



ONTARIO SOIL AND CROP IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

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MEDIA RELEASE

Ninety Per Cent Cost-Share Opportunities for Farmers on the Oak Ridges Moraine

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As farming residents of the Oak Ridges Moraine, Colleen Moore and Bill Graham are eligible to participate in an innovative funding initiative under the Oak Ridges Moraine Environmental Enhancement Program (ORMEEP). The attractiveness of this program is its 90% cost-share funding level, and as Colleen says, "It certainly has people talking."

Colleen, Bill and their 7 year-old son, Brian, live on and farm 110 acres of hilly land in the eastern reaches of the Oak Ridges Moraine, south of Rice Lake, near Harwood. The homestead was owned by Colleen's grandparents and parents, and then subsequently sold. But one's ties to the land are often strong, and when an opportunity arose to purchase the land back, that's just what they did.

The 110 acre farm now supports a 25 Charolais cross cow-calf operation. Eight to ten yearlings are fed out for freezer orders each year, and the remaining calves are sold in the fall. An additional 110 acres are rented for hay and pasture.

The Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) has been part and parcel of their efforts in building their operation. Colleen has completed both the second and third edition plans and finds the benefits of doing so well worth the effort. It's an easy way to update their knowledge on the current recommendations of Beneficial Management Practices (BMP) for farming operations.

A completed plan also makes them eligible for cost-share funding initiatives from a variety of sources to help implement changes in farming practices that benefit the operation from both a farm management and an environmental perspective.

Colleen has already initiated the process to secure financial assistance for three projects: a clean water diversion to channel water from the hills above the buildings to vegetated ditches, rather than having it disperse through the barn yard and down the lane; a new well to provide a secure water source for the size of their operation; and replacement of a water bowl with one of better design with more efficient water use and improved insulation.

While taking advantage of the cost-share initiatives unquestionably offers benefits in the long-term, there is some work involved to participate in the programs. Colleen explains, "There's only so much time in a day. The paperwork involved in the application process takes time. And then there is the cash flow challenge. We pay the project expenses up-front and receive reimbursement later." Colleen mentions these, not so much as a deterrent, but rather as a reality of taking advantage of these programs.

Under the federal programs, cost-share portions are 30%, 33% or 50%, depending on the BMP category. ORMEEP tops-up the funding for eligible projects to 90%. Colleen notes, "Financial support of 90% vs 50% can affect the decision to proceed with a cost-share project." Another important change that came with the current cost-share programs is the eligibility of in-kind contributions. "This was an important change and an additional incentive. It allows us more flexibility in scheduling the work to fit our time and resources."

The Oak Ridges Moraine stretches 160 km from the Northumberland County's Trent River in the east to the Niagara Escarpment in the west. As a geological landform, the moraine is a height of land draining north to Georgian Bay, Lake Simcoe and the Trent River, and south to Lake Ontario. The Moraine's unique environmental and hydrological features make its ecosystem vital to southern Ontario.

ORMEEP is delivered by the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association on behalf of the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation (ORMF). Conservation Authorities are also partners and can provide technical expertise to producers who request it. The Foundation was created in 2002 to help landowners protect, preserve and, where feasible, restore the environmental integrity of the Oak Ridges Moraine. ORMF is a registered corporation with its own Charter and an initial grant of \$15 million from the Province of Ontario to support its activities.

The Foundation provides the top-up to 90% cost-share in combination with funding for the Canada-Ontario Farm Stewardship Program, Greencover Canada and Tier 1 of the Canada-Ontario Water Supply Expansion Program. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs support these programs under the Agricultural Policy Framework (APF) that aims to make Canada's agricultural sector a world leader in environmentally sustainable production. The Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition is also a strong supporter.

Eligibility for ORMEEP must meet four criteria. The farm business must own, rent, lease or manage agricultural land within the designated Oak Ridges Moraine, where the proposed project will occur. It must be a legal farm entity with a unique Farm Business Registration Number, and have an EFP Third Edition deemed appropriate through peer review. Lastly, the selected BMP project must relate to an action defined in the EFP action plan and be eligible for funding.

Eligible BMP categories for ORMEEP include riparian area management, erosion control structures, land management for soils at risk, shelterbelt establishment, enhancing wildlife habitat and biodiversity, preventing wildlife damage, and ponds for storing water for agricultural purposes.

Colleen is considering three potential projects that would be eligible under ORMEEP. Without the 90 per cent funding, going ahead would probably not be a priority, but they are projects she's had her eye on for awhile.

A spring-fed pond half-way up the hillside of one of their pastures provides a water source for their cattle. It's served the purpose for many years, but the cattle have unlimited access. Fencing the pond and providing an alternate water source, would result in improved water quality for the cattle, stabilized banks, and a pond in a more natural condition with the associated environmental benefits.

Another potential project involves forage establishment on an expanse of sandy soil which is so characteristic of this area and so susceptible to erosion. Benefits would ultimately include additional pasture, as well as more fertile, stabilized soil. A third project Colleen's considering is a flushing bar to push birds off their nests when cutting hay, enhancing wildlife survival.

As a final thought, Colleen adds, "A farmer's decision to invest time and money in these types of initiatives depends first on whether it will benefit livestock and ease the labour of farming. Advantages to the environment are a welcome, but secondary benefit."

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For further information contact the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association at 1-800-265-9751 or www.ontariosoilcrop.org; your local OSCIA Program Representative; or your local Conservation Authority.