



A Call for Farm Renewal and a New Farmer Strategy in Ontario



Where we are

Ontario's agricultural sector is facing a significant transition crisis. An aging farm population is approaching retirement while new farmers face substantial barriers to establishing viable farm businesses.

By the end of the next Agricultural Policy Framework (2033), up to 40% of Ontario's current farmers are expected to retire.

At the same time, new and equity-deserving farmers encounter systemic challenges in accessing land, capital, training, markets, and infrastructure.

Provincial governments play a critical role in shaping an inclusive and resilient agricultural future. This brief outlines key policy challenges and presents recommendations to support farm renewal, strengthen local food economies, and advance a more equitable and resilient agri-food system in Ontario.

Issues

Demographic Crisis



Since 1991...



Farm Income Crisis

Low net farm incomes and income instability are the primary drivers of the generational renewal crisis, discouraging new entrants and limiting the ability of existing farmers to transfer their operations.

Farmland Market Failure

Ontario's farmland market exhibits clear market failure conditions, where land values exceed the income that can reasonably be generated through farming.

Ontario has the highest per-acre farmland costs in Canada, and prices continue to rise



Land and Capital Accessibility

Access to land and capital remains the most significant challenge for new farm entrants, with barriers disproportionately affecting equity-deserving groups. Ontario is one of the only provinces without a dedicated provincial crown corporation for agricultural lending.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Gaps

Equity-deserving groups remain underrepresented in Ontario agriculture. Ethnocultural diversity among Ontario farm operators is significantly lower than the national average.

Local Food Infrastructure Gaps

Ontario lacks sufficient processing, storage, and distribution infrastructure for small and mid-sized farms. These gaps make it difficult for new and growing farm businesses to scale production and meet increasing consumer demand for local food.

Insufficiently Tailored Supports

Existing provincial programs do not adequately address the needs of new farmers during the start-up phase and fail to respond to the structural barriers faced by equity-deserving farmers.

How We Got Here

Lack of Coordinated Farm Renewal Approach

OMAFRA's Grow Ontario Strategy sets a target of increasing the production of food grown and prepared in Ontario by 30% by 2032. Achieving this goal will require a dedicated Ontario New Farmer Strategy. Current efforts lack sufficient coordination, long-term investment, and targeted action to support generational renewal.

Ontario has no dedicated strategy for supporting generational renewal and new farmers.

Lessons from Other Provinces

Quebec's targeted investments in new farmers have helped reverse farm loss trends, demonstrating the highest rate of generational renewal and the proportion of greenhouse vegetable production reaching 50% self sufficiency. British Columbia's New Entrant Strategy, which includes land-matching programs and enhanced extension services, has improved outcomes for beginning farmers.

Canada Lagging Behind Peer Jurisdictions

Internationally, Canada trails comparable jurisdictions. The European Commission's Generational Renewal Strategy recommends that member states dedicate 6% of all agricultural spending to generational renewal initiatives, with recent assessments demonstrating strong impacts. In the United States, comprehensive supports for "Beginning Farmers and Ranchers" were introduced in 2014, contributing to a nationwide increase of more than 10% in the number of new farmers.



What We Need

1

Prioritize New Farmers in the Next Agricultural Policy Framework:

Ensure land and capital access for new farmers are prioritized in upcoming federal, provincial, and territorial Agricultural Policy Framework negotiations. This should include funding for land-matching services, succession planning, start-up-focused grants, and low-interest loan programs.

2


Develop an Ontario New Farmer Strategy:

Establish a comprehensive, province-wide New Farmer Strategy focused on generational renewal, developed in partnership with organizations supporting new and equity-deserving farmers.

3

Strengthen Regional Food Production and Infrastructure:

Expand public and shared processing, storage, and distribution infrastructure; revise health and local food regulations to be scale-appropriate; and ensure funding programs are accessible to small and medium-scale farms, cooperatives, and social enterprises.



Founded in 1979 by farmers, the Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario (EFAO) supports farmers to build resilient ecological farms and grow a strong knowledge-sharing community. EFAO has over 1000 members, and approximately half are aspiring and new farmers who have been farming for less than five years. Many are facing barriers in accessing land and capital to start and grow their farm businesses.