



INDICATOR: Participation in environmentally sustainable agriculture program

Strategic Direction: Empower People

Target: 3. By 2030, biodiversity conservation programs and actions are inclusive, equitable and reflect Indigenous and diverse perspectives

Target 4: By 2030, land use planning approaches to maintain and enhance biodiversity, such as natural heritage systems, are implemented at local, regional and provincial levels.

Theme: Conservation and Sustainable Use – Sustainable Management

Previous versions:

- [Participation in environmentally sustainable agriculture programs - 2021](#)
- [Participation in environmentally sustainable agriculture programs - 2015](#)

Background Information

Ontario has about 48,000 farms and just over 4.7 million hectares of land on farms, which includes:

- about 3.7 million hectares of cropland (about 79% of farm area),
- about 160,000 hectares of managed pasture (about 3%) and,
- about 0.9 million hectares of other lands (about 20%), primarily woodland and wetland (Statistics Canada, 2021).

These Ontario farmlands represent about 8% of Canada's farmland. Approximately 23% of farm cash receipts in Canada come from Ontario farms (Statistics Canada 2020).

The Canada-Ontario Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) program was established in 1992. It encourages farmers to incorporate sustainable practices in their farming activities. Under the EFP, farmers complete environmental risk assessments of their farming practices, and create action plans that identify best management practices to reduce risks (Government of Canada, Government of Ontario and Ontario Farm Environment Coalition 2013). The 4th edition is the most current edition of the EFP workbook. Farmers are encouraged to update their plans if their farm operations change, and to review and update every five years.

The geographic distribution of the approximately 29,500 on-farm environmental projects completed between 2005-2024 is shown in Figure 1.

The best management practices implemented include activities such as runoff control, improved manure storage, cover crops, equipment modifications to improve nutrient and manure application and to reduce soil compaction, and soil erosion structures, practices that have multiple environmental benefits. Other actions such as restricting livestock access to waterways, establishing vegetative buffers in riparian areas, planting windbreaks, and restoring wetlands help benefit biodiversity.

Many best management practices have been supported through cost-sharing funding under a series of Canada-Ontario agriculture agreements from 2005 to 2024: the Agricultural Policy



Framework (2005-2008), Growing Forward (2008-2013), Growing Forward 2 (2013 to 2018), the Canadian Agricultural Partnership (2018-2023), and the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (2023-2024). Since 2014, there are several other programs that provide support to farmers for implementing specific biodiversity-related on-farm improvement projects. These efforts are not reflected in the data in Figures 1 and 2. For example, programs such as the Species at Risk Farm Incentive Program (SARFIP) and Species at Risk Partnerships on Agricultural Land (SARPAL), delivered by the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (funded by various sources including Ministry of Natural Resources, Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks, and Environment and Climate Change Canada). In addition, many Conservation Authorities provide funding and technical support to support farmers (e.g., Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority's 'On the Farm' program). Under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, Ontario has launched the Resilient Agricultural Landscape Program, that applies an ecosystem-goods and services (EG&S) payment approach to increase uptake of environmental best management practices that have traditionally had low uptake under cost-share. Many of the practices supported provide EG&S and biodiversity enhancements.

The indicator reports on the number of participants preparing EFPs and the change in numbers over time (Figure 2).

Data Analysis

Information on the number of On-farm Environmental Projects completed from 2005-2020 was mapped at the County level in southern Ontario and at the Region and District level in the north (Figure 1). The annual number of participants in the Canada-Ontario Environmental Farm Plan program and the annual number of Environmental Farm Plans reviewed each year at the provincial level were compiled for the years 1994 to 2020 (Figure 2). The cumulative number of participants in the program was also calculated. Data for this indicator are maintained by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) in Guelph, Ontario.

Results

Trend: Mixed Data Confidence: High Geographic Extent: Provincial

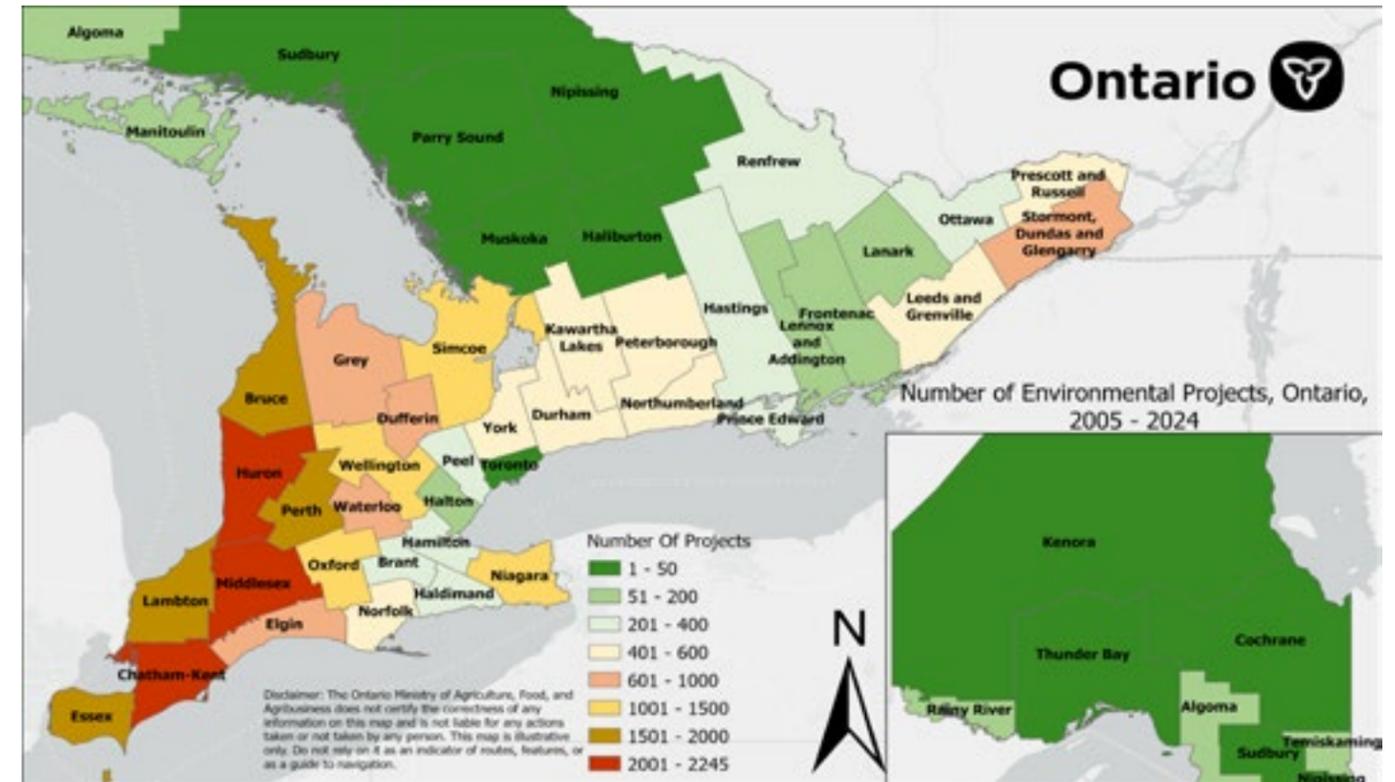


Figure 1. Number of completed On-farm Environmental Projects by Municipality (2005-2024) (source: OMAFRA, Guelph, Ontario).

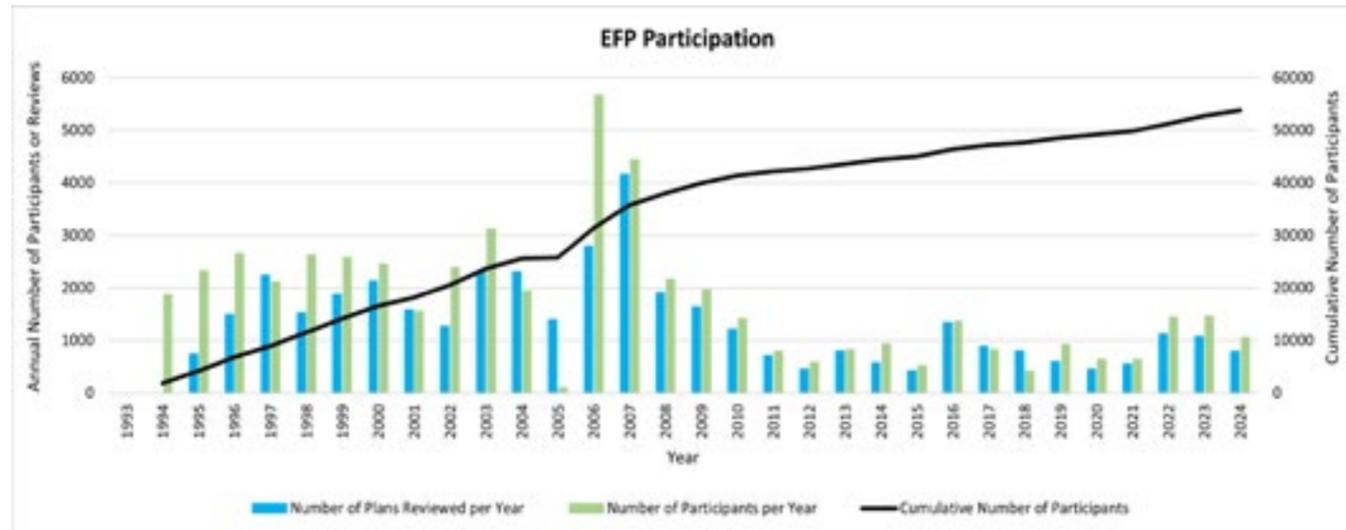


Figure 2. Number of participants in Canada-Ontario Environmental Farm Plan program, 1994–2024 (source: OMAFRA, Guelph, Ontario).

Status:

- Between 2005–2024, farmers implemented more than 29,500 on-farm projects supported by government cost-share programs to achieve environmental outcomes, investing approximately \$519,866,000 (Figure 1). That is an additional 1,855 environmental projects completed with support of government cost-share programs since the 2020 State of Ontario’s Biodiversity Report.
- From 1992 to 2024 there were over 53,000 participants in the EFP, including those who were updating a previous EFP (Figure 2), with more than 9,300 participating since the 2015 State of Ontario’s Biodiversity report.
- Around 20% of farm businesses have completed a reviewed 4th edition of the EFP workbook as of 2024. The 4th edition is the most current edition. Farmers are encouraged to update their plans if their farm operations change, and to review and update every five years. An estimated 30% of farm businesses had completed a 3rd edition EFP between 2005 and 2013 (OMAFRA 2025).
- In addition, the Species at Risk Farm Incentive Program (SARFIP) helped fund the completion of several hundred projects undertaken by farmers since 2013 not reported in Figure 1. Projects were specifically targeted at improving biodiversity and species at risk habitat. Project examples include grasslands improvements, tree shelterbelts and windbreaks, and protecting sensitive areas including forested areas and watercourses.

Related Targets: N/A

Related Themes: N/A

Web Links

Canada-Ontario Farm Plan

<http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/environment/efp/efp.htm>

Environmental Farm Plan | OSCIA (ontariosoilcrop.org)

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