



Ontario Sheep Farmers are Environmentalist

Media coverage and increased activism over the course of the last few years may have many believing that farming is bad for the environment. By suggesting that farmers pollute the water, are stripping the soil of its nutrients and are responsible for mass deforestation. The truth though, is that farmers are and continue to be, front line environmentalist and stewards of the land.

Much of the work that the Ontario Sheep Farmers (OSF) is engaged in is about dispelling this myth and talking with government and the public about how committed sheep farmers are to the environment and sustainable production practices. OSF believes that livestock can be part of the solution when it comes to climate change and sustainability and we continue to be active on this important policy file.

Ontario's sheep sector plays an integral role in the management of grasslands and we recognize that the, conservation of grassland birds requires collaboration between farmers and conservation biologists. Given this, OSF along with Beef Farmers of Ontario, are working with Bird Ecology and Conservation Ontario on a project to collaborate with farmers to implement stewardship actions on farms. These actions will provide nesting habitat for species such as bobolink and the eastern meadowlark on farms and increasing awareness of the value of agricultural grasslands for wildlife. More on this project can be found on page 26.

OSF is also committed to healthy soils and clean water and is taking its responsibility seriously by providing leadership on the Lake Erie Phosphorus Ag Sector Working Group. This group, brings industry and government together, is a forum to exchange information, provide advice on potential actions by agriculture and government to reduce phosphorus entering Lake Erie. We know we have a responsibility to be part of the solution.

We are also active participants in the Timing Matters - Peer to Peer Response Team. Which is an industry-led,

peer-to-peer network made of a coalition of agriculture and commodity organizations. The team is here to listen and assist farmers by identifying practical alternatives to spreading manure on frozen or snow-covered ground, in order to use nutrients more effectively and minimize potential environmental impact on local creeks, rivers and lakes, many of which eventually drain into Lake Erie.

As a member of ECO-AG, OSF is a champion of the environmental work that farmers do focusing on maximizing the reduction impacts of best practices, relying on industry leadership for peer-to-peer culture and behaviour changes, and minimizing regulatory burden on producers.

ECO-AG is committed to providing continued leadership on these important issues. Its activities include the following:

- participation in the initiative led by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture and the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative to reduce phosphorus loss from farmland by improving water management on private land and in the municipal drainage system;
- active promotion of existing nutrient management standards and 4R practices¹, including the environmental, social and economic benefits of maximizing nutrient use efficiency and following existing nutrient management standards;
- promotion of established and/or innovative best practices; and
- ongoing research efforts to develop decision-making tools to help producers determine the most cost-effective means of achieving environmentally sustainable results.

People may not always see it, but Ontario sheep farmers work hard to produce food and fiber for the world. Farmers also protect the environment as stewards of the land for future generations. This continues to be demonstrated daily with many different practices such as conservation (no-till), preservation (lands taken out of production) and moderation by using less resources and developing new ideas of how to best manage the resources on farm. **OSN**

Editorial policy: Ontario Sheep Farmers welcomes and encourages letters to the editor and article suggestions from farmers and industry partners as a means of communicating with the Ontario Sheep Farmers board of directors and other farmers on issues of importance. Letters may be on any sheep industry topic, including Ontario Sheep Farmers' policies, programs and procedure. Letters may address previous articles or letters to the editor, and the editor may comment on the accuracy of the information in letters. Letters should not exceed 300 words and may be edited for style and grammatical errors. When submitting a letter, please include the name of the author, address, phone number and/or email address (for verification purposes). Printed letters will include the author's name. Potentially defamatory or libelous material, or personal attacks on individuals will not be permitted. If an author feels that the editor has inappropriately edited or not print a letter, a written request can be submitted to the board of directors for review to determine if there has been a violation of *Ontario Sheep News'* editorial policy.