

Consultations underway for farm and food sustainability plan

(Guelph, ON) May 4, 2016 – A coalition of Ontario farm organizations is working with the food and beverage sector on a consultation process to clarify and streamline sustainability initiatives. The goal of this process is to create assessment equivalency and harmonize verification among the many sustainability codes and standards throughout the farm and food value chain.

“Sustainability programs are an increasingly common request across the Canadian and global food and farming sector,” says Gord Surgeoner, Chair of the Sustainable Farm and Food Coalition Steering Committee. “This is good news in terms of responding to environmental, social, and economic priorities, however, without some harmonization of these initiatives, both farmers and consumers will face a dizzying array of programs.”

The consultations are critical in developing a draft framework for a Sustainable Farm and Food Plan that encompasses all three sustainability pillars (planet, people and profit), while reducing duplication and supporting the entire value chain.

Producers, processors, retailers, food service, non-governmental organizations and consumer groups will be contacted during the consultation phase, which is expected to take place over the next 12 to 18 months.

Surgeoner says it is important to note that the initiative will be built upon the efforts of existing programs, including the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) and Growing Your Farm Profits (GYFP), Codes of Practice, regulatory standards and various commodity-specific sustainability initiatives.

The coalition recently hired Synthesis Agri-Food Network as project manager for the initiative. President Rob Hannam and Consulting Project Lead, Bronwynne Wilton, will facilitate the stakeholder discussions in collaboration with food industry veteran David Smith of Orion Global Business Sustainability Consultants.

“Farmers and food manufacturers see a need for harmonizing standards to reduce the burden of reporting, while also recognizing there is equivalency in many categories,” says Wilton. “We are looking forward to conversations with stakeholders about developing a cohesive framework that reflects a whole-farm system approach. Our intent is to reduce redundancy and to keep things as simple as possible in terms of demonstrating the positive management practices in use on farms across the country.”

While this initial phase of the consultation process is focused in Ontario, there is also interest in facilitating a national conversation around sustainability in the farm and food sector.

Anyone interested in learning more about the initiative is encouraged to visit www.sustainablefarms.ca, follow @FarmFoodBeyond, or call Bronwynne Wilton at 519-822-7272 x. 105.

Sustainable Farm and Food Plan supporting organizations include: The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), Christian Farmers’ Federation of Ontario (CFFO), Ontario Agri Food Technologies, the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA), Farm & Food Care Ontario, Provision Coalition and the Food Institute of the University of Guelph. Representatives from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada participate in an observer capacity.

[Synthesis Agri-Food Network](#) is a specialized firm providing strategic consulting, education programs and marketing communications for agriculture and food industry clients. The organization is based in Guelph, Ontario with a network of core team members and associates throughout the country. Synthesis draws on this combined expertise to build and customize solutions that meet each client's unique need.

David Smith (Principal, [Orion Global Business Sustainability Consultants](#)) is a globally recognized business sustainability leader with over 20 years of business leadership and P&L experience with blue chips and start-ups in operations, marketing, general management, business development, and sustainability in the USA, Canada, EU, Middle East and with global supply chains. David has extensive food industry experience including previous roles as VP Sustainability for Sobeys and VP Marketing for Whole Foods Market (USA).

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