

Building Capacity to support stewardship on the south-east shores of Lake Huron

A Report to the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs
to support efforts of the Healthy Lake Huron Initiative and the Canadian
Agricultural Partnership for Stewardship Clusters

Stewardship Clusters Project #2018-010(a)

Activity 3

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Activity 3: Building Capacity by Reaching “Influencers”

Due: December 15, 2019

Deliverables:

- Bring together local resources in the watersheds of St. Clair Region, Ausable Bayfield, Maitland Valley and Saugeen Valley with a **minimum of five (5) expert resources who have hosted at least one(1) event** involving the promotion of soil health, water quality or the adoption of BMPs between January 1, 2017 to November 30, 2019.
- Meet with these experts/influencers is to **obtain their views** on the promotion of soil health, water quality and the adoption of BMPs.
- Report on the findings, which will be made available on the Recipient’s webpage until March 2021 and will include the following:
 - potential opportunities and barriers to promote soil health, water quality and the adoption of BMPs;
 - ways in which events aimed at promoting soil health, water quality and the adoption of BMPs can be better coordinated and/or planned;
 - what key messages best promote soil health, water quality and the adoption of BMPs

St. Clair Region Conservation Authority designed a survey that can be used by all recipients to discuss the views of experts/influencers that represent a number of local industries and sectors. The recipients plan to reach out to the following industries/sectors:

- Grain elevators
- Co-ops
- Drainage Superintendents
- Drainage Contractors
- Agronomists/CCAs
- Equipment dealers
- Erosion control contractors
- Nutrient management consultant
- Banks and finance – Libro and Farm Credit
- Local chapters of commodity groups (Cattlemen’s Association, Grain Farmers of Ontario, Ontario Soil & Crop Improvement Associations, etc)

Building relationships with the experts or influencers in these industries and sectors allows the recipients to link to someone who isn’t our normal audience in order to grow our networks and learn different perspectives, thereby building capacity.

The recipients are staff of Healthy Lake Huron Conservation Authorities. As such, we are unequipped with the skills or resources necessary to study behaviour. We identify this lack of psychological or sociological training as a gap in understanding what drives different industries

and sectors within the agriculture community. Nonetheless, we have created a survey to build our networks and communities through casual conversations.

The survey will more or less remain the same when initiated with an expert to ensure consistency in messaging and responses across the Healthy Lake Huron Watersheds. The recipients may however, use the survey as a loose script to guide conversations with the different individuals to whom they connect. Allowing freedom to ask more or fewer questions and frame the survey as a causal conversation may provide more straightforward and practical answers by the expert as opposed to “official” responses spoken on behalf of an entire organization.

In these survey discussions with the experts, we will share the background of why we are attempting to build capacity with these industries and sectors. We will also introduce the idea of working together for a future workshop (Activity 6) and pilot project (Activity 7).

This survey project generated much eager discussion amongst the Agreement recipients. The recipients view this survey as a tool to connect with individuals we have not had a chance to network or build relationships with in the past. In fact, the goal is to use the survey to connect with many more than the minimum five experts outlined in our Agreement.

As of December 1, 2019, the Recipients have narrowed down whom they wish to speak to and two surveys have been completed (and submitted here). In the interest of candor, the names of individuals interviewed has been removed, but the industry and position of the individual remains.

Survey of Agricultural Influencer/Expert Views on BMP Adoption

Background

The use of best management practices (BMPs) by farmers on their land, both owned and rented, has demonstrated benefits to water quality. Specifically in the Lake Huron watersheds (inland from Sarnia to Tobermory), a collaborative effort between municipalities, Conservation Authorities, and County health units, along with provincial and federal governments, has developed trusted relationships with stakeholders. The ten year long collaborative effort, called Healthy Lake Huron, has used a variety of methods to reach agricultural and non-agricultural stakeholders, including demonstrations, field tours, research and multiple land-based projects. Benefits of this approach include greater awareness of the linkages between soil health and water quality, and actions or decisions at the local level.

The Healthy Lake Huron group endeavours to engage and collaborate with other industries, sectors, and communities in the Lake Huron Watershed that could potentially help messages about soil health and water quality reach new audiences. This collaboration is called a “stewardship cluster”.

The concept of the stewardship cluster is drawn from the fact that many producers seek advice from trusted sources. If the number of trusted sources were increased, and more local influencers were engaging with local farmers, the farmers may be inclined to adopt more BMPs. Although funding has been available to help producers and farmers with the implementation of BMPs, recent reports in Ontario indicate that one-on-one mentoring, advisory services and local demonstration from experts and peers are required to improve the understanding and decrease risk aversion to BMP adoption.

By participating in other aspects of agriculture, there is an opportunity to identify new ideas or approaches, to engage with producers who don't normally attend stewardship events, and to recognize the other factors that influence behaviours and decisions at the farm level.

Survey

Interviewing Conservation Authority:

Watershed:

Date:

Interviewee name:

Interviewee company/association:

Twitter handle:

Email/Contact info:

Website associated with company/association:

Interviewee agricultural background/experience (school/work/volunteer):

In your opinion, where do your clients/peers seek out BMP information with respect to soil health, water quality and the adoption of BMPs?

In your opinion, what are the key limitations to BMP implementation in your sector/industry and community? What barriers exist – whether real or perceived?

In your opinion, how could the different industries/sectors/associations coordinate outreach (information on BMP implementation) and mitigate risk – real or perceived, better?

In your opinion, what key BMP messages should be relayed in your industry/sector (and beyond) to best promote soil health and water quality?

In your opinion, how could your industry integrate the needs of the environment (eg. Reduced phosphorus) while meeting the needs of your clients and industry/sector?

In your opinion, if unlimited funding was available for the agricultural industry, what BMP or action (or combination) would best address soil health and water quality?

In your opinion, are financial incentives for BMP implementation the best “bang for the buck” with respect to improving soil health and water quality? Are there other actions that you feel would increase adoption of BMPs?

How do you see CAs and your sector/industry working together to implement key messages and/or actions in your sector/industry/organization?

If you (or your sector) had the opportunity to engage the community, what resources would you need? How could we, as a CA, assist in this engagement?

In your opinion, could the structure of events or workshops that promote soil health, water quality and BMP implementation be improved to enhance learning and reduce perceived or actual barriers? If so, how? What resources would help?

With funding from OMAFRA, our CA has an opportunity to co-host a field-based event or workshop with an industry/sector/organization to present a soil health, water quality or BMP adoption topic, which your industry wouldn't necessarily be exposed to. We'd like to partner with you and your organization to engage the community to build capacity in your industry/sector. How would you see an event taking shape where we work together?

Are there any communication or social (real or perceived) barriers that you feel may affect messaging coming from a Conservation Authority?