



For Immediate Release

Sustain Our Farms Town Hall Targets Threats to Ontario Food

STRATFORD, April 6 – Hundreds of concerned local farmers flocked to today’s *Sustain our Farms* town hall meeting at Stratford’s Rotary Complex, calling for specific reforms to provincial and federal agriculture policies. The town hall was organized by Ontario Agriculture Sustainability Coalition (OASC), which supports producers of livestock, fruit and vegetables, grains and oilseeds.

“Ontario’s local food supply is in jeopardy, along with thousands of families, farms and processing jobs,” said Bette Jean Crews, President of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA). “Urgent government action is needed to help Ontario’s farmers manage their business risks and access credit.”

Farmers are calling for two key changes that would better protect local food production and support the sustainability of Ontario’s farms:

- The federal government’s AgriStability program needs to be bankable and predictable, to promote investment and better address cash flow challenges for farm businesses.
- A comprehensive Business Risk Management Program, jointly funded by farmers and government, is needed to improve predictability, business planning and sustainability.

The strength of Ontario’s food supply has huge implications for rural and urban communities. Agriculture is the largest economic contributor in Ontario and the province’s third largest employer. There are 43,700 full-time-equivalent farm workers in Ontario, working on about 57,000 farms. Related agri-food industries, such as processing plants and grocery stores, employ about 718,000 people, pumping \$28 billion into Ontario’s economy.

“Agriculture is a pillar of South-western Ontario’s economy,” said Stratford Mayor Dan Mathieson. “When farmers suffer, whole communities suffer. We all have a direct interest in making sure Ontario agriculture is strong and sustainable.”

The OASC’s members include the Ontario Cattlemen’s Association, the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers’ Association, Ontario Grains & Oilseeds, Ontario Pork, the Ontario Sheep Marketing Agency and Ontario Veal, together with the Christian Farmers’ Federation of Ontario and the Ontario Federation of Agriculture.