



## Fertile grounds: Exploring alternative land access opportunities

The Greenbelt win has shown how important farmland protection is to Ontarians, but the work doesn't stop there. Farmland access is a deeply rooted issue, with challenges like soaring land prices, farmland leases being unsuitable for smaller scale agriculture, and limited housing options near or on-farm.

The NFU-O and partner organizations, including the EFAO, are working together to improve knowledge around alternative land access models, and support regional networking and natural connections amongst aspiring landless farmers and farmers with land. Alternative land access models can take the form of sharing land in creative ways, being part of a co-operative or community farm, accessing land through publicly held land, and more.

To support this work, the NFU-O has hired five Land Access Field Coordinators, who will facilitate conversations around land access, collect information from land holders and land seekers, and foster connections within regional farming communities. The coordinators will be placed in the GTA, Grey/Bruce County, and Eastern Ontario, and will be working with new, young and BIPOC farmers to host a range of field days, workshops, and webinars around land access.

The coordinators attended three workshops and field days in September, organized by the EFAO and NFU-O Local 344. Read on:

### *September 5 — Field Day at Shade of Miti*

The EFAO held a field day with Rav Singh of Shade of Miti Farm in the Region of Peel in September. Shade of Miti is a small-scale, ecological farm specializing in South Asian vegetables. Rav spoke about growing and selling cultural crops, and her okra research, showcasing five different types of Okra grown in 2023. Also, Rav's off-grid solar powered pond irrigation system was a point of focus, where Rav explained the process of researching suitable kinds of irrigation, legal considerations, food safety, equipment, cost, and more.

Rav shares farmland alongside three other farmers or home gardeners, and one cash cropper. Participants were encouraged to connect with the NFU-O and EFAO for land access resources and support. Through this, one land holder participant was able to connect with the NFU-O to obtain a sample land lease to help formalize a land sharing agreement with a landless farmer.

### *September 18 — EFAO Farm Tour*

The EFAO held another field day in September with Long Road Eco-Farm and Farm Sum Food in Harrowsmith, ON. Long Road Eco-Farm is a small ecological farm specializing in livestock and specialty crops like ginger and garlic. They work with Farm Sum Food, who produces prepared Chinese foods like steamed buns, ferments, dumplings and more, all with products from Long Road Eco-Farm. Participants in the field day learned about growing specialty crops like ginger, raising

livestock, seasonal greenhouse use, and developing prepared foods as part of a farm-business model. An NFU-O land access field coordinator attended the event to connect with folks in the region around land access opportunities and challenges, and create connections to further the conversation and run programming in the area in the future.

### *September 23 — Sharing the Land*

NFU-O Local 344 (Grey) held a workshop event focusing on regional land access issues. The event included a panel discussion to share the historical context of land access and the perspectives of landless farmers, and a presentation from the Grey County Director of Planning to discuss housing bylaws on-farm.

There was also a community dinner and a sharing circle, to make connections and voice concerns specific to the area.

Heather Newman, the Grey/Bruce NFU-O land linking coordinator helped to make connections amongst participants and shared about the NFU-O's land access project. The connections made through this will help the NFU-O advocate for land leases that are more suitable for small-scale farmers, and housing solutions for farmers sharing land with land holders.

The NFU-O will continue to prioritize land access work and support the next generation of farmers, as they are crucial to the future of agriculture in Ontario. The NFU-O also recognizes the disproportionate barriers that new, young and BIPOC farmers face when looking for farmland, and is committed to offering heightened support to these communities with this work.

~ Briana Vanular is the NFU-O's Land Access & Young Farmer Support Coordinator. You can reach her at [briana@nfontario.ca](mailto:briana@nfontario.ca).

### Local News/Events

- NFU-O News/Events: Women and gender-diverse farmers are invited to attend the upcoming NFU Women's Caucus meetings taking place on November 15th at 7:00 p.m. Join us to talk about issues affecting your lives and actions we can take together, on a systemic level, to change the systems that aren't working on behalf of us, as people. If you are interested in attending, please email Claire at [claireapoulton@gmail.com](mailto:claireapoulton@gmail.com)

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