

Agricultural and Rural Policy - Updated Priorities and Emerging Issues 2011

AGRICULTURE POLICY

Competitiveness

Food Policy

- What are the opportunities for better bridging between largely urban consumers and producers/program beneficiaries in rural economies? How could the economic interests of the agriculture and food industry be integrated with social concerns, environmental considerations and health aspects mainly driven by growing urban interest in food systems? What is the role of government in the food policy debate?
- Are there any models for integrating the economic interests, social concerns, environmental considerations and health aspects in order to inform food policy?

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Sustainability

Petroleum-based Economy

1. In the coming years, it is anticipated that Ontario will participate in a fundamental shift from a petroleum-based economy to a bio-based economy. Already, we have seen significant impacts on commodity prices resulting from the development of agricultural feedstocks for bio-fuels and secondary impacts on related value chains*. The demand for new bioproducts is expected to create new markets associated with alternate, non-food uses for

commodities. Ontario has a strong interest in fostering a robust bioeconomy in the province. Research into the potential long-term economic, environmental and social implications of developing this emerging sector is needed and will help ensure informed policy development.

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* Definition: A Value Chain is defined as a strategic partnership among inter-dependent businesses that collaborate to progressively create value for the final consumer resulting in a collective competitive advantage.

Water Policy

There are opportunities for Ontario's agriculture and food industry to improve its economic competitiveness and product differentiation capacity by enhancing water quality and quantity management:

1. What is the role of the government in encouraging a culture of water quality and quantity management in the agriculture and food sector?
2. How to balance the pressure for greater regulation with industry's potential for increased competitiveness and profitability?

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Regulation of Agriculture and Food Sectors

There is a growing need for cost-benefit modeling and SWOT analysis to enable the Ministry to successfully balance regulatory pressures with the agriculture and food sectors' economic interests

- For example, an examination of other jurisdiction's food inspection systems and/or regulatory/standards as non-tariff barriers that impact Ontario's economic activities in the agri-food sectors.

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Changing Production Costs

Over the last few years, drivers for production costs have been evolving. Research to outline these shifts and the implications of the evolving production costs for producers is needed:

- What are the new drivers of production cost changes for producers?
- What are the potential scenarios for a higher-cost-of-production agriculture and food industry as it responds to broad public interests, rising energy prices and economic uncertainty?
- What is the role of government in balancing the public interest pressure, rising energy prices/economic uncertainty and the industry's economic competitiveness and profitability?

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RURAL POLICY

Rural Infrastructure

- How can government investments support a sustainable level of infrastructure in rural Ontario? Proposals to answer this question should address one or more of the following areas:
 1. What best practices exist for rural municipalities/communities to adopt collaborative approaches and alternative governance and financing models to promote efficiency and sustainability in infrastructure development and service delivery?
 2. What alternative methods of financing are available for 3P partnerships?
 3. What are other jurisdictions doing? How do we transfer this knowledge to clients?

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Climate Change

- What are the risks and opportunities associated with a changing climate and how can Ontario's agri-food sector and rural communities best adapt to these anticipated changes?

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Human Capital

Rural Labour Market

- What is the role of government in supporting the changing rural labour market? Proposals to answer this question should address one of the following areas:
 1. What are the needs of rural Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) as employers in terms of attracting and retaining skilled workers? What successful tools and strategies are currently working to address these issues, and what can government do to address current and future needs?
 2. What strategies are being put into place at the community and/or regional level to attract human capital? How are various partners (e.g. municipalities, economic development offices, business sector, Workforce Training Boards, etc.) working together to think long-term about human capital needs, and how are these being integrated into broader economic development strategic planning?

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Rural Entrepreneurship

- What methods/structures/supports work to develop regional networks that encourage business start-ups and expansions?
- What systems are being implemented in other jurisdictions to support home-based businesses, small business start-ups, innovation and rural-based businesses?
- What type of projects focused on improving and broadening entrepreneurial support need to be in place to help rural business growth?
- What business skills need to be developed to support self-employment, help unemployed workers explore options for starting their own businesses and

access business counselling and scholarships for business management and vocational training?

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