

Jurisdictional Scan of Environmental Recognition Programs Within Ontario and Lake Huron Recognition Programming Recommendations

A Report to the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs to support efforts of the Healthy Lake Huron Initiative and the Canadian Agricultural Partnership for Stewardship Clusters

Stewardship Clusters Project #2018-010(a)

Activity 5

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Executive Summary

The need for programming to encourage BMP adoption has resulted in numerous and varied programs. This has resulted in redundancies, potential impact cannibalization and an increased cost across the conservation and sustainable agriculture sectors.

With the existence of many standards of programming, we are also given the opportunity to assess the qualities inherent in successful programming in order to target strategies that improve on what we know and seek to complement the resources available to us.

We conducted a jurisdictional scan by means of website search, followed by an online survey to program coordinators, follow-up program coordinator interviews, program participant interviews and Lake Huron Conservation Authority Cluster consultation.

This report highlights the jurisdictional scan of 20 programs that has informed the objectives and necessary next steps to achieve the goal of increasing adoption of BMPs in the Lake Huron Basin through a strategy that is harmonized with existing programming.

The main objectives in this suggested strategy are:

1. Influence the adoption of water quality improving practices amongst all stakeholders within the Lake Huron Basin.
2. Celebrate partnerships and influence a greater nuanced conversation on the issues affecting water quality.

Several characteristics were considered vital to the success of the programs we assessed, including:

- A sense of participant ownership of the program
- Participant contribution to the continuance of the program
- Learning outcomes from participating in the program
- Personal connection and network improvement outcomes as a result from participating in the program
- Indirect recognition of individuals supporting the program objective
- Leadership support (modalities of influencing leadership self-identification and community-identification)
- Strategic Program Design (i.e. the use of systems thinking design)

These findings allows us to strategically select how we recommend to move forward to improve BMP adoption in the Lake Huron basin, without compromising the impacts of what has already been accomplished. As we continue with the activities of this project and further discuss and select a single strategy forward, we will continually update our framework for understanding the topic of recognition within behavioural influence programming.

Introduction

Sustainable agriculture is a hot topic in the in the agriculture industry; sustainable agriculture is "the efficient production of safe, high-quality agricultural product, in a way that protects and improves the natural environment, the social and economic conditions of the farmers, their employees and local communities, and safeguards the health and welfare of all farmed species." OMAFRA – Intro to Sustainable Agriculture - <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/busdev/facts/15-023.htm#Define>

Water quality in Lake Huron and soil conservation in the Lake Huron basin are of vital importance to the agricultural sector and all industries dependant on water quality. As both extreme weather events and demand for agricultural productivity increase, farmers will need to continuously adapt their management practices to balance these pressures. To help encourage best management practice (BMP) adoption, education, outreach, recognition and incentive programs have been developed by many organizations in the Lake Huron basin and beyond.

Recognition programs serve to award actions to benefit the environment and incentivize target audience members to act in ways that meet the program objectives. To better understand the recognition programming being used, key stakeholders from several agricultural and conservation sectors were surveyed and interviewed. A wide range of definitions for recognition were included in the scan, from traditional reward-based recognition programs, to programs that recognized participants through establishing their role and identity in more complex programming. Ultimately, this will reduce redundancies and impact-cannibalization of recognition programs in the Lake Huron Basin and ensure the programming available to farmers will incentivize BMP adoption.

Background

Prior to the engagement of Lake Huron Basin Conservation Authorities represented in this cluster, partnership and communication between the conservation authorities had been strong, but functionally, parallel. The ten activities within this project serve to align our strategies, minimize redundancies and create common objectives and evaluation methodologies with the goal of improving our impact as individual organizations and as a collaborative. Activity 5 has allowed us to explore one specific tool for influencing BMP adoption, recognition programming. For the purposes of this activity, we have defined recognition programs to mean any programming that identifies individuals as role models, model citizens, shining examples, leaders, mentors, trusted sources or authorities in the desired behaviour targeted by the program as a means for influencing the adoption of that behaviour.

Methodology

1. Jurisdictional Scan of Existing Programs

A scan was conducted of many existing recognition programs in the conservation and agricultural sectors within the Lake Huron basin. Programs were identified through scanning websites and internet searches.

2. Engagement with Key Stakeholders

2.1 Survey

Program coordinators were surveyed using predetermined survey questions (see appendix A), based on the deliverables of this project, conventional program evaluation criteria and developed through consultation with the Lake Huron Basin Conservation Authority Cluster. Following this, program survey results were incorporated into an excel database (see appendix C) to summarize the key attributes for a resulting jurisdictional scan survey report (see appendix A). The survey provided an opportunity to gather information about the programming that is currently in place, and update the scan.

2.2 Interviews

Program coordinators and participants were interviewed using predetermined interview questions (see appendix B), based on the program evaluation criteria themes and concepts and developed through consultation with the Lake Huron Basin Conservation Authority Cluster. Following this, program interview results were compiled along with the aforementioned survey results to summarize the key attributes for the following Jurisdictional Scan Findings report. The interviews provided opportunity for discussion to qualify survey results and develop a deeper understanding of the commonalities between successful programs.

2.3 Follow-up Interviews

Based on the findings compiled in the jurisdictional scan report and through consultative discussion with the Lake Huron Conservation Authority Cluster, follow-up interview questions were created and used for continued discussion (see appendix D). This scan provides a summary of important attributes of recognition programs.

3. Cluster-led Evaluation and Program Design

The combined results from the surveys and interviews were presented to Lake Huron Cluster representatives to design a harmonized program and develop recommended strategies and necessary conditions and competencies for success.

Limitations

The information presented in this report was generated from surveys and interviews with those available coordinators and participants. If neither could be contacted, expert resources were consulted to discuss the parameters of the programs as it related to the survey and interview questions developed. As a result, there may be information not included in this report. Additionally, agriculturally focused programming was targeted in this scan. As a result, there may be information missed that would be gathered from including purely conservation programming.

Jurisdictional Scan Findings

In speaking with different associations and groups about their sustainability-based programs and awards, various aspects of each have stood out indicating their contribution to the success of the program/award. To create a successful program, the following areas should be included in the framework of the program:

- 1) Farmer Involvement
 - a. Farmers should be involved with the development of new program ideas in order to establish a sense of ownership and determine the validity, feasibility, and interest for the program, and
 - b. Farmers should also be contacted with proposed changes or ideas for future events, awards, etc. associated with the program
- 2) New Structure/style of program/event
 - a. A new program structure will be more intriguing to people and motivate participation, as it has never been experienced before or done by other associations time and time again. It will reinvigorate interest in issues that have to be tackled or talked about every year, (if they are consistently relevant to many farmers) and help to bring a different perspective.
- 3) Communication aspect
 - a. Need to provide a good environment in which networking can take place, and includes people from a variety of different farm types, farming practices, farming goals, different geographic locations
 - b. Mode of communication within the program (for administration and participants) as well as outside of the program (for participants to continue the discussion, problem solving and support that occurred during the program)
 - c. Need to 'speak the same language'. Whether in discussing a single topic with a group of farmers or in having a discussion with people involved from all levels of the program: farmer, program administrator, researcher, marketer, etc. This means providing background, and explaining terms that will be used to ensure everyone is ready and able to speak on the same level, to understand and tackle

the issues at hand. Learning to speak the same language can and will take time, so the process should be continued at each meeting and soon everyone will be on the same level, comfortable and having productive discussion.

- d. Remember: farmers learn best from other farmers, because they speak the same language and they come from the same background.

4) Support System

- a. Providing some form of system in which participants can access via phone, email, messaging system, will help when participants need to clarify information, discuss difficulties or problem solve an issue they are experiencing. This is especially important when farmers are individually working on projects or are in a more remote location. Providing support will create confidence and inspire innovation.

5) Structure of group: Individual, Partnership, Network, Volunteer, Multi-layered

- a. Depending on the association, its size and area of agriculture, the structure of a group is important as it can provide greater avenues for spreading the word on new programs as working with other groups or volunteers can bring their connections into play (have a strong following of farmers, good rapport with sponsors, different programming efforts, etc.)

6) “Trendy” Programming

- a. Have programs and awards relevant to current important issues of concern in agriculture and the greater community.

7) Promotion

- a. Make sure to use all avenues available to the association and people including:
 - i. Social media
 - ii. Other local associations and their media
 - iii. Local sounding boards (newspaper, event boards/websites/buy and sell areas, mommy and daddy groups)

8) Education

- a. Require an educational aspect, which allows for side discussions.
- b. Have participants do a presentation at a conference to educate others on the work that they have completed, what worked, what did not work, steps to improve on for next year.

9) Funding is imperative and can be difficult to obtain, especially when you are a smaller group and function differently than the typical group

- a. Dependent on the type of group and how it operates, consider both public and private funding, apply for grants (put the work into them), add a membership fee, and look to create volunteer opportunities within the group.

10) Accountability

- a. Need to create a form of accountability for participants in the program, to keep them up to date on tasks/schedule, on track and maintaining what the program

is intending (*i.e.* learning). Accountability will motivate and invigorate thought, ideas, innovation, and give participants the satisfaction of completing the task.

Proposed Lake Huron Recognition Program Competencies and Conditions for Success

Participant Co-development

The jurisdictional scan showed that farmer involvement in the initial and continual development of programming is vital for the success of said programming. In order to launch successful programming, it needs to be developed through a consultation process with Lake Huron Basin stakeholders.

Multi-stakeholder Communication Strategies

Communication of recognition programming is key to the program's success, and leveraging the appropriate messengers has shown to be a strong strategy for successful communications. The success of a recognition program would be dependent on a continued relationship with such stakeholders and their engagement and partnership in communication strategies.

Funding

As noted in the jurisdictional scan, access to consistent funding is a common weakness in programs throughout Ontario. A long-standing recognition program would be reliant on the existence of consistent funding to function well.

Proposed Lake Huron Recognition Program Strategies for Success

The primary finding in this activity (*i.e.* our first finding: there are 20 programs available) indicated that there was enough recognition programs that farmers had access to, to demonstrate a substantially weak need for additional recognition programming.

Supporting Existing External Programming

Benchmarking and Identifying Programs for Support

In order to confidently identify the program(s) for the Lake Huron conservation authorities to support, we propose to conduct a series of discussions to develop a benchmarking tool for recognition programs. Using the information gathered herein, in addition to information gathered from follow-up interviews with the program coordinators included in the jurisdictional scan, we would develop a set of performance areas. We would then consider all programs in the Lake Huron Basin, by mapping them against these performance areas and scoring them against each other to determine the strongest program as per our collective objectives and performance measures.

Storytelling and Communication

One suggested means of augmenting an existing external program is to develop a storytelling-based communications strategy to offer their program. For example, the conservation authorities would support the visibility and uptake of such a program by highlighting their recognized individuals by a variety of means (*i.e.* articles, advertisements, podcast interviews, short videos, featuring them as speakers, etc.)

Enhancing/Focusing Existing Internal Programming

Refocus Programs to Enhance Recognition Aspects

Currently, the events that use peer-to-peer models of education in our programming, are technically recognition programs, according to this project's definition of recognition. One suggested option is to continue our activities that use peer-to-peer educational models and enhance the recognition aspects in our communication and module-development. (*i.e.* an entire workshop series could be hosted by one individual that we wish to recognize, organizing topics by the myriad of BMPs that they implement in their management system)

Introduce Unique Programming

Opportunities for Unconventional Audiences

One suggested means of introducing additional recognition programming without reducing the impact of existing programming is to develop recognition programming for unconventional audiences. For example, in our discussions, it was identified that while profitability mapping and stewardship or the economics of BMPs are widely offered as educational opportunities and points of discussion amongst identified leaders, those actors are often not the authorities conventionally referred to on the topic of economics in agricultural actor networks. Should we wish to improve the impact of the messaging on the economic feasibility and even profitability of some of the sustainable agricultural practices we're seeking to influence, our target messenger should be those stakeholders that farmers naturally refer to

for economic advice. A recognition program engaging those stakeholders or recognizing those stakeholders would be unique and serve to augment our messaging.

Opportunities for Recognizing Collaborations

In understanding the strengths posed in engaging unconventional stakeholders to augment our influence on stewardship behaviour, one opportunity was identified to encourage such unconventional partnerships. This opportunity specifically addresses the objective to “celebrate partnerships and influence a greater nuanced conversation on the issues affecting water quality”. Should we seek to recognize and therefore encourage unconventional partnerships along the supply chain, this initiative would certainly serve to improve the common understanding of water quality issues throughout the agricultural and environmental sectors. Additionally, there is potentially a gap in not including lakeshore residents and consumers and a missed opportunity for motivating behavioural adoption by better connecting and informing the consumer to farmer relationship. In this case, the program would ideally be a subtle recognition program integrated with educational and social network-enhancing opportunities, not only based on our jurisdictional scan findings, but also because the amount of such partnerships is currently very limited.

Next Steps

Additional Information

In order to begin developing our benchmarking analysis tool, we have identified that additional information from purely environmental/conservation-focused programs (such as the blue-ribbon program) will be helpful in broadening our understanding of the strategies that lead to success.

Benchmark Existing Programming

Using the information gathered in our jurisdictional scan and including additional information gathered from broadening our scope to non-agriculturally focused recognition programs, we will seek to develop a benchmarking tool to properly inform our final proposed strategy.

Integration of learning from other activities

As we develop our understanding of the behavioural adoption programming landscape through the remaining activities, we will integrate these findings with our objectives and strategies as informed by this jurisdictional scan.

Strategic Analysis

Using this jurisdictional scan, our benchmarking tools, additional information from broadening the scope of our scan and engaging in the other activities listed in this project, we will define our final proposed strategy through a strategic assessment of the options identified thus far.

Conclusion

The Lake Huron cluster of conservation authorities recommend either supporting or augmenting existing programming or to develop a significantly unique Lake Huron recognition program. Regardless of the strategy chosen, the objectives of such a program should be to influence the adoption of water quality improving practices amongst all stakeholders within the Lake Huron Basin, celebrate partnerships and influence a greater nuanced conversation on the issues affecting water quality.

With those objectives in mind, we recommend several actions for our next steps. We recommend gathering additional information on non-agricultural environmental recognition programs and integrate learnings from the other activities of this project. We recommend assessing all existing programs against performance measures to select programming strategies based on objective measures as defined in the jurisdictional scan and additional activity-derived learnings. Finally, we recommend performing a strategic analysis to select and define the best path forward.

Once we have selected a program, some key elements that will determine the success of the program are as follows: Consistent funding, participant co-development and multi-stakeholder communication strategies.

Appendices

Appendix A – Jurisdictional Scan Survey Report

Appendix B – Jurisdictional Scan Interview Questions

Appendix C – Jurisdictional Scan Survey Data

Appendix D - Jurisdictional Scan Follow-up Questions

