



Supply Chain Stability and Adaptability Program

Dairy Farm Modernization Sets Stage for Future Growth



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Andrew Eisses is passionate about dairy farming. He's equally passionate about his family's future in that industry and in carrying on a family legacy that dates back four generations.

The University of Guelph graduate returned to the family's dairy farming business in 2016, milking cows and managing a herd in the same facility built by his grandfather in the 1960s. Plans for a new barn that would incorporate the latest advancements in animal housing and technology had long been talked about, but had never been a possibility.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought challenges to Ontario's dairy industry, including labour shortages and inflation that decreased farm profitability, made inputs harder to source and created transportation issues.

It was the launch of the Supply Chain Stability and Adaptability Program, which offered applicants cost-share funding opportunities for projects that would support the growth of Ontario's food production capacity, that helped Eisses turn a corner with the project.

"We had been thinking about this for about five years. I knew I couldn't work with the old facility for another 10 years and putting money into trying to upgrade that barn was not a viable, long-term solution," says Eisses. "It was either going to mean building a new facility or stop farming."

The cost-share funding Eisses was able to access through the program finally brought that long-held dream to fruition, creating a more resilient farm operation that will not only strengthen the province's food supply chain but also allow for future growth as Eisses and his wife Victoria move through their farming careers.

"This program came at a perfect time for us to help us with some of the infrastructure costs that had become very high and let us build a facility that will ultimately let us double our production," he adds. "We're now at a modern standard with cattle housing how it should be done that offers the best care and environment for cows. This also opens the door to considering new opportunities in the future like onsite processing or even agri-tourism that weren't an option before."

The new barn, which boosts capacity from 110 to 170 stalls, features sand bedding – considered a gold standard for cow comfort and disease prevention – and is a bright, airy design with good ventilation, more space per animal, a modern feeding system and updated milking robots.

And thanks to the cost-share funding, Eisses was able to include a few extra features like automated foot baths, he notes.

"The funding was very valuable. Since the pandemic, costs have gone up so fast, which made things pretty stressful. Having someone see the value of farms like ours that are looking to the future and understanding the value they bring to the industry and to the local community is terrific," he adds. "Farming is part of the community and this lets us look to the future and we know the investment will pay off."

The Supply Chain Stability and Adaptability Program is funded by the Government of Ontario to address supply chain challenges in the agri-food sector. The Agricultural Adaptation Council is delivering the program on behalf of the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness.