



Organic Consultant Inc - Ruth Knight PAg "Soil Health to Farm Wealth"

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“Community Action, Climate Change, and Soil Health in the Greenbelt”

Presentation Summary to Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation – June 19, 2107

Ruth Knight

The Opportunity

Healthy soils are critical to the success and sustainability of farming. Improving soil health delivers numerous social benefits, including climate change mitigation and adaptation. The proposed pilot identifies an opportunity to support farmers to improve the health of their soils by:

1. Developing robust measures of soil health that cut across all production systems and provide direct feedback of management changes.
2. Mobilizing knowledge that supports behavioural change and innovation of adaptive management practices that fit local conditions.
3. Supporting citizen science for increased understanding and enabling more involvement.
4. Engaging the community for greater connections between multiple sectors.

The proposed project is novel to Ontario. Similar initiatives exist in other jurisdictions but this will be a first for Ontario. The full pilot will result in a model that can be replicated in other agricultural / rural communities. As the pilot project demonstrated significant potential to contribute to the goals of the Greenbelt Foundation, a feasibility study was sponsored. The study funded consultation events and this report.

By running workshops, focus groups and targeted outreach, the feasibility assessment set out to test:

- Is there demand for this type of participatory approach to improving soil health?
- Do participants connect soil health to climate change?
- Can the project team recruit sufficient numbers of farmers to run a viable pilot?
- Can the project team recruit sufficient community members for the citizen science component?
- Is Erin a suitable location for a pilot based on the size and composition of local farms
- What is the possibility of attracting multiple sources of funding to support the pilot?



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Adaptive Management

The range of practices that are presumed to lead toward increased soil carbon and improved water infiltration include:

- diverse crop rotations
- cover crops
- mulching
- reduced tillage
- intercropping
- integrating livestock

Summary of Results

The feasibility assessment demonstrates there is a strong demand for the pilot among the farmers consulted and that the community of Erin can support the critical requirements to be a successful location for the pilot. The farmer workshop resulted in 29 producers stating an interest and willingness to participate. They represent a diverse mix of farm types, sizes, management practices and experience. The community workshop had over 100 participants and resulted in more than enough interest to run the citizen science element of the pilot. In addition, links were made to the current eco-school programs at Erin High School and Public School.

The Town of Erin contributed \$2,500 towards the cost of hosting the initial workshops demonstrating their commitment to the project. Credit Valley Conservation is also very involved. The engagement activities undertaken so far have created community momentum that can carry over to the initial stages of the pilot. Community members from the Town of Mono have already expressed interest in future participation based on the initial workshops for this feasibility assessment.

The project team have identified possible avenues for funding and the intakes for these are scheduled for early fall. Based on the level of community interest, the benefits associated with improved soil health, and the broad range of stakeholders interested in the pilot, there is cause for optimism.