



Growing Forward 2—Organizations and Collaborations

SUPPORTING INITIATIVES FOR NORTHERN ONTARIO AGRICULTURE

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SUPPORTING INITIATIVES FOR NORTHERN ONTARIO AGRICULTURE

- ▶ Introduction
- ▶ *Growing Forward 2* supports northern Ontario agriculture
- ▶ *Growing Forward 2* helps northern agriculture realize what's possible

These projects were funded in part through *Growing Forward 2 (GF2)*, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative. The Agricultural Adaptation Council assists in the delivery of *GF2* in Ontario.



Supporting Initiatives for Northern Ontario Agriculture shines a spotlight on the successful *Growing Forward 2 (GF2)* projects led by two well-respected northern Ontario agricultural organizations, Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance (NOFIA), based in New Liskeard, and Rural Agri Innovation Network (RAIN) in Sault Ste. Marie.

The AAC recognizes the unique challenges and opportunities facing farmers in the North. Northern Ontario is a large area geographically with significant variability in climate, environment, geography and infrastructure from region to region. *GF2* funding has been instrumental in supporting agricultural research and innovation initiatives targeted to the different regions served by NOFIA and RAIN.

With *GF2* support, these two organizations have undertaken projects to provide farmers with a variety of useful resources to expand agriculture in the North. This includes plant propagation protocols for hemp varieties and a water management tool to improving forage production and a land clearing reference document so farmers can make better decisions on land management practices.

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GROWING FORWARD 2 SUPPORTS NORTHERN ONTARIO AGRICULTURE

New Liskeard—There's a world of difference between farming in northern and southern Ontario. The climate, soils, and available infrastructure in the north mean farmers have different innovation and research needs than their more southern neighbours.

The Agricultural Adaptation Council (AAC) recognizes the unique challenges and opportunities of northern Ontario farmers. Through *Growing Forward 2 (GF2)*, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative, AAC has secured cost-share funds for five northern-focused innovation projects headed by the Northern Ontario Farm Innovation Alliance (NOFIA).

"There is a major difference not only between northern Ontario and rest of the province, but also between the regions of northern Ontario, which is geographically huge," explains NOFIA Administrator Steph Vanthof. "This is one of the reasons it is so important to maintain agricultural research and innovation for the north."

NOFIA is a non-profit organization established in 2014 by northern farmers to advance agriculture in Northern Ontario. This includes applied research

on-farm or at the agricultural research station in New Liskeard, innovation and commercialization of technologies, or technology transfer to ensure existing information gets to the farmers who need it to benefit their commercial operations.

"Because of the differences in conditions, there are things that need to be done in the north for the north, and NOFIA was created to bring a voice to that, to ensure northern Ontario could speak with one voice and get projects off the ground without duplication or repetition," Vanthof adds.

Plant propagation protocols have been established to support the rapid development of northern Ontario-specific industrial hemp varieties. This is part of efforts to expand the diversity of crops that can be grown viably and competitively in the north and help bring products to market more quickly.



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To help expand the growing agriculture sector in the north, NOFIA spearheaded the creation of FarmNorth.com, a one-stop online resource for agriculture in the region. It was designed to provide information both to farmers already in northern Ontario and those looking to relocate north.

“Land is available and affordable here but there are differences between farming in northern Ontario and other areas, so we want people to know those differences before they come here and learn them the hard way,” says Vanthof.

Other projects include development of a business plan for NOFIA, creation of a reference document on the five most common types of land clearing to help farmers make better informed decisions on land management practices, and a workshop on developing year-round grazing systems.

NOFIA has also been supporting Beef Farmers of Ontario’s development of the Beef North tool that connects potential beef farmers to the resources they need related to beef farming in northern Ontario.

For NOFIA, there’s no question that being able to access *GF2* funding has been critical to agriculture in northern Ontario, and is playing a key role in the sector’s development in the region.

“*GF2* funding has allowed us to leverage industry dollars to get larger, more meaningful projects off the ground,” says Vanthof, adding that it’s important to NOFIA to be able to demonstrate that there is a valid and viable agricultural sector in the north.

“Connecting people with the information they need has been one of the biggest benefits we’ve seen with these projects,” she adds. “AAC has been helpful in working with us to ensure that funding gets to valid projects, and it has been very encouraging to see research dollars and investments go into ag in the north.”



Watch the video on **You Tube**





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***GROWING FORWARD 2* HELPS NORTHERN AGRICULTURE REALIZE WHAT'S POSSIBLE**

Sault Ste. Marie—Innovation is an essential part of farming in northern Ontario. Distance, climate and infrastructure are different than in more southern parts of the province, leaving agriculture in the north to adapt to make the sector successful.

In support of that drive for innovation, the Agricultural Adaptation Council (AAC) has provided funding to a variety of projects led by the Rural Agri Innovation Network (RAIN) through *Growing Forward 2 (GF2)*, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative.

“Northern Ontario is a unique place to be, but we have to do a lot more with a lot fewer resources,” explains David Thompson, RAIN Research Project Coordinator. “Support from *GF2* has really helped us generate research results specific to this area, which is in northern Ontario but also in the shadow of Lake Superior, so we’re in a unique climatic area.”

RAIN, located on the campus of Algoma University in Sault Ste. Marie, is a project of the Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre and the NORDIK Institute with a mandate to build a more resilient agriculture sector in northern Ontario.

The work with AAC has resulted in projects focused on managing forages and crop portfolio diversification that both demonstrate best practices and evaluate new methods from other parts of the world for applicability in the north.

“For many years, Algoma has been known for producing a lot of great products like maple syrup. We have a long history of producing cattle and our farmers are looking at getting ahead of the curve,” Thompson says.

A project using keyline subsoiling as a water management tool is under way to improve forage production. This involves using an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) to look at field’s topography and then applying a contour-based pattern of subsoiling to ensure a more even flow of water and better pasture growth.



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Through on-farm trials RAIN partners with select farmers to experiment with growing new crops in the region and showcase best practices like no-till, soil health amendments and rotational grazing. Experiences are shared at field days so other farmers in the region can see the tools in practice and learn from the experiences of their fellow growers.

A more recently launched project is looking at cross-seeding forages as an alternative way to seed crops, and evaluating this practice from New Zealand and the United Kingdom in the context of northern Ontario.

As well, work is underway to study the economics of sulphur fertilization to determine whether applying sulphur to brassica crops can be economical for beef, vegetable and canola producers in Algoma.

It's the local farm community that helps drive many of the research priorities in the region, but without the *GF2* support, the work either wouldn't be getting done at all or simply at a much reduced scale.

"We rely on a number of partners to put these projects together, but it's the *GF2* funding that has let

us leverage these bigger projects we just don't have resources to do on our own," Thompson says. "There is a lot of opportunity when we're working together and it has really been a benefit to have this support for community-based innovative research like this."

"Agriculture is a great opportunity for northern communities because it's a way we can diversify our economy and our work with the AAC has really helped us and the community to realize what's possible in northern Ontario," he adds.



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