

# Closer to the Heart:

## A CFFO Vision for Farming



*serving agriculture  
since 1954*



**Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario**

*A professional organization of Christian family farm entrepreneurs*

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## Closer to the Heart: A CFFO Vision for Farming

*“...Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men  
will see visions, your old men will dream dreams ...”  
Acts 2:17 (NIV)*

*“...Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he  
may run that readeth it ...”  
Habakkuk 2:2 (KJV)*

### Preamble

**T**he Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario has a vision. A vision of a renewed agriculture, which is productive, keeps people on the land, and protects our provincial resources of land, water and air. We believe the implementation of this vision will honour our Creator and bless all people.

The CFFO has spent over four years developing this vision because we believe that agriculture in Ontario stands at a crossroads. If we keep moving along the current path we can expect to see fewer people farming, more farmland turned to other uses, an erosion of farming communities and the loss of an ethic rooted deep in the province’s rural people. Indeed, we are already far along that path. However, we believe that another route is still possible—one that builds upon the time-honoured values of farming and creates new opportunities.

To become a reality, all dreams and visions must be shared with others and acted upon. At the CFFO, our prayer is that, as you read further, you will catch the vision and make it your own.

### Why is a new vision needed?

**S**imply put, current trends are creating a type of agriculture which is productive, but not always desirable. Certain aspects of modern farming have shed families, created greater environmental risks, destroyed cooperation and community, and alienated consumers and rural residents. Public support programs have tended to reinforce

these aspects, creating a whirlpool threatening to pull in all of agriculture.

The following outline highlights some of the trends the CFFO finds troubling.

a) **Income Insecurity.** As a result of declining profit margins, farmers have embraced industrial models and technology that allow them to produce greater amounts of food for less cost. Over time, this trend towards higher production has squeezed out farm families, driven profit margins even lower, and created ever-larger and specialized farm operations. And while the move towards these more intensive farms can help to deliver better profit margins in the short term, the long-term pattern is that these types of farms will continue to see their margins shrink. They are not a solution to the problem of income insecurity.

Income insecurity is driven partly by the move towards global markets. Farmers are being encouraged and challenged on several fronts to produce high-quality food with competitive price and quality for any number of national markets. This trend also pushes farmers to embrace industrial technologies and squeezes profit margins.

Another part of income insecurity is driven by concentration in the food industry. Shareholder-driven companies push for greater profits, scales of efficiency and improved competitive positions. As part of the supply chain to which farmers sell and from which they buy, many farmers are squeezed on both their input costs and market prices. This contributes to income insecurity and drives the adoption of technology and scale of operation.

Finally, farmers themselves contribute to income insecurity. Every farmer wants to produce a little more and do a little better. On an individual basis this has strong merit and is expected of entrepreneurs like farmers. However, combined with the cost-price squeeze outlined above, this natural inclination among farmers helps to drive the adoption of technologies, tending to worsen, rather than better, the problem.

b) **The structure of agriculture.** Farmers are part of an overall agricultural structure, which supports them in their efforts and offers guidance in their choices. The CFFO is concerned that this dynamic structure is moving farming away from family farming and towards increasingly industrialized, large-scale agriculture.

Government support programs offer one example of farming's underlying structure. While supportive of the rationale behind such programs, the CFFO has noted that, in practice, safety net programs

based on production—such as Market Revenue Insurance—have tended to reward and encourage the growth and specialization of farms. When income support is tied to the production and quantity of bushels per acre or livestock, the incentive is great to produce more crops or livestock to obtain more payments. There has been no allowance in these programs for capping payments or for introducing a sliding scale of public support.

Marketing legislation is another example of farming’s underlying structure. Historically, it has provided solid support for the marketing efforts of farmers in a wide variety of commodities. However, the CFFO has noted that this enabling legislation is under enormous pressure to move away from marketing principles that ensure fairness for many in the marketplace. Increasingly, private contracts between buyer and seller are eroding the market clout of family farmers.

Finally, the retail and input side of farming contributes to the overall structure of agriculture. Increasingly, farmers find themselves part of “supply chains” that value volume, consistent quality and food safety standards. Over time, these marketing arrangements contribute to the growth and specialization of farms by offering price premiums for volume, and cost reductions for input supplies. And while these arrangements can work well in the short term, they serve to move long-term control of management choices and decisions off the farm and into the hands of an agribusiness manager.

c) **Little formal recognition of “public services” offered by farmers.** Farmers provide more to the public than just food. The farmlands of this province also contain water supplies and recharge areas, endangered species, and carbon sinks that help to decrease the greenhouse gases implicated in global warming. These public benefits all come from private land, with the farmer unable to recover any of his costs from the marketplace. And so far, farmers have received little public support for their efforts to preserve or enhance the resources that provide these public benefits.



The demand from the public for an increase in these types of public benefits has risen in recent years. However, some farmers are now finding themselves under a financial burden for being stewards of these resources: either it costs money to protect a resource, or it reduces the income from land that cannot be fully used any longer.

By way of example, if a farmer protects a wetland, society benefits by having a water recharge area and a carbon sink for greenhouse gases. However, this same farmer can be under a disadvantage because draining the wetland and increasing the amount of land farmed would increase his production capacity. Likewise, farmers have adopted buffer strips to prevent runoff into streams and rivers, but correspondingly reduced the amount of productive land in tillage.

The pressures to protect the environment will only increase as Canada moves towards implementing strategies to curb greenhouse gases and global warming. In addition, consumers are increasingly demanding that food be produced in conjunction with environmental services. These trends add to the income insecurity of farmers by either adding costs or cutting revenues.

**d) The erosion of the farm community.** Farming in Ontario has historically been driven by strong cultural values, in addition to economic values. Previous generations used these cultural values to produce a type of agriculture which included marketing legislation, safety nets, cooperatives, credit unions, farm insurance mutuels, farm debt mediation, telephone help lines, soil conservation movements, and a host of other initiatives. These cultural values were experienced at the local level through farmers treating each other as colleagues.



As agriculture has become more industrialized and specialized, it's less likely that farmers know as many people in their communities. Farmers hold fewer and fewer similarities with each other, or with the wide variety of non-farm people now making their home in the countryside. Although difficult to measure, or plot on a graph, this erosion of common purpose has whittled away at the historic nature of the rural community.

For some farmers, the increasing loss of this type of community is resulting in a loss of identity. It also serves to undercut the efforts of the wide variety of service organizations that farmers have created throughout the years. Finally, the loss of community also limits the future choices of farm youth. Rather than finding or creating a fulfilling job in their home communities, farm youth must look further afield for employment and lifestyle opportunities.

### What has the CFFO done about creating a vision?

**T**he CFFO is troubled by the current trends and believes that if they continue without challenge, there will be less room in agriculture for family farms. Our membership is committed to maintaining family farms as the dominant arrangement for farming in Ontario, and strongly feels the need to challenge and curb the trends mentioned above.

As a result, the CFFO leadership decided in 1998 to focus a good deal of its time and energy on talking with its membership about these current trends and the values which they hold. A host of activities took place in the four years between 1998 and the end of 2002: those activities chronicled the values of our members and started the process of sketching out options needed to strengthen and expand the good things that are still part of agriculture. A view to the future, with challenging new approaches, was also part of the package.

Member-based, facilitated workshops have been the backbone of the CFFO's efforts in creating a new vision. Held in locations across the province, the workshops typically attract from 200 to 300 members from all aspects of agriculture. These workshops have been extremely important in establishing the values of our members and their aspirations for the future.

■ In 1999, the CFFO held a workshop series entitled *Market Clout: How You Get It, How You Keep It*. The purpose of the workshop series was to help CFFO members and friends identify and prepare for the next marketing challenges facing the agricultural sector. From this series we learned that CFFO members see farming as a lifestyle, in addition to being a business. We also learned that they believe their values are threatened by global markets, and that agriculture should not be structured to accommodate these markets.

■ In 2000, the CFFO held a workshop series entitled *So ... Who's Running the Farm?* The purpose of this workshop series focused on whether the introduction of an increasing amount of new management approaches or tools is reducing the amount of decisions being made by farm operators. From this series we learned that a majority of CFFO members believe that technology-use agreements, linked production systems and investor agriculture reduce the decision-making abilities of the family farm.

■ In 2001, the CFFO held a workshop series entitled *The New Countryside: Patterns of Change at Loggerheads*. The purpose of this workshop series probed family farmers' perceptions of changing land uses in the countryside and the impact these are having on the family

farm and agriculture as a whole. From this series we learned that many CFFO members see family farmers as the keepers of an integrated set of values, while other countryside users are often seen as agents of the dissolution of these values. Most insisted that farming is fundamentally different from other types of business and that other types of rural activities encroach on a way of life.

■ In 2002, the CFFO held a workshop series entitled *Gearing Up for a Better Future: a Compelling Vision for Farmers and Farming in Ontario*. The purpose of this workshop series focused on a reality check amongst CFFO members: will our emerging vision work for your family and farm business? In addition, CFFO members were exposed to some of the methods governments have used to pay farmers to provide environmental services to the public. The workshop series showed that CFFO members are largely onside with pursuing the emerging vision for agriculture, but are also wary about the forces pushing farming away from that same vision.

In addition to the workshop series, the CFFO also launched two research projects aimed at developing future options for farmers. The first project dealt with the whole subject of paying farmers to take care of the environment. The second project examined the forces at work in the marketplace and where family farmers can choose to position themselves for the future. A researcher was contracted for one year to produce the required research and resulting reports.

■ The first project delivered a report entitled *Voluntary Agri-Environmental and Other Incentive Programs to Protect the Environment in Ontario*. The 190-page report reviewed the wide number of programs used internationally to encourage farmers to adopt practices aimed at protecting the environment, and use rewarding and proven compensation methods. A basic theme that emerged from the report is that protecting the environment is everyone's business, even though it largely remains in the keeping and stewardship of farmers. As such, financial payments to farmers are fully warranted.

■ The second project delivered a report entitled *The Structure of the Market Place*. The 127-page report reviewed the processes and patterns at work in the market for farm products and the marketing options, both historic and current, available to farmers. A basic theme that emerged from the report is that farmers are caught in a matrix of contradictory forces: global markets versus local markets; and individual efforts in farming versus collaboration with others.

Finally, the CFFO Convention for 2001 focused its members on the questions of what a new vision for agriculture would look like, and what it would take to get there.

## The CFFO Vision for Agriculture

**O**ut of all this activity, the CFFO has settled on a vision, which contains three parts.

The first part encompasses the values, desires, characteristics and qualities regarding the type of farming that the CFFO would like to establish in Ontario. It addresses the heartfelt qualities, which our members would like to see strengthened and developed in our province's agricultural communities. It's about qualities and values: a blend of faith, cultural, community and economic. Our qualities and values are the driving forces behind all we do.

The second part describes the abiding principles that governments, farmers and the public need to uphold for sustaining a type of agriculture that undergirds moderate-sized, family farms. These principles outline the roles and commitments that governments, farmers and the public need to make for retaining and building upon the best parts of Ontario agriculture.

The third part provides a list of concrete recommendations for creating immediate action towards a type of agriculture reflecting the heartfelt qualities of Ontario's farmers. It serves as a roadmap of "how to get there." This part puts forward bold suggestions for changing, enhancing or preserving the way farming is done in the province.

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## Part One

**T**he qualities and values the CFFO sees in Ontario agriculture:

- **Family-based**

The CFFO sees farm businesses remaining family-based. Each succeeding generation should be able to own its own piece of farmland, take care of its natural resources, and leave it in better shape than when they took over. This business can be transferred as a business, family farm and with a cultural heritage to a new generation or a new family.



- **Farming as a vocation**  
The CFFO sees farming viewed again as a vocation, rather than only a way to make a living. Farmers, like others in society, feel a calling from God to a particular career and lifestyle. We view farming as a response to our Creator, in addition to being a way to pay the bills.
  
  - **Farming as a valued career**  
The CFFO sees farmers valued for producing crops and livestock through a process that creates safe food for consumers, is ecologically sustainable, and builds up fields, streams, sky and wetlands. Both farmers and consumers need to provide each other with formal assurances that recognize this value.
  
  - **Farming with respect for others**  
The CFFO sees a type of farming that shows respect for all people, as befitting humans made in the image of God. Practically, farmers need to be true partners in any supply chain arrangements, retaining the ability to make independent decisions regarding their farms and their destinies. It also means farmers will strive to create business arrangements for agriculture based on fairness and not on other factors.
  
  - **Satisfactory returns**  
The CFFO sees farmers obtaining satisfactory profits for their efforts. The profit needs to cover the product and the stewardship of our natural resources. Through satisfactory returns for farmers, local communities will continue to thrive.
  
  - **Commitment to stewardship**  
The CFFO sees farm families continuing to adapt their farming practices to provide long-term ecological care. Our faith tells us that God loves this world and we labour to express that love in our daily actions.
  
  - **Compassionate**  
The CFFO sees farmers acting in a generous fashion to support the hungry or those going through a crisis. The benefits from the generosity for fighting hunger are two-fold: immediate assistance for the starving, and long-term support so that the hungry can become productive and meet more of their own needs. We also believe that appropriate community support is needed for those farmers in our own province suffering through tough times.
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## Part Two

### Principles for moving towards the CFFO Vision for Agriculture

#### Principle #1

The CFFO believes that moderate-scale family farming needs to be made the focus of all federal, provincial and municipal government legislation, policies and regulations. Focusing government policies on moderate-sized family farms will help to create a structure for agriculture that provides guidance through appropriate incentives and disincentives. Without a clear commitment by governments to the family farm, agriculture will provide fewer overall benefits to society.



#### Principle #2

The CFFO recommends that governments remain committed to developing and maintaining the infrastructure that underlies Ontario agriculture. This includes educational programs, drainage legislation, research, health, safety and a host of other programs and activities. All of these programs and procedures need to remain focused on enabling a thriving family-farm form of agriculture.

The CFFO sees some specific pieces of infrastructure maintained or enhanced. Those specific pieces include:

- The CFFO sees governments making a binding commitment to marketing legislation. Family farms want to receive the largest share of their income from the marketplace. Marketing legislation has historically offered a variety of tools for gaining market clout. Governments need to remain rock-solid on maintaining these marketing tools for farmers.
- The CFFO sees governments remaining firm in their commitment to safety net programs. Farmers need the public's help with weather and market-related risks associated with producing crops and livestock. Government commitments need to be in the form of well thought-out, long-term agreements rather than ad-hoc programs.

- The CFFO sees governments becoming more vigilant in their protection of farmland. Good land is one of the key ingredients for a long-term, prosperous agriculture. However, the province and many municipalities allow scattered development to gobble up the best farmland. Rural housing severances are amongst the worst offenders of good land-use planning principles. Governments need to adopt legislation and policies that take a long-term view and demand good farmland be protected.
- The CFFO sees governments ensuring appropriate land-use planning tools are in place at the municipal level and that these tools reflect the needs of family farm agriculture. For example, the CFFO is in favour of capping the size of livestock farms, or ensuring that farmers own or use a minimum amount of land, at the least, to meet the requirements to utilize manure and other nutrients. Without such land-use planning tools, appropriate public guidance will be lacking for agriculture.
- The CFFO sees governments commit to providing, maintaining and enhancing appropriate ongoing social services to rural communities. As citizens, farm family members need access to medical, educational and other social services. Such services also help to maintain the “critical mass” of people needed in the countryside.

### Principle #3

The CFFO sees government policies, legislation and programs containing family-farm appropriate minimums and maximums. This means that all farmers will benefit from government programs but no farmer will be able to take more than his or her fair share. Without a commitment to minimums and maximums, incentives are artificially created to produce more products to gain more government payments. This works against the long-term interests of farmers.

### Principle # 4

The CFFO sees governments commit to helping farming communities deliver programs that help farm families during times of economic or personal hardship. Like any business, farming has its share of people who must modify their goals and plans as circumstances change. However, unlike other businesses, farming also carries a strong sense of personal and community identity that needs nurturing during hard times.

### Principle # 5

The CFFO recommends that governments remain committed to international efforts to aid those people in the world who suffer from hunger. In particular, governments need to remain committed to efforts by farmers to assist the hungry, both at home and abroad.

### Principle # 6

The CFFO recommends that farm families carefully examine their goals and choices in light of the type of agriculture they want to help create. Farmers themselves play a key role in providing guidance to agriculture. By their management choices on the farm, and through the choices they make within their marketing organizations and farm groups, farmers “vote with their feet” for the type of agriculture they want. Each farm family needs to evaluate its farming plans against the long-term implications for their farm, their community and the future of the children who will someday take over farming operations.

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## Part Three

### An Action Plan for CFFO’s Vision for Agriculture

#### *Action #1*

#### **Public support for production agriculture refocused on family farm agriculture**

- The establishment of firm maximums per applicant at a family farm<sup>1</sup> size in all programs that are primarily linked to the amount of food production by a farm.



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<sup>1</sup> CFFO uses the term “family farm” in a qualitative sense. It is not possible to provide a precise (with numbers) definition. A family farm is a unique form of enterprise or farm business structure where all factors involved in the enterprise come from a family: the manpower comes from the family; the management comes from the family; the ownership and stewardship of the resources are an integral part of family responsibility and the financing of the enterprise is based on the family’s personal assets and on its integrity.

- The establishment of a permanent commitment by governments to compensate family farm agriculture for an appropriate level of losses due to trade or exchange rate market distortions.

*Action #2*

**A permanent new source of income for farming and the countryside**

- The establishment of a small charge on the retail sale of food in Ontario to pay for environmental services and joint farmer/consumer initiatives.
- The negotiation of a “*Green Book*” of annual environmental payments for identified societal environmental benefits to be funded by a small charge on food at retail.

*Action #3*

**Renewed commitment to fairness in the marketplace**

- The strengthening and enhancing of marketing legislation to protect the right of all farmers to organize and negotiate a fair share of the consumer food dollar for their contribution to the food chain.



*Action #4*

**The best farmland in the province firmly protected for family farm agriculture for the long-term**

- The development and implementation of a new provincial policy statement under the Planning Act that protects the best farmland in all parts of the province for food production.
- The development and implementation of a model municipal zoning bylaw that protects the best farmland for family farm agriculture and complementary initiatives.

Action #5

**The development of a permanent forum between farmers and society**

- The creation of permanent financing for an effective dialogue between farmers and society. The fund to be jointly managed by farmers and consumers and expand the potential of programs such as Agriculture in the Classroom, farmers' markets, community supported agriculture, Foodland Ontario and other products of Ontario promotions.



Action #6

**Increased funding for basic research and sustainable market development**

- The adoption by federal and provincial governments of legislation that establishes funding for basic research for farming and environmental initiatives in the countryside at a fixed percent of consumer dollars spent on food.
- The creation of a production and market development initiative that will help Ontario farmers produce many of the food products now imported and retain control of their product further up the food chain.

**Concluding Remarks**

**O**ur hope and prayer within the CFFO is that this vision for farming strikes a chord within you. If you agree with our vision, please join us in our quest. Together, we can all work towards the creation of an agriculture that is truly "closer to the heart." May our Lord bless you as you embark on this journey.



### For More Information

If you would like to learn more about the CFFO's Vision for Agriculture, a host of materials providing more detail are available.

Here is a listing of CFFO vision-related documents:

- *Market Clout: How You Get It, How You Keep It*  
(1999 Workshop Report)
- *So ... Who's Running the Farm?*  
(2000 Workshop Report)
- *The New Countryside: Patterns of Change at Loggerheads*  
(2001 Workshop Report)
- *The Structure of the Market Place*  
(Research Study Report, 2002)
- *Voluntary Agri-Environmental and Other Incentive Programs to Protect the Environment in Ontario*  
(Research Study Report, 2002)
- *Gearing up for a Better Future: A Compelling Vision for Farmers and Farming in Ontario*  
(2002 Workshop Report)
- *CFFO Position Statements related to the CFFO Vision for Agriculture document.*
- *CFFO's website at [www.christianfarmers.org](http://www.christianfarmers.org).*



*Envisioned by the members and leadership of the CFFO  
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