

CIELAP's 4th Partnering for Sustainability Workshop
Achieving Resilient Agricultural Systems: Innovation, People and Partnerships
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Case Study:

Ontario's Agricultural Best Management Practices: Diverse Partnerships for Diverse Solutions

Name and Organization

Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Prepared by: Peter Sykanda, Farm Policy Researcher; with support from Ted Taylor, BMP Program Analyst and Technical Advisor, OMAFRA.

About the case study

A Best Management Practice (BMP) is an environmentally sustainable farm practice, technique or system that integrates the concurrent goals of environmental protection, agricultural productivity, fiscal responsibility, practicality and field-proven efficacy.

The intent of the program was to develop accessible and visually appealing publications for farmers and non-farm rural residents detailing the planning and implementation of environmentally sustainable agricultural practices. Each book presents a range of circumstances and options to address a particular environmental concern. The 'menu format' allows farmers to use the information to assess what's appropriate for their specific property.

The BMP program continues to receive support from farm organizations looking to promote environmental responsibility among their members and to advocate and demonstrate sector due-diligence to the general public.

The first BMP project was completed in the Fall 1991, and is now entering its 18th year. For the most part, BMPs are made available to farmers through producer workshops and winter meetings. BMPs are also distributed by partnering agencies (e.g. farm organizations, Public Health Units, and Conservation Authorities) to rural landowners.

How this case study advances sustainable development and fosters resilience

It's all about the People - The development of the BMP publications demonstrates an excellent example of collaboration between NGOs, government agencies, and agricultural producers to generate materials that provide beneficial management practices that positively affect the whole province. Successful collaborations such as this between multiple and diverse stakeholders is a necessary component for creating solutions to environmental issues that will have the greatest uptake. The BMP program is an on-going, informal partnership between the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, Agriculture and Agri-food Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs.

It's all about Process - BMP publications are consensus building projects. BMPs are created collaboratively by Task Teams consisting of key stakeholders from various

farm organizations, environmental NGOs, research staff, extension specialists, agribusiness professionals, and appropriate regulatory agencies.

The end goal of the BMP process is user up-take – it has to be practical. In designing a BMP publication, the Task Team follows a complicated, iterative review process that allows for input from those who discover there is a problem to those that will implement the solution. There are usually around 100 reviewers for any one BMP publication; however there can be upwards of 200 reviewers on some publications.

Barriers / Challenges

- Navigating diverse group dynamics and negotiation – appeasing the multiple perspectives on an issue;
- Finding the scientific and technical expertise available to comment;
- Funding from partner organizations;
- Other regulatory agencies;
- Distribution;
- Applying the science – countering more traditional ideas about farming;
- Managing the expectations of environmental organizations.

Interesting Lessons

Uptake – The BMPs represent a highly successful approach to environmental education and sustainability within the farming community that counters those that would call for greater regulation as a solution to environmental issues.

Market research results speak to the success of the program: of the 600 farmers surveyed by telephone - 68 % had BMP publications and 92 % found them to be useful, readable and credible. Most importantly, 66% of those owning BMPs had *voluntarily* made changes to their operation after reading the books and the same proportion stated they would be willing to pay for them.

Format – Uptake of BMPs is enhanced as a result of the ‘menu format’ – farmers are able to apply those practices appropriate to their geographic, sector and socio-economic circumstances and counters the blanket approach often proposed by regulatory agencies.

Designing the Solutions – Extension literature is full of examples where failure to seek the input of end-users of innovation has resulted in poor uptake. Working through the BMP process has shown that non-agriculturalists (ex. environmental NGOs) appear to be very good at articulating the initial problem; OMAFRA excels at providing the solution to the problem; and the farmers do extremely well in bringing the practicality and applicability of the solution to farm operations. This process, though perhaps painful at times, creates more allies in the end.

Consensus leads to Legitimacy – The simple fact that time is given to allow for consensus between multiple stakeholders gives BMP publications a high degree of legitimacy, particularly the farm community.

Moving Forward

The program is planning to complete a round of market research to determine other relevant topics and appropriate media through which to disseminate BMP publications. There is also a drive to address the issues facing rural non-farm residents.

Best Management Practices Development Process

