO's pilot Soil Health Benchmark Study visit: [efao.ca/soil-health-benchmark-2019-results](https://efao.ca/soil-health-benchmark-2019-results)



## Future of the study:

Many participants gained insights into how the soil health on their fields compared in 2019, but the real power of this study will come in future years when the farmers re-sample the same areas and compare the new data to the 2019 baseline data. To this end, we are exploring ways of continuing this program for follow-up sampling and new cohorts of farmers for baseline sampling.



# Advocating for Climate-Friendly Policy

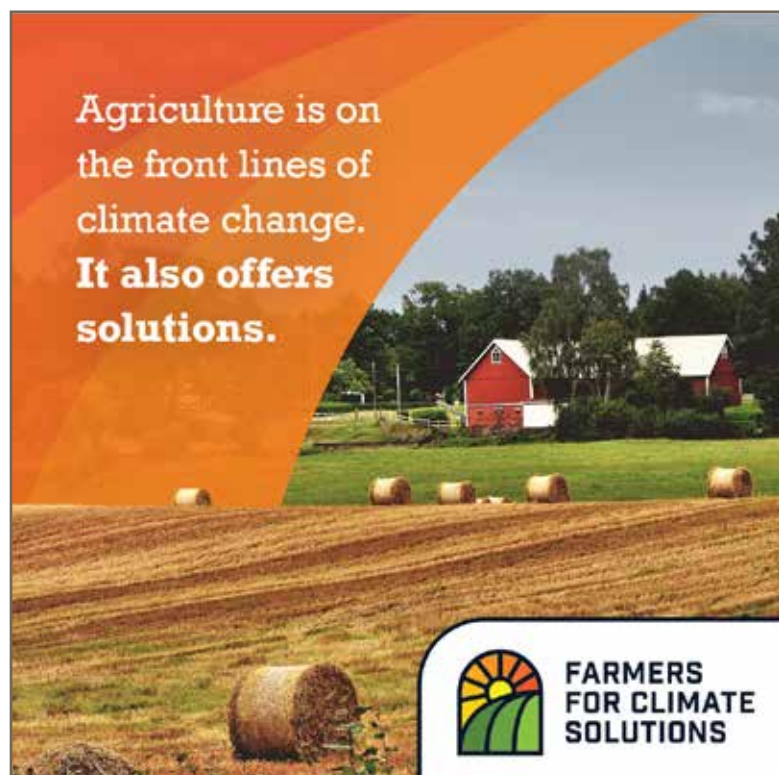
In late 2019, EFAO became a founding member of Farmers for Climate Solutions (FCS), a national coalition of farmer-led and farmer-supporting organizations that believe that agriculture must be part of the solution to climate change. Since formally launching the campaign in February, FCS has gained national media attention, held meetings with federal ministers and attracted new members. The coalition now includes fifteen member organizations who together represent over 20,000 farmers from every province and the Yukon. After a targeted government relations campaign, the federal government included FCS language in the September Speech from the Throne, recognizing “farmers, foresters, and ranchers as key partners in the fight against climate change, supporting their efforts to reduce emissions and build resilience”.



**FARMERS FOR  
CLIMATE SOLUTIONS**  
**FERMIERS POUR LA  
TRANSITION CLIMATIQUE**

## Highlights of FCS work in 2020:

- Conducted a media campaign for the launch of Farmers for Climate Solutions, with coverage from coast to coast.
- Produced a report on policy recommendations for a climate-friendly recovery from COVID-19 in agriculture.
- Briefed the federal Minister of Agriculture and Minister of Environment and Climate Change on FCS policy recommendations.
- Met with numerous officials across the federal government.
- Submitted a proposal for a multi-year, multi-million dollar program to spread ecological farming practices across Canada.
- Assembled a farmer-led task force to quantify GHG reduction potential and cost of climate-friendly on-farm practices to inform government decision-making.



EFAO has been a driving force behind all FCS efforts and sits on the Coordinating Body that oversees the work of the coalition. In 2021 we look forward to leading FCS work with the provincial government in Ontario and continuing our advocacy for climate mitigation and adaptation in Canadian agriculture.

To learn more about Farmers for Climate Solutions visit:

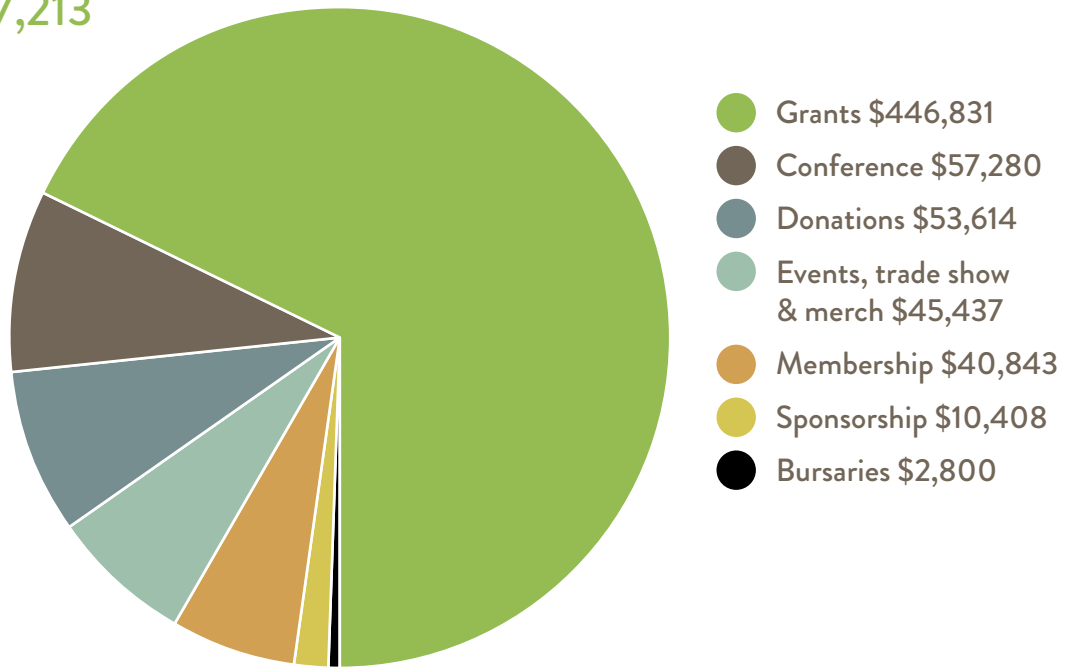


[farmersforclimatesolutions.ca](https://farmersforclimatesolutions.ca)

# 2020 Financial Report

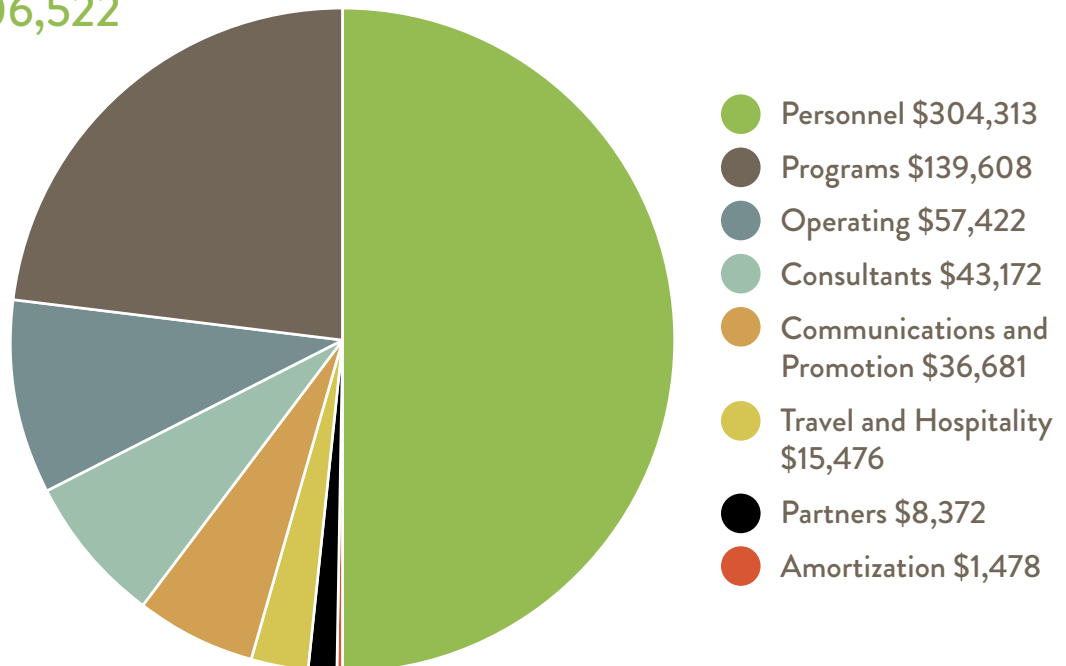
## Revenue \$657,213

2020



## Expenses \$606,522

2020



## 2020 Net Revenue: \$50,691

Operating Fund Balance: \$112,565 - \$25,000 to be internally restricted for FY 2020-21 = \$87,565



# Outreach

## Digital reach



E-news  
2877  
subscribers



Instagram  
2025  
followers

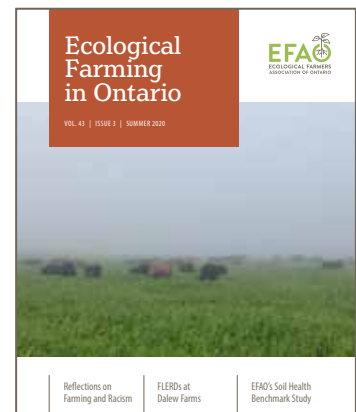
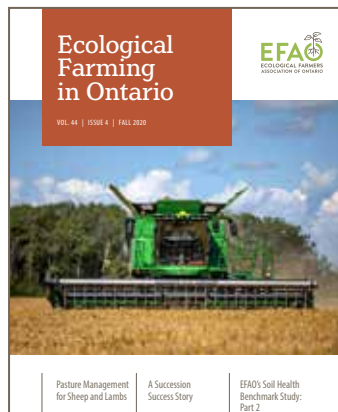


Twitter  
1575  
followers



Facebook  
4388  
followers

This year we redesigned our quarterly print publication *Ecological Farming in Ontario*. A cherished resource among members, it features articles on practical farming techniques, stories from fellow farmers, and provides a way for members to connect to the broader ecological farming community.



EFAO is thrilled to be working with some amazing partners in Northern Ontario who have strong ties and a wealth of knowledge in their respective regions. These partners include:

- Thunder Bay District: Thunder Bay and Area Food Strategy
- Algoma/Manitoulin Districts: Sault Ste Marie Innovation Centre's Rural Agri-Innovation Network (RAIN)
- Timiskaming/Cochrane Districts: Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance (NOFIA)
- Sudbury/Nipissing/Muskoka/Parry Sound Districts: Isabelle Spence-Legault

# Funding Partners

Thank you to our funding partners for making it possible for EFAO to offer a variety of innovative farmer-led programs and initiatives in ecological agriculture.



**Brian and  
Joannah Lawson  
Family  
Foundation**

**Robert and Moira Sansom  
Ideas Foundation**

A fund within the



**LONDON  
COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION**



**Ontario  
Trillium Foundation**



**Fondation Trillium  
de l'Ontario**  
An Agency of the Government of Ontario  
Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

# Organizational Partnerships

We are grateful to have worked in close partnership with numerous organizations and individuals across the province, particularly:

- Canadian Organic Growers
- Everdale
- Ignatius Farm (Ignatius Jesuit Centre)
- Innovative Farmers Association of Ontario
- Local Food and Farm Co-ops
- National Farmers Union - Ontario
- Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association
- Ontario Soil Network
- Organic Council of Ontario
- Practical Farmers of Iowa
- SeedChange
- The Bauta Family Initiative on Canadian Seed Security
- University of Guelph

# Thank You

There are many ways that members and supporters contribute financially beyond membership fees. This provides invaluable support to the organization as it builds towards a diversified and stable funding model.

Big thanks to: Lifetime members, donors, Silent Auction contributors and conference bursary donors.

