

Advancing a New Farmer Strategy in Ontario



Purpose

Ontario's agricultural sector is at a critical juncture. An aging farm population, combined with persistent barriers for new and equity-deserving farmers, threatens the long-term viability, resilience, and equity of Ontario's agri-food system. This brief outlines the urgency of coordinated action and calls on governments and sector partners to advance a comprehensive New Farmer Strategy for Ontario.

Background and Rationale

Unstable farm incomes, growing input costs, rising farmland prices, and limited access to capital present major barriers to farm entry and succession. **Ontario has the highest per-acre farmland costs in Canada, often exceeding the income-generating capacity of farming itself.** Access challenges are particularly acute for equity-deserving farmers, who also remain significantly underrepresented in the sector.

By the end of the next Agricultural Policy Framework...



Currently...



Since 1991...



At the same time, Ontario faces critical gaps in local food infrastructure, including processing, storage, and distribution capacity for small and mid-sized farms. These constraints limit the ability of new farm businesses to scale and meet growing demand for local food.

The Grow Ontario Strategy aims to **increase food grown and prepared in the province by 30% by 2032.** Achieving this target will require a dedicated and coordinated approach to generational farm renewal. Ontario has no dedicated strategy for new farmers.

Evidence from Other Jurisdictions

Targeted policy interventions have demonstrated positive outcomes elsewhere. Quebec's investments in new farmers have helped reverse farm loss trends, resulting in an increase of young farmers and greenhouse vegetable production reaching 50% self-sufficiency. British Columbia's New Entrant Strategy has improved outcomes through land-matching and extension services. Internationally, the European Union dedicates 6% of agricultural spending to generational renewal, while the United States has seen a nationwide increase of more than 10% in new farmers since implementing comprehensive supports in 2014.

Policy Recommendations

1

Prioritize New Farmers in the Next Agricultural Policy Framework:

Embed dedicated supports for land access, succession planning, start-up grants, and low-interest loans for new farmers.

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

Invest in Regional Food Infrastructure and Market Access:

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.



Call to Action

We invite agricultural organizations, farmer associations, food system organizations, and allied stakeholders to endorse and sign on to these policy recommendations. A coordinated, cross-sector approach is essential to securing a resilient, inclusive, and economically viable future for farming in Ontario.

By working collectively, Ontario can support the next generation of farmers, strengthen local food economies, and ensure a sustainable agri-food system for decades to come.

*A document prepared by the
Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario.*

