



AMI Project Summaries

Taking a new approach to farm business management



From **2006**
to **2009**

The Agricultural Management Institute is a young organization with a specific mandate to raise understanding and awareness of farm business management practices in Ontario. The concept of farm business management is one that means different things to different audiences.

This brochure contains summaries of the various projects AMI has funded in the past. As you'll read in the pages that follow, AMI has funded a wide range of farm business management projects for varying audiences over the last several years. It is hoped that this publication will assist future applicants with their project proposals to AMI.

Message from the Chair

Farm business management is a critical component of successful farming in the 21st century. This includes succession planning, risk management, benchmarking and effective human resources management. Farmers need access to all these tools and more to help meet their business goals and for agriculture to be a growing, vibrant sector with a sustainable future.

At AMI, our mission is to increase the understanding and awareness of business management practices by stimulating ideas and funding projects.

This publication contains summaries of some of the many projects and initiatives AMI has funded to provide support to farmers and advance awareness and knowledge of farm business management tools and practices in this province.

We have worked with farm organizations across many sectors and commodities, as well as supported regional initiatives and projects designed to assist the needs of unique groups, such as franco-Ontario producers, new and young farmers, and new Canadians wishing to farm.

We're here to champion farm business management in Ontario by offering ideas, resources, links and business tools. We don't have all the answers, but we're here to help you find them.



Dr. Peter VanderZaag
2006-2011 *Chairman of the Board*

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The Top Manager Team

AgVision Inc.

Farmers can benefit from interactive access to management experts and expertise. That thinking by AgVision Inc. led to the creation of the Top Manager Team, which received funding from AMI.

These farm management specialists included a group of six farmers, academics, consultants and researchers, as well as the 500 members of the Canadian Association of Farm Advisors, which is made up of accountants, bankers, lawyers and other professionals who deal with farm management issues.

Farmers were encouraged to send their management questions directly to these experts, who responded via email, television or blog. Questions covered a wide range of issues, including viability of biofuel and other new value-adding enterprises, dealing with price volatility, farm finance strategies and building value chain partnerships. The top questions – and their answers – were featured in the “Top Managers” TV segment on AgVision, in the “Top Managers” newsletter and online at topmanagers.ca.

The free electronic newsletter that was sent to over 1,700 farmers emerged as the most effective way of communicating with farmers. It delivered key management strategies to its audience weekly and also served as a good reminder to watch the TV segment and visit the website. According to a March 2007 survey by Ipsos Reid, 44,000 Canadian farmers were tuning in to the Top Manager segments each week.

Over the course of the 15-month project, the website registered over 1.6 million hits with an average of approximately 5,700 visitors per month. A total of just over 82,000 farmers visited the site to source information and interact with the team of experts. ■

For more information, visit www.topmanagers.ca or contact AgVision TV at 519-438-8747.

AGVISION
www.agvisiontv.com

Tools to enhance the competitiveness of agri-food

ACC Farmers' Financial

Learning from the experiences of others can be invaluable. Value chains have been identified as one way for farmers and farm businesses can boost their competitiveness and profitability, yet they're not widely understood in the sector as a viable management tool.

A new value chain management training tool that focuses on successful examples and expert interviews was developed with the help of a \$165,000 grant from AMI. The tool, the first of its kind in the world, was released by the George Morris Centre in conjunction with ACC Farmers' Financial and Farm Credit Canada. Other supporters of the project included the Canadian Farm Business Management Council, HUB International and the Ontario Agricultural College at the University of Guelph.

In addition to written materials, producers also received video case studies of successful value chain initiatives, such as U.K. baker Warburton's, which sources wheat from farmers in both Canada and the U.K., Alberta-based Little Potato Company and Thompson's, a soybean, wheat and corn breeder and marketer located in southern Ontario.

The video footage included participants explaining the management of their operations and the benefits of involvement. It also showcased interviews with several value chain experts from around the world, who described further lessons for commercial success.

The tool, for use in group or individual settings, presented a unique opportunity to learn about the issues, avoid common mistakes and capitalize on the experiences of others. ■

For more information, visit www.vcmtools.ca or contact the Value Chain Management Centre at 519-822-3929.



Succession planning (Service accompagnement au transfert de ferme)

Union des cultivateurs franco-ontariens

Successful farm transfers are important to the future of our agricultural sector. For francophone farmers in Ontario, succession planning is also linked to the continued survival of language and culture.

When a survey of its membership showed that while 80 per cent of farmers intended to pass their farm on to the next generation but only 20 per cent knew how to go about that, the Union des cultivateurs franco-ontariens (UCFO) swung into action.

Supported by funding from AMI, the UCFO launched an initiative to help prepare Ontario's francophone farmers for farm succession and ensure a steady transition of farms and agribusinesses from one generation to the next. It began by asking its members what kind of resources and support they felt were needed. The survey showed that farmers lacked a good planning tool or road map to succession, as well as a good understanding of the kinds of advice and information that are available.

"Succession planning is a process," said UCFO's former Executive Director Nadia Carrier. "It's about seeing the farm unit as a family and also as a business. Each of those is complex enough, and when you try to bring them together, you need to be committed to the process in order to make it a success."

UCFO used the survey information to develop a series of workshops for farm families in Eastern and Northern Ontario, helping them work through the principal components of a good succession plan. This included teaching the importance of fostering open, honest dialogue amongst family members and how to best navigate through the myriad business structure and taxation options. UCFO also made the information available at existing agricultural events and hosted a youth forum at the University of Guelph's campus d'Alfred.

Approximately 150 people participated in the various workshops and over 2,000 others received information on farm succession planning through articles and advertisements in the French language farm newspaper Agricom, as well as online at La Voie Agricole. ■

For more information, visit www.ucfo.ca or contact L'Union des cultivateurs franco-ontariens at 1-877-425-8366.

Agri-food marketing: what everyone should know

Union des cultivateurs franco-ontariens

Value-added agriculture is something many farmers look to when it comes to boosting their farm incomes or diversifying their operations. But for many, it can be difficult to get started without knowing what opportunities might be viable, how to access a market and how to approach production of a new crop or product.

The Union des cultivateurs franco-ontariens (UCFO) accessed funding through AMI to develop resources that will help francophone farmers in Ontario move into value-added agriculture.

A series of feasibility studies that looked at both production issues and market potential identified possible opportunities for farmers in a variety of areas:

- Biodiesel or biolubricant production using soy
- Artisanal dairy, goat and sheep cheese production
- Biomass and energy crops
- Specialty meat production, including goat, lamb, deer and wild boar
- Heritage fruit and vegetable varieties
- Small fruits and berries with functional properties
- Agritourism

UCFO then shared that information with farmers through information sessions and articles in Agricom and online at La Voie Agricole. Two guides, one dealing with launching a value-added business and one focused on general business opportunities in Ontario, were also developed. ■

For more information, visit www.ucfo.ca or contact L'Union des cultivateurs franco-ontariens at 1-877-425-8366.



Renewal awareness plan

ACC Farmers' Financial



In order for farmers to maximize the profitability of their businesses, they need to know what business management tools, resources and programs are available to assist them. ACC Farmers' Financial received funding from AMI to help raise awareness of farm business management amongst farm advisors and producers as a way of helping farmers achieve their financial goals.

The first step was to conduct a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) and gap analysis to establish the current level of awareness. This involved senior executives from farm organizations, including commodity groups, input suppliers and leadership and training organizations. Additional in-depth information regarding farmers' attitudes and perceptions toward farm business planning was gathered through telephone interviews and in-person farm visits.

The results clearly showed that there is a lack of producer and advisor awareness of farm business planning programs and resources, and although they think there are programs available, they don't know where to start. Farmers are generally quite comfortable with seeking professional advice, especially for taxation or production issues and, although they're innovators and very good at production, they need to progress in the area of farm business planning.

ACC Farmers' Financial used these results to develop an awareness campaign that included a very successful DVD using the experiences of real farmers as examples. It was distributed to all of ACC's 5,300 customers, 50 Ontario farm organizations, over 100 directors and regional representatives of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, 160 Canadian Association of Farm Advisors (CAFA) members, and through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

Articles focusing on farm business management issues were included in the ACC Farmers' Financial newsletter, as well as in publications of other organizations such as Farm Credit Canada and CAFA. ■

For more information, visit www.accfarmersfinancial.ca or contact ACC Farmers' Financial at 1-888-278-8807.

Web classroom

The Ontario Agricultural Training Institute (OATI)

Continuous learning is important in an industry that changes as quickly as agriculture does. But it can be difficult to access that ongoing training. So the Ontario Agricultural Training Institute (OATI) turned to the Internet to help bridge the gap between farmers and experts.

With project funding provided by AMI, OATI developed four courses that were delivered to farmers in an online web classroom format that allowed course members to interact with each other using a microphone or keyboard messaging. A facilitator was available for each course to answer participants' questions and provide specialized training.

The four courses included introductory and intermediate/advanced level commodity marketing; managing for high performance, a human resources session designed for producers who have a number of employees working for them in agri-businesses; and an introduction to farm succession planning.

A fifth course focused on advanced succession planning was developed specifically for farm advisors and was designed to be delivered in the more traditional, face-to-face format.

Participants who completed courses using the web classroom technology felt this was an effective method of course delivery as it does not require travel to an actual class location. This could save farmers valuable time and avoid problematic weather conditions during the winter months, which is when most training courses traditionally take place. ■



Benchmarking for aboriginal farmers

Indian Agricultural Program of Ontario (IAPO)

Farming can always be challenging but especially so for First Nation farmers. Their access to credit is limited since the Indian Act prohibits the use of First Nation land as collateral, which means mainstream lending institutions will not provide financial support to on-reserve farms. Many First Nation farms are relatively new – in business only a decade or two – and the clay soil and poor drainage found on a lot of First Nation land can make cropping a challenge.

The Indian Agricultural Program of Ontario (IAPO) turned to AMI for funding support to develop accurate First National agricultural benchmarks, statistics that will establish comparisons between First Nation and off-reserve farmers and boost the financial risk assessments of First Nation producers in the province. With a grant of \$26,600 from AMI, IAPO developed a database of financial and production data of First Nation farms that is capable of producing various agricultural financial benchmarks and is already producing results.

“We find that our farmers need to see where they fit in with mainstream agriculture in Ontario as well as where they fit in with their own peers on the First Nation lands,” said Doug Macpherson, a consultant and former general manager of IAPO. “If you take a benchmark such as equity – First Nation farmers tend to be at the lower scale of Ontario agriculture because they’re just starting out. But compared to their neighbour down the road, they’re on par. So that provides a bit of comfort when they feel they’re not making any progress with their farm business.”

In future, the goal is to use benchmarks to improve financial risk assessment for First Nation farmers and to promote First Nation agriculture to other funding partners, such as National Aboriginal Capital Corporation Association, Aboriginal Business Canada and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada for even greater impact. ■

For more information, visit www.indianag.on.ca or contact the Indian Agricultural Program of Ontario at 1.800.363.0329 (Eastern and Northern Ontario) or 1.800.663.6912 (Western and Southern Ontario).



Resource centre for life-long learning

University of Guelph Kemptville Campus

There is an undeniable link between agricultural sustainability and business management. There’s also an understanding that agri-food training needs to widen its focus from day-to-day production management to further include business, strategic management (long-term planning) and entrepreneurship – resources that were missing in Eastern Ontario.

The University of Guelph’s Kemptville Campus, its partners and supporting organizations, feel strongly that farmers can and will be able to achieve sustainability and prosperity through life-long learning in business management and entrepreneurship.

A strategic planning exercise at the Kemptville Campus identified the former agricultural college as an ideal location to develop a resource centre for life-long learning to serve the training needs of agriculture in Eastern Ontario. The University of Guelph received \$239,000 in start up funding from AMI for the initiative, whose goals included cultivating new partnerships to help develop the centre and establishing the campus as the “go-to” place for education and information for agri-food businesses.

The centre was designed to be a training provider in the areas of strategic and business planning, domestic and global commodity marketing, succession planning and human resource development. As well, it would serve as an information source, create and host a virtual library of resources and provide a networking forum for the agri-food sector within its course structures.

Partnerships were established with many different stakeholders, including the Canadian Farm Business Management Council, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, the Centre for Rural Leadership (now Rural Ontario Institute), Ontario Cattlemen’s Association, the Canadian Association of Farm Advisors, Farm Credit Canada, Kansas State University and the University of Guelph Office of Open Learning. ■

For more information, visit www.agribusinessecampus.com or contact the Business Development Centre University of Guelph Kemptville Campus at 613-258-8336.

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KEMPTVILLE CAMPUS

Implementing the Occupational Health and Safety Act in Ontario greenhouses

Flowers Canada (Ontario) Inc.

A reliable work force is essential in the labour-intensive greenhouse flower industry. Flower growers need to be compliant with all current labour legislations as well as be effective human resource managers if they want to maintain long term, profitable businesses.

Flowers Canada (Ontario) Inc. received a grant from AMI to educate growers on how to run their greenhouse operations in compliance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA), as well as monitor and manage long-term human resource issues in the sector.

Through this project, Flowers Canada developed an employer package of information for growers, distributed a series of six newsletters focused on OHSA to its 135 members and ran articles about the Act in the Greenhouse Canada magazine. The organization also provided individual support to growers by responding to requests for information and conducting farm visits to help with on-farm implementation. Workshops were held to inform growers of their rights and responsibilities under the Act and educate them on accident claims reporting and audits by the Workplace Safety Insurance Board (WSIB).

A secondary goal of the initiative was to monitor a number of significant human resources issues in the industry, such as employment standards orders and appeal, minimum wage, WSIB premium training and benefit costs, court rulings on various cases and what they might mean to the sector and assessing the impact of government policies, such as elimination of mandatory retirement and reforms of the Human Rights Code dispute resolution process.

As a result of this project, Ontario greenhouses have greater awareness of labour-related issues, workplace standards and safety regulations. The long-term goal of the industry is to provide growth and stability to the sector by having Ontario greenhouses as sought-after workplaces with employers who are effective human resource managers. ■

For more information, visit <http://flowerscanadagrowers.com/ontario/index.asp> or contact Flowers Canada (Ontario) at 1-800-698-0113.

Renewable and alternative fuels investment

ACC Farmers' Financial

There is strong interest from the agricultural sector in alternative forms of energy for use on-farm. Newly emerging industries, however, are often limited by lack of resources and infrastructure. An extensive literature review on this topic revealed, for example, that many financial institutions did not have policies and procedures in place to govern lending for renewable energy systems.

Overcoming this barrier was the goal of the Renewable and Alternative Energy Financing project launched by ACC Farmers' Financial. Funded in part by AMI, this program provided assistance in the development of business plans, strategies and feasibility studies for producers with an interest in implementing a renewable or alternative energy project on their farms. Farmers could then take their completed businesses plan to a bank or other lending institution for funding consideration.

Phase two of the project included a series of workshops built around the idea of holding one-on-one meetings between interested farmers and consultants. Examples of workshops conducted included "Bio-digester Financing 101" and "Financing a Wind Turbine Project."

Throughout the course of the project, resources were assembled into one convenient website location: farmenergyonline.com. This site provided an information platform for renewable energy business planning and management for farmers, farm advisors, processors and lenders to promote a common understanding of both business opportunities and risks in this emerging sector. ■

For more information, visit www.accfarmersfinancial.ca or contact ACC Farmers' Financial at 1-888-278-8807.



Improving greenhouse management

Flowers Canada (Ontario) Inc.

A benchmarking study was completed to help boost the competitiveness of Ontario's greenhouse flower growers. Its goal was to provide a baseline against which grower members of Flowers Canada (Ontario) Inc. can compare their own numbers and look for areas of improvement in the management of their operations.

Supported by funding from AMI, a comprehensive survey was developed using input from industry stakeholders and subsequently completed in detail by 23 grower participants. The results were intended to help Ontario flower growers develop and adopt best practices, improve profitability and financial stability and assist owners, investors and lenders with decision making.

The survey showed the greenhouse flower industry to be in a fairly healthy state despite a series of industry challenges. Greenhouses with between 100,000 to 185,000 square feet of production area were identified as the most profitable (14.2 per cent or \$2.66 per square foot), whereas those with more than 295,000 square feet of production area were least profitable (4.1 per cent or \$0.71/square foot). The results also indicated that respondents are reinvesting in their operations with large investments in capital assets, signalling a positive outlook for these operators.

The study also surveyed respondents on key operational issues related to greenhouse flower production and improving profitability, including better alignment of production space to crop categories, addressing the human capital and workforce skills gap, dealing with staffing complements and availability of management information.

Survey results were distributed to Flowers Canada (Ontario)'s members, as well as through an article published in Greenhouse Canada. ■

For more information, visit <http://flowerscanadagrowers.com/ontario/index.asp> or contact Flowers Canada (Ontario) at 1-800-698-0113.

Industry renewal replant strategy

Ontario Tender Fruit Producers' Marketing Board

Ontario's tree fruit producers were at a crossroads. Faced with shrinking domestic market share and increased international competition, they could either accept the decline of their industry or embark on a path towards long term renewal.

Their choice was clear – reinvest in a sustainable future for Ontario growers of apples, peaches, pears, plums, nectarines, sweet and tart cherries and apricots. The Canadian Horticultural Council (CHC) Apple and Fruit Committee developed a national competitiveness strategy to help Canadian tree fruit and grape growers increase their domestic and international market share. This included an industry consensus on which varieties were to be downsized and which new varieties should be introduced to meet market demands.

The Ontario Tender Fruit Producers' Marketing Board and the Ontario Apple Growers joined forces to obtain \$13,500 in funding from AMI towards the development of an Ontario-specific business plan for this renewal strategy. The goal of this document, written by JayEff Partners, was to provide both marketing boards with a plan to help their members implement the national strategy in a responsible, timely and economically viable manner.

Apple growers, for example, were looking to replace one of the more historically popular varieties in the province, McIntosh, with newer varieties that are gaining a wider appeal among consumers, such as Ambrosia and Honey Crisp. The overall costs of the replanting program, which targets replanting up to 25 per cent of Ontario's tree fruit orchards over a seven year period, are shared between the federal and provincial governments and fruit growers. ■

For more information, visit www.ontariotenderfruit.ca or contact the Ontario Tender Fruit Producers Marketing Board at 905-688-0990.

Improving pest management in Ontario floriculture greenhouses

Flowers Canada (Ontario) Inc.

Ontario farmers have worked hard to improve their pest management techniques, reducing their pesticide use by over 50 per cent in the last two decades. Now, a new software program for greenhouse flower growers will make the task of tracking pests and recording treatments even easier.

Flowers Canada (Ontario) teamed up with Engage Agro to develop “SprayScout”, a computer program that allows flower growers to easily record their crop protection applications and generate reports that analyze their product use in the greenhouse. The software, built with the support of a \$55,000 grant from AMI, also contains information on many of the common insects and diseases that can harm flowers.

There are relatively few crop protection products registered for use on cut flowers in Canada, so most growers rely heavily on biological controls—using good bugs to combat the bad—as well as pest scouts who come into greenhouses to determine what insects or diseases are present. For example, sticky cards are used to trap flying pests. Information on their identity and density can now be incorporated into “SprayScout” and help the grower determine when and which controls are needed.

“Growers realize that not only does this software streamline record-keeping, it makes it so much easier to maintain data in an industry-standardized format,” said Irwin Smith, former Executive Director of Flowers Canada (Ontario), who was pleased with the response from his members to the new tool. “Growers can track pests, review past years, and access current information on pesticide application rates, alternative controls and so much more.”

The program is also useful to growers who provide product for export markets as it can create detailed records that verify to importing countries what products have been used on the flowers and that they are free of disease and pests. ■

For more information, visit <http://flowerscanadagrowers.com/ontario/index.asp> or contact Flowers Canada (Ontario) at 1-800-698-0113.

Financing crop and livestock loans

Farm Associate Risk Management Services (FARMS)

Farmers are always seeking ways to stabilize their incomes through various risk management strategies. As business owners, they use benchmarking as a management practice—comparing aspects of their farm against those of other producers of the same crop or commodity.

A newly developed crop and livestock benchmarking program called “Farm Forward,” designed to help producers finance their inputs, manage risk and help make good sales decisions, made it easier for farmers to apply this management technique to their operations.

AMI provided \$131,000 in funding to ACC FARMS, a division of ACC Farmers’ Financial, to launch the program. In its first year, “Farm Forward – Benchmarking” was offered as a pilot program to wheat and corn growers.

The program offered historical sales data (volumes and prices), regional price and basis (the difference between local and reported regional market prices), marketing trends and analysis and cost of production and marketing templates, complemented with ideas on how to apply information and templates to a individual farmer’s operation. Historical and day-to-day price data was contributed by Farm Market News, an organization based at the University of Guelph Ridgetown Campus, which has recorded Ontario crop prices since 1991.

Next steps included plans to expand Farm Forward into other sectors and adding content and more capability. Producer opinions collected during the development of the website, www.farmforward.ca, served as the basis of these plans, which include sales information and tools for livestock production, acid test and information on insurance coverage and liability and graphing capabilities. ■

For more information, visit www.farmforward.ca or contact ACC Farmers’ Financial at 1-888-278-8807.



Agricultural performance benchmarking study

Food, Agriculture and Resource Economics – University of Guelph

Benchmarking has long been used to categorize and evaluate various aspects of a farm operation, such as profitability. Success in benchmarking studies has traditionally been based on the theory that efficiency was synonymous with good management. As the differentiation of consumer food products emerged, farmers responded to that demand by evolving their operations from cost-driven producers to profit-driven entrepreneurs.

Yet the traditional benchmarking system remained unchanged. The Food, Agriculture and Resource Economics (FARE) department at the University of Guelph launched a study, assisted by funding from AMI, to bridge the link between entrepreneurial management and traditional benchmarking as a new way of understanding farm success.

FARE conducted benchmarking surveys with two sectors, asparagus and beef cow calf using the Strengthsfinder tool offered by Gallup. It is the first of its kind that attempts to match entrepreneurial skills with farm success; its real indicator for allowing a producer to stay in business is long-run profits in place of cost and efficiency benchmarks. The theory is that although costs and efficiency influence profits, it's the entrepreneurial skills of the farm manager that most impact survival when margins are very low.

Fifteen asparagus producers completed the management practices survey, although most did not provide financial information. By comparison, 45 cow calf producers submitted a survey, with 38 also providing financial information.

Initial study results were shared with participating producers. The next phase of this project included developing the data into templates or scorecards that producers can use to evaluate their own operations and management skills. ■

For more information, visit <http://fare.uoguelph.ca/> or contact the Department of Food, Agricultural and Resource Economics at 519-824-4120, ext 53625.

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Building a local sustainable food system

National Farmers' Union

The local food movement in Ontario is expanding every year. And although more and more consumers are clamouring to buy locally produced foods, they can often be hard to source or identify at the retail level. Missing are channels to can directly bring food from farmer to buyer, which is what led the National Farmers' Union in Frontenac, Lennox and Addington to launch a program to connect consumers with local foods.

The goal of the program, supported by funding from AMI, was to make eating local food a more convenient and practical choice for consumers without forcing them to go out of their way to make that choice. The NFU took the lead in organizing a series of seminars for area farmers and supporters began drafting a Kingston Area Food Charter to bring farmers and consumers together around a shared vision of how their food should be grown, processed and sold.

The short-term objective was to get consumers talking to farmers as a way of starting to build local networks that are hoped to eventually include growing, processing, distribution and retailing. Research from Queen's University suggests that an area's farms become more sustainable when the distance that food is shipped to market is reduced. This is partly due to lower transportation costs, but also because the number of distributors and processors in the chain between farmer and consumer is reduced as well, letting a larger share of the food dollar stay at the farm level. ■

For more information, visit <http://www.fooddowntheroad.ca/> or contact the National Farmers' Union at 1-888-832-9638.

My farm on the Internet

Henri Hofer

A personalized farm management tool was developed for francophone farmers in Eastern Ontario thanks to a funding grant from AMI. Through password protected access, farmers use the site to track agronomic data, such as crops planted, soil analyses, crop protection use and fertilizer application, for each field on their farms. ■

For more information, visit <http://www.lavoieagricole.ca/groupement/> or contact Groupement de Gestion Agroenvironnementale at 613-679-0034.

Business skills for beekeepers

Ontario Beekeepers' Association

A two-day business management workshop for beekeepers was offered in order to promote good management practices and provide skills training in running an efficient business. The Ontario Beekeepers' Association accessed funding through AMI for the event, which focused on the transfer of information vital for effective business decision-making.

The workshop was held at the University of Guelph and attracted approximately 30 participants each day. The agenda included business training through presentations and interactive sessions in areas of taxation, food safety, human resource management, the seasonal agricultural worker program, suitable beekeeping equipment, liability insurance, retirement planning, marketing, increasing productivity, succession planning, decision-making, record keeping, honey house set-up and successful business profiles. A guest expert from Penn State University provided an overview of honey bee research, as well as an update on Colony Collapse Disorder, which has been plaguing the industry in the United States.

Many beekeepers work full-time outside of the industry so there are few opportunities for them to get together to learn business skills. Traditionally, information has been passed from generation to generation with minimal business training, but the changing demands of the industry mean additional support, like this training event, is needed to sustain an efficient honey bee sector. ■

For more information, visit www.ontariobee.com or contact the Ontario Beekeepers' Association at 905-636-0661.



OnTraC for market access

East-Central Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association

Traceability—being able to track a food product from farm to store—and food safety are major pillars of the modern food production system. This includes farmers, who are increasingly asked to participate in on-farm food safety initiatives and implement traceability programs.

The East Central Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association helped its members by developing an electronic record keeping system for tracking farm production practices. The software was designed to meet current marketplace traceability requirements and was developed with input from key produce buyers with major Ontario supermarket chains, including Loblaw's and Sobeys. An AMI grant supported the development process.

The tracking system was developed for apple and berry growers to document food safety and good agricultural practices that will meet industry standards and help ensure domestic and international market access for those commodities.

Two computer workshops were held to introduce growers to the software and provide hands-on training to individuals interested in using the program. ■

CAFA Ontario education day

Canadian Association of Farm Advisors

Professional farm advisors play an important role in Ontario's agricultural sector. It's therefore critical that they stay current with emerging issues and trends in order to better advise their farm clients.

AMI provided the Canadian Association of Farm Advisors (CAFA) with funding to host an Ontario education day for its members focused on human resource development and training. Speakers at the event, hosted in Guelph, addressed key topics such as farm safety regulations, partnership building and human resources management. They also helped identify what advisors can do more of to become a regular part of farm business planning processes.

Over 80 participants took part in the education day, which also helped encourage the CAFA organization to look at opportunities to expand its training to be more focused on management issues and the information needs of its members. Six of the eight presentations were recorded and made available on the CAFA website. ■

For more information, visit www.cafanet.com or contact the Canadian Association of Farm Advisors at 1-877-474-2871.

Co-ordinating benchmarking and agribusiness assessment activities in Ontario

Food, Agriculture and Resource Economics – University of Guelph

As awareness of farm business management and benchmarking practices in agriculture has evolved, the number of projects, proposals and initiatives in this area also increased. This led the University of Guelph's department of Food, Agriculture and Resource Economics (FARE) to join together with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) to co-ordinate efforts, avoid duplication, provide effective information transfer to end users and ensure the most efficient use of available resources.

Funding from AMI helped launch this joint project to establish a structure to support benchmarking projects in a co-ordinated fashion. Experts from FARE and OMAFRA provided expertise in measurement and evaluation methods, developed linkages between existing benchmarking and business feasibility studies and groups in Ontario and elsewhere and provided oversight on proposed research projects.

Throughout the project, which was the first phase in a four-part initiative, FARE and OMAFRA hosted meetings to bring together representatives from the various groups currently receiving AMI funding for benchmarking and business management activities. Participants each provided overviews of their project activities, objectives and results to enhance communications between the groups and avoid duplication.

The longer term goal of FARE is the eventual development of a Centre of Food and Agribusiness Research and Management at the University of Guelph as a centre of excellence that could build networks with other, similar groups around the world. ■

For more information, visit <http://fare.uoguelph.ca/> or contact the Department of Food, Agricultural and Resource Economics at 519-824-4120, ext 53625.

UNIVERSITY
of GUELPH

Hedging strategies for Ontario wheat while managing operating capital requirements

Ontario Wheat Producers Marketing Board (now Grain Farmers of Ontario)

Hedging and forward contracting are tools used by many different businesses, including the Ontario Wheat Producers Marketing Board (OWPMB), to mitigate price volatility risk. The organization operated a pool to market Ontario wheat and offered forward contracts to producers for future delivery by hedging wheat on the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) futures market.

This kind of activity can require significant commitments of working capital to hold the hedged positions. OWPMB, unlike other businesses or organizations, did not have collateral to finance margin and was forced to use other measures to deal with these financing issues. This led the organization to secure AMI funding to develop a firm strategy and tools for managing margin risk and incorporating them into the OWPMB wheat marketing plan.

The study, conducted by the Guelph-based George Morris Centre, estimated historic margin requirements based on past CBOT futures data, estimated the standard deviation in margin requirements (also based on historic data), tested several strategies designed to reduce margin requirements and developed a tool that OWPMB could use to evaluate potential risk and cash margin requirements when evaluating marketing decisions.

The long-term goal of the project was to ensure ongoing profitable returns to wheat producers while minimizing risk to the organization. ■

For more information, visit www.gfo.ca or contact Grain Farmers of Ontario at 1-800-265-0550.



Musculoskeletal disorders injury prevention initiative

Canadian Mushroom Growers Association

Mushroom harvesting and packing entails a lot of repetitive action. The Canadian Mushroom Growers Association (CMGA) commissioned an ergonomic study to determine what might be the cause of musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) and other injuries amongst workers on mushroom farms.

Supported with funds from AMI, an ergonomics professional conducted assessments and job demands analyses for three main tasks in mushroom production—harvesting, packing and manual handling/palletizing—on several Ontario mushroom farms. The results were compiled and used to publish a manual titled “Ergonomic Assessment of Harvesting and Packing Lines”, developed in consultation with the Farm Safety Association and with input from CMGA.

The manual, which sets out recommendations and best practices to address ergonomic workplace hazards and prevent MSDs in the workplace, formed the basis of educational materials and recommended training for Ontario mushroom workers and their employers. A “train the trainer” workshop was held in Milton where 29 employees representing 10 different mushroom farms participated in the session and received a manual to take back to their workplace. This event was so successful a second workshop was added.

The Farm Safety Association has adopted the manual as a training guide to be used when visiting mushroom farms. The Workplace Safety Insurance Board (WSIB) and the Ministry of Labour welcomed this initiative, leading to increased collaboration between those groups and the mushroom industry. ■

For more information, visit www.mushrooms.ca or contact the Canadian Mushroom Growers' Association at 519-829-4125.



New farm-to-market programs

FarmStart

Ontario's demographics—particularly in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA)—are changing. The dominant European ethnic groups of the post-war era have given way to growing populations of new Canadians from China, South Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. This cultural shift means the opening up of new market opportunities for Ontario farmers – they can grow the ethnic vegetables immigrants are used to right here in Canada, creating the potential for import substitution.

Unfortunately, most farmers don't know how to access these markets or exactly what to produce for them. That's where FarmStart identified the need for an initiative that would create links between Ontario farmers and emerging markets. Their plan, which included market research, networking and communications to help meet this goal, received \$90,000 in funding from AMI to get off the ground.

The MarketLINK program assessment included a broad-based evaluation of market support programs and emerging opportunities that had already been identified, as well as a survey of 15 new farmers to identify new market strategies and support needs. FarmStart also completed a market study of the opportunities and challenges in ethno-cultural markets in the GTA, with a focus on the Afro-Caribbean, South Asian and Chinese communities, where researchers interviewed 36 different food chain purchasers, retailers, restaurants and processors.

These discussions and interviews resulted in the development of resources such as a Direct Marketing Guide and an email newsletter. FarmStart also organized a successful conference—“Growing International: Producing and Marketing Ethnic Food”—as a catalyst for developing a local supply for Ontario's growing world food markets.

“We have been very pleased with the progress and outcomes of the project and are working actively on next steps,” said Christie Young, founder and Executive Director of FarmStart. “It's clear there needs to be more work in addressing the incredibly huge market in world crops, as well as the challenges in the food system that prevent new and existing farmers from accessing those markets. We don't have any three-step solutions, but we've started to identify how farmers can take advantage of these new markets.” ■

For more information, visit www.farmstart.ca or contact FarmStart at 519-836-7046.

Grower computer training program

Grape Growers of Ontario

An award-winning training initiative to improve the computer skills of Ontario grape growers was made possible through funding provided by AMI. A grant of \$63,750 to the Grape Growers of Ontario (GGO) supported the development of a grower training program for newly upgraded management software.

The Vitis Vine Management tool is traceability and record management system that was designed specifically to give Ontario's processing grape growers a business advantage. GGO developed the system several years ago and an upgraded version launched two years later required one-on-one training with growers for successful implementation. Vitis allows growers to complete computerized weigh bills, track vine imports and access a myriad vineyard reports, all electronically.

The program included development of a training protocol and manual and the hiring of a training co-ordinator, who met individually with 125 growers to review basic computer skills, Microsoft programs, Internet use and the newly revised GGO Vitis program. An interim review of the training program found that a combination of group and individual training sessions was the most effective way to cover all knowledge levels. This revised approach allowed for an increase in the number of growers reached and the ability to facilitate one-on-one follow up training sessions as needed.

During the training program, it was discovered that many growers were working with outdated computer systems and were using dial-up internet access. GGO subsequently partnered with a local internet provider to offer discounted high speed service to its members. Growers may also come to the GGO office to use computers there to access the internet if they don't have high speed service on-farm.

GGO was awarded the Training Excellence Award by the Business Education Council and the Niagara Training Adjustment Board for their efforts to boost the computer skills of their members. ■

For more information, visit www.grapegrowersofontario.com or contact Grape Growers of Ontario at 905-688-0990.

Electronic market billboard for producers

Ontario Maple Syrup Producers Association

Linking together buyers and sellers of pure maple syrup products was the goal behind the development of an online, electronic billboard. The Ontario Maple Syrup Producers Association (OMSPA) spearheaded the initiative, funded by AMI, as a way of increasing its member services, expanding its markets and using cutting edge technology to attract international customers for Ontario maple syrup products.

The objective of the interactive message board was to foster an efficient business model for sourcing, arranging and developing regional and international markets. Purchasers looking for bulk pure Ontario-produced maple syrup, maple sugar, maple candy or larger orders of packaged maple syrup were encouraged to use the system, as were those individuals and businesses hoping to sell bulk maple syrup or value-added maple syrup products.

The posting of notices on the billboard is available free of charge to everyone. Viewing the billboard is available at no cost to current members of the OMSPA and accessible through the use of a login and password. Non-members may use the system on an annual fee basis.

The system was specifically designed to provide OMSPA and its members with a marketing tool that is inexpensive to run; for example, many replies and notifications are automated and do not require the input of a system administrator. Since the launch of OMSPA's electronic billboard, other commodity organizations expressed interest in using a similar system. ■

For more information, visit www.ontariomaple.com or contact the Ontario Maple Syrup Producers Association at 1 866-566-2753.



Organic dairy farm business planning and risk management program

Organic Meadow Co-operative

Consumer demand for organic dairy products has been increasing steadily. This means more organic milk is needed to help the sector continue to flourish—either from existing producers boosting their production or by new Ontario farmers taking the step of converting their operation from conventional to organic production practices.



Although considerable production information and expertise is available to prospective organic dairy farmers, the material was not consolidated into a useable format. AMI provided \$68,250 in funding to the Organic Meadow Co-operative to design a program to help potential organic producers understand the risks, rewards and business management implications of shifting from conventional to organic dairy practices. The goal of the program was to help remove significant barriers to entry and allow the organic dairy sector to continue to grow.

The co-operative hired Jim Fisher of the University of Guelph Kemptville campus to lead the development of a business planning workbook and a computer-based analysis tool for organic dairy production. The tool allowed farmers to use financial data from their own farms, combined with a self-directed evaluation of their operational and management skills to project an outcome for changing to organic production, a highly customized approach that provides a more accurate risk assessment.

For a conventional farm to become certified organic, it must first pass through a four-year transitional phase. The land, livestock and crops need to adjust from conventional farming practices, and all chemicals and fertilizers need to work their way out of the environment. Once certified, an organic farm needs to be inspected annually by a certification agency to ensure everything—including livestock, crop and manure management—is functioning organically. ■

For more information, visit www.organicmeadow.com or contact Organic Meadow Co-operative at 1-866-767-9694.

2007 CFFO seminar series

Christian Farmers' Federation of Ontario

The Christian Farmers' Federation of Ontario (CFFO) hosted a seminar series to encourage and enable farmers to develop a farm business plan for their own operations. The seminars focused on current trends in agriculture, such as farm size, finances, debt, marketing options and future opportunities, as well as elements of farm business planning.

According to CFFO, most participants in the seminar series, supported in part by AMI funding, were full-time family farmers. The majority, although at least somewhat aware of the trends in agriculture, did not have current farm business plans to help them adjust to those trends. Most previously completed business plans were developed with the goal of achieving access to finances. Younger seminar participants in particular were more likely to want to develop their own farm business plan as a result of having completed the workshop.

At the end of each session, participants were provided with a workbook containing the agenda for the day, an explanation of the elements of farm planning, a farm plan example and group exercises, as well as a template and information provided by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA). Close to 100 farmers participated in the seminars held in Elmwood, Guelph, Thamesville, Ancaster, Stratford, Kemptville and Peterborough. ■

For more information, visit www.christianfarmers.org or contact Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario at 519-837-1620.



Ontario farm business planning workshop

Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association

Farming by its very nature involves a lot of planning—such as when to plant and harvest crops or when to breed or market livestock. However, only 15 per cent of farm managers are actively involved in any sort of business planning.

The Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA), a provincial farm organization which works with farmers to implement and promote soil, water, air and crop stewardship practices, hoped to change that with the development and launch of the “Growing Your Farm Profits” program in 2007.

The pilot project was based on the popular and successful Environmental Farm Plan model, which uses workshops and a workbook to walk participants through course content and develop farm-based action plans.

More than 100 farmers participated in 14 workshops at locations across the province to test the process. Over two days, they analyzed and critiqued their own business practices, learned new skills to help them to be more competitive and developed action plans to meet future goals. Components of the sessions included strategic planning, marketing and purchasing, financial and risk management, succession planning and human resources. The program was developed by the OSCIA with \$206,600 in funding from AMI.

“We appreciate all of the hard work OMAFRA staff put into helping develop the resource materials,” said Harold Rudy, executive director of OSCIA. “Initial feedback from participants shows that not only were they satisfied with the process, but over two-thirds have already implement portions of their action plans.”

This pilot program has since evolved into the successful Business Development for Farm Businesses program under Growing Forward. ■

For more information, visit www.ontariosoilcrop.org or contact Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association at 1-800-265-9751.

An agri-food expo for eastern Ontario

(Carrefour agroalimentaire de l'est de l'Ontario)

Union des cultivateurs franco-ontariens

Many farmers and food producers are harnessing the growing popularity of local food to help them market their products directly to consumers or develop new niche products. In Eastern Ontario, farmers joined together to focus their efforts in this area. This included building relationships between the various stakeholder groups involved in the region's agri-food sector, as well as strategic development, information sharing amongst agri-food partners and using regional niche products to help promote the sector and the region.

With the help of a grant from AMI, a colloquium and discussion panel was organized to help look at distribution channel requirements. The event, which involved approximately 40 participants, promoted networking between value chain stakeholders in the region and helped facilitate the sharing of information needed to develop promotional and marketing projects. It also helped launch the development of a preliminary marketing plan for regional products. A follow-up report identified different key players in the agri-food value chain for the region and their needs.

Subsequently, 16 agricultural entrepreneurs participated in agri-tour activities and five promotional events at farms in the area, which attracted about 5,000 local consumers and helped raise their awareness levels of the availability of products being produced in the region. ■

For more information, visit www.ucfo.ca or contact L'Union des cultivateurs franco-ontariens at 1-877-425-8366.



Farm business planning and management training

FarmStart

Agriculture is not generally a sector most new immigrants flock to when they arrive in Canada. And yet it's a sector that needs new entrants who are willing and eager to farm. FarmStart received a grant from AMI to for a project that will help attract new people into agriculture.

FarmStart conducted research into the training needs of new Canadians wishing to farm and developed a course curriculum and training materials, including case studies to illustrate key concepts covered in the course. Eight farmers involved in innovative agricultural enterprises were interviewed as part of the case studies.

The business planning and management course was intended to help prospective small and medium scale farmers, especially new Canadians, to analyse their proposed farm enterprises, markets, production costs and potential profitability. The course was piloted in two locations, Toronto and Guelph, attracting eight and 12 students respectively.

The Guelph participants were primarily graduates of a program that places interns on organic farms in the area and all were born in Canada. Participants in the Toronto course were mostly new Canadians who immigrated from countries in Africa, so this curriculum included a greater emphasis on developing an understanding of Canadian farming, food distribution and marketing systems. The Guelph course curriculum, in comparison, focused more on co-operative production and marketing approaches.

FarmStart's experiences with these two pilot courses indicated a greater need for training and support amongst immigrants who wish to farm in Canada due employment pressures and a lack of understanding of Canadian agriculture and food systems. It is believed new Canadian farmers may well take a more gradual approach to starting a farming operation, beginning with small cultivated plots marketed to family and friends and growing to more large scale production as their markets expand. ■

For more information, visit www.farmstart.ca or contact FarmStart at 519-836-7046.

Ontario Young Farmers Forum

Junior Farmers' Association of Ontario

The vision behind the Ontario Young Farmers' Forum (OYFF) to create an opportunity for young farmers to learn, network and lead. Thanks to a grant from AMI, the 2007 OYFF attracted almost 100 young and future farmers from across the province to the event held in Toronto.

The event aims to identify the problems encountered by young people looking to establish themselves in agriculture, promote the exchange of ideas, develop leadership skills and consolidate the opinions of young and future farmers on agricultural and rural issues.

Aged 18 – 40, the participants used the 2007 forum as an opportunity to learn, share and discuss opportunities and challenges facing their futures in farming. The event's theme was "Facing Challenges to Create Opportunities" and featured speakers from across Canada and the United States on topics such as farm business management and planning, changes in family business, managing employees, finance, direct marketing and communicating agriculture's stories to the public.

A formal presentation by four young farmers summarizing the forum was made to 300 delegates at the Ontario Federation of Agriculture annual convention, outlining what they believed to be the biggest challenges and opportunities in their future.

The 2007 Ontario Young Farmers' Forum enjoyed a record number of participants and garnered positive feedback from delegates, especially relating to networking opportunities, the chance to discuss mutual concerns and ideas with peers, and the educational program. ■

For more information, visit www.jfao.on.ca or contact Junior Farmers Association of Ontario at 519-780-5326.

Human resources management and training capacity building for the Ontario pork industry

Ontario Pork Industry Council

Recruiting and retaining good employees is a critical success factor for farmers. Training and resources for farm employers in everything from employee motivation to performance appraisals can help make it easier to attract and keep a workforce.

The Ontario Pork Industry Council (OPIC) identified effective human resources management as a key to future growth and prosperity in the industry and, through the help of funding received from AMI, developed and delivered a series of human resources (HR) tools for farm owners, barn managers and supervisors, as well as industry partners.

Through the project, OPIC compiled a summary of Ontario HR resources, which is available on the organization's website, developed a "cut and copy" HR manual in electronic format for use by farmers and barn managers and supervisors with their staff, and launched a series of four HR training modules to familiarize producers with human resources management tools and techniques.

"It's an ongoing challenge to find good help and motivate them to stay for the long run," says Harry Koelen, a hog farmer from the Paisley area who completed the training with his wife Leony. "We took the course to enrich the farm and to get better at what we do. There is a lot for us to learn—I found that out in the meetings." ■

For more information, visit www.opic.on.ca or contact Ontario Pork Industry Council at 1-877-577-6742.



Ontario hog market information newsletter

Ontario Pork

The Canadian pork industry exports approximately half its national production, which means hog farmers must be competitive in a global environment. Access to the latest marketing trends and production information is very important, leading Ontario Pork to approach AMI for funding to provide this service to its producers.

The main objective of the project was to provide the pork industry with a newsletter containing production and marketing information to enhance the competitiveness and profitability of both individual farmers and the industry as a whole.

Researchers at the University of Guelph Ridgetown Campus surveyed farrow to finish farms to collect financial and production data and analyzed consumer and consumption data to develop an in-depth understanding of consumer demand for pork. This provided benchmarking information to help producers continue to modify their production practices in order to capture the best returns on their livestock, as well as to identify pork consumption trends to provide Ontario Pork with opportunities to target select markets for pork promotion.

A newsletter—called Ontario Hog market Information Newsletter—was launched to provide benchmarking information, as well as market information on hog prices, exports, global issues and consumption and consumer trends to the hog industry.

The newsletter was printed and distributed to over 3,200 pork producers in Ontario and posted to the Ontario Pork website. It is now available quarterly in electronic format through the website and directly to producers who signed up to receive an email copy. ■

For more information, visit www.ontariopork.on.ca or contact Ontario Pork at 1-877-668-7675.



Sheep performance benchmarking study

Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency

The goal of the Ontario sheep industry is to have more than 50 per cent of the lamb consumed in the province to come from Ontario farmers. To achieve this goal, Ontario's sheep producers need to boost their production in an economically viable manner.

AMI provided funding to the Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency (OSMA) to develop a pilot benchmarking study of the sheep industry to identify the decisions and practices that differentiate top producers from the rest of the sector.

A technical industry advisory committee was formed that included representatives from OSMA, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and researchers from the University of Guelph. The committee developed a draft management survey and financial spreadsheet, which were completed by three producers as part of the pilot project. Their feedback was used to refine and finalize both surveys in preparation for the next phase of the initiative, which is to roll out the survey to a larger group of producers. Completion of the management portion of the survey took approximately one hour, with producers spending two to three hours filling out the financial spreadsheets.

The ultimate goal is to establish appropriate Key Performance Indicators for the sheep industry against which producers can benchmark their own operations. ■

For more information, visit www.ontariosheep.org or contact Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency at 519-836-0043.



Agricultural performance benchmarking – phase II

Centre for Agribusiness Research and Management, University of Guelph

This project is a continuation of benchmarking work for the beef industry started by the University of Guelph's Food and Agriculture Resource Economics (FARE) department. The goal was to expand the survey in order to build models that would link farm financial performance to operator characteristics, business structure and operator strengths and skills. AMI provided financial support for the expanded survey.

As part of Phase II, a technical advisory committee was established to redesign and extend the management survey developed in Phase I—shortening it for producers who had already completed it in the previous round and amending it for first-time participants to include information about environmental practices. Thirty-nine of the original 45 cow-calf participants agreed to participate in year two of the program and 16 new participants were added.

Survey results showed that:

- 51% worked part-time or full-time off the farm
- 49% had a spouse who worked part-time or full-time off the farm
- 87% have Internet access, split evenly between dial-up and high speed
- The average herd size was approximately 105 cows
- Producers prefer continuing education through local meetings and seminars

The next step for researchers is to analyze and compare the available data to identify trends and factors resulting in the primary Key Performance Indicators for cow/calf producers. ■

For more information, visit <http://cfarm.uoguelph.ca> or contact University of Guelph Centre for Agribusiness Research and Management at 519-824-4120, ext. 53169.



Cost benefit analysis of PRRS interventions

Ontario Pork Industry Council

A devastating swine disease has been wreaking havoc on the Ontario pork industry since 2004. Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome virus (PRRSv) causes respiratory and reproductive problems in pigs, resulting in a high mortality rate. Once a herd is PRRSv positive, there are various strategies farmers can employ to contain the outbreak and minimize losses, but until recently, there was no quantitative data to show the benefits of the different strategies under a variety of scenarios.

Supported by funding from AMI, the Ontario Pork Industry Council worked with Dr. Zvonimir Poljak from the University of Guelph to develop a best management practices business management tool for use by farmers and veterinarians to undertake a cost/benefit analysis of PRRSv intervention strategies.

Poljak's work on this project included acquiring required software to import and analyze production data, establish statistical criteria to define the beginning and end of a PRRSv outbreak, define the interventions of interest in this study and design and develop a data collection survey.

He subsequently evaluated three scenarios using data from 25 outbreaks: no intervention, late homologous exposure and use of Pulmotil™ to treat the virus. His findings concluded that no intervention, while the least costly intervention strategy, also yielded the most dramatic production and economic losses. And most of the time, financial losses were highest in the no-intervention group during 32 weeks after the start of the outbreak. ■

For more information, visit www.opic.on.ca or contact Ontario Pork Industry Council at 1-877-577-6742.



Farm business planning resources and workshops - Growing Your Farm Profits

Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association

The Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA)'s Environmental Farm Plan program is one that is popular with farmers. This led OSCIA to develop a workbook and workshop, with the support of AMI, patterned after EFP to promote farm business planning. These resources were tested through the delivery of pilot workshops and feedback from participants indicated the need for revisions to the workbook before the program could be rolled out province-wide.

AMI provided funding to OSCIA to revise the workbook, hire and train program delivery staff and implement a communications strategy to promote the availability of the program to farmers. Partners from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs assisted with the content revisions of the workbook, where chapters and assessment tools were refined to improve the content and overall flow of the material.

Four regional co-ordinators were hired to deliver 30 farm business management workshops planned for March and April 2009; the OSCIA's Environmental Farm Plan representatives were also provided with training so they could assist with the delivery of these new workshops.

As part of the project, a wide-ranging marketing and communications plan was developed to promote the availability of this new program to farmers; OSCIA's goal was to have 20 to 30 participants at each workshop. This included development of a logo, informational brochure, frequently asked questions document, standardized presentation slides, post card mailer and banner stand display. News releases and articles were complemented with print advertising, distribution of an e-newsletter and presentations at county level producer meetings.

An average of 22 participants took part in each workshop; response from the farm community to the new program has been very positive. The Growing Your Farm Profits Workshop is now the entry point for producers who want to access the new cost-shared Business Development programs under Growing Forward. ■

For more information, visit www.ontariosoilcrop.org or contact Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association at 1-800-265-9751.

eHarvest

AgVision Inc.

The emergence of new media tools means there are many new ways to share information with an audience. eHarvest, with funding provided by AMI, was designed to deliver and demonstrate management concepts to farmers using multiple media platforms with the goal of encouraging producers to run their businesses in a similar manner to top CEOs and managers.

A series of documentaries featuring top Canadian farm managers was created that show firsthand how farmers have put various management strategies into practice in real world situations. At the end of each feature, the three key management strategies demonstrated in the documentary were clearly identified.

Film crews visited nine different farm locations across Canada, covering honey production, cash cropping, beef, dairy, coriander, bison and flower production. Previous management videos had featured management experts explaining key concepts but the focus of this series was having farmers themselves describe how they have adapted and implemented those concepts in their businesses.

The documentaries aired as part of the AgVision television series and were posted on www.eharvest.com, a website that delivers headline news, farm market commentary and feature documentaries, all focused on farm management decision making. Approximately 44,000 farmers watch AgVision TV each week in Canada. ■

For more information, visit www.eharvest.com or contact eHarvest at 519-438-5729.



Coordinating new farmer business development training resources

FarmStart

A wide range of training resources and materials are available for farmers in Ontario. Most of them, however, are aimed at existing farmers with very few built or adapted specific to address the needs of new farmers. FarmStart obtained funding support from AMI to address this gap in resources for new farmers.

The project involved compiling an inventory of farm business development resources available for new farmers, which showed that not only were few in existence, but most were only in the early development states. The New England Small Farm Institute (NESFI) in the U.S. had done some pioneering work in this area; the issues facing new farmers in that region were deemed to be similar to those in Ontario.

The Growing Your Farm Profits farm business management program developed by the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA) and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) was reviewed with new farmers, representatives of NESFI and the FarmStart/OSCIA/OMAFRA working group, who collectively determined that the existing curriculum could not be adapted to meet the needs of new farmers.

FarmStart then turned to the NESFI's small farm planner workbook, as it was found to more closely reflect their needs. The workbook was piloted in Guelph, Ottawa, Hastings and Sudbury as well as circulated to new farmers within the first three years of their farming enterprise. The resulting feedback was used to adapt the small farm planner resource for new farmer needs in Ontario. ■

For more information, visit www.farmstart.ca or contact FarmStart at 519-836-7046.

Veal carcass scoring education program

Ontario Veal Association

A new carcass scoring resource has been developed to help veal producers maximize their returns in the marketplace. Completed with funding provided by AMI, this project included extensive research into what veal calves look like “live” and how that translates into carcass performance. Carcass quality directly impacts grading; how a calf grades ultimately determines what price a producer will receive from the processor.

As a result of the research, the Ontario Veal Association (OVA) developed a grain-fed veal carcass scoring resource that contains a variety of photographs and diagrams to illustrate what a finished or market-ready veal calf looks like. Standardized veal cattle descriptions for use on the electronic auction system were also developed, as well as a laminated barn chart that illustrates the three carcass conformation grades.

A presentation on what producers should look for with regards to carcass quality was given at the OVA annual general meeting and a workshop was hosted at the Ontario Livestock Exchange. ■

For more information, visit www.ontarioveal.on.ca or contact Ontario Veal Association at 519-824-2942.



Demystifying agricultural agreements in Ontario

Ontario Farmland Trust

Agricultural agreements—also known as easements—can be used to protect farms for future agricultural production. The financial and tax issues associated with farmland conservation agreements are quite complex, leading Ontario Farmland Trust to research and develop practical resources on their use.

The project, funded through an AMI grant, originally intended to produce resources for landowners and buyers, real estate agents, appraiser, financial and land use planners and lawyers. However, a preliminary analysis of the scope of the issue led Ontario Farmland Trust to refocus its efforts on producing one detailed document for the land trust community and its advisors before turning to broader communications.

The report addresses the financial implications of a landowner registering a conservation agreement on farmland. It looks at a wide range of different agreements, from sales to donations of all or part of a farm, and data analysis helped determine the impact of various scenarios on a landowner’s bottom line. The document concluded that conservation agreements on farmland are an effective tool available to land trusts and landowners to protect farmland and facilitate its succession to new farmers. ■

For more information, visit www.ontariofarmlandtrust.ca or contact Ontario Farmland Trust at (519) 824-4120 x 52686.



AMI funding

The Agricultural Management Institute continues to provide funding for new and innovative projects that meet one or more of the following objectives:

- demonstrate the benefits of business planning
- address farm business management gaps and opportunities
- foster the development of producers working cooperatively and share beneficial business management practices
- encourage producers to incorporate beneficial business management practices into their daily operations and activities
- develop simple and applicable business management information, products, services, resources or training for producers that enhance decisions making and farm profitability



More information is available at
www.TakeANewApproach.ca

or by contacting the AMI office at
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