



## Meet Claire Poulton: Your NFU-O Women's Advisor

As NFU-O's Women's Advisor, Claire Poulton says it will be "exciting to have a voice" in policy decisions. Her previous educational, professional, and personal experiences lend exceptionally well to this. Despite a non-farming background, Claire runs Little Fields Farm: a small-scale, diversified farm in Bright that provides a 115 person CSA plus flowers, laying hens, broiler chickens, turkey, and pork. Without any exposure to farms growing up, or any farmer familial relations to guide her, Claire gathered her practical farming skills by completing multiple internships. Her background in environmental studies directs her desire to have a low impact on the environment and advocate for new and existing farmers to do the same thing. Little Fields Farm is now in its eighth year as a productive farm, and Claire says: "even when I'm tired, I wouldn't rather be doing anything else."

Considering farming her passion project, Claire enjoys running a business. Grateful for the advice she received early in her journey: "don't expand too quickly," she embraces a steady and mindful farm development. And she encourages new farmers to do the same thing. Claire notes that because getting on land can be so exciting it's important to remain realistic about available time, energy, and resources. She recommends finding a reasonable balance of work and leisure by structuring working hours to avoid burnout. Because with a proper balance, one remains fresh and ready to interact with their community.

And Claire considers interactions with her community one of the most rewarding parts of her job. As a response to the pandemic, Little Fields Farm pivoted from farmers markets and began to run a CSA. Claire says she loves the CSA model because of the relationships she gets

to build with people who are committed to supporting her business. Considering community, not only with buyers but with other farmers, essential, she says that when you begin farming, "it can be overwhelming, and you can't possibly know all the answers." Inter-farmer relationships are vital for knowledge sharing, resources, tool swaps, and support.

Claire has established her community and says that she knows quite a few other farmers who are women. "A lot of young ecological farmers are women. I'm not really sure why that is exactly but it's definitely something notable, that a lot of women are drawn to this field." And Claire is right. According to the 2021 Agriculture Census, 30.4 per cent of farm operators in Canada are female, a rise from 28.7 per cent in 2016. It is exciting to see more women step into self-directed roles as farmers, businesswomen, and leaders. Barriers still exist, however. Claire



notes how in such a physically demanding job, being a woman in farming is especially difficult if one hopes to start a family.

Claire hopes for an Ontario where rural communities are thriving hubs. Her steadfast commitment to farming sustainably contributes to this goal and aligns with NFU-O's vision of vibrant and contextualized food systems throughout Ontario. The NFU-O is so excited to have Claire and her wealth of knowledge on regional council! Welcome, Claire!

### EFAO Conference returns to in-person programming in 2022

In the winter of 2022, for the first time in three years, the EFAO Conference and will be holding in-person events. That's a big deal.

This year's EFAO Conference theme, Regrowth, is a reflection on how EFAO, its members, and farmers across the province have grown and changed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also an homage to the many ways ecological farmers seek to work within natural cycles. From the necessity of pruning to the beauty of compost, farmers understand that aligning with natural cycles of life and death is paramount to addressing our planet's ecological crises. EFAO hopes to foster new ways to connect, build community, and share learning, and that out of these strange times come many opportunities to experience life-giving regrowth.

Save the date! The EFAO Conference will be offered in a dual format this year, with regional gatherings across the province, and an online program to allow for wider access to the educational components of the conference.

#### Regional Gatherings:

- Southwestern | Nov. 12, Waterdown
- Eastern | Nov. 19, Batawa
- Northeastern | Nov. 26 & 27, Sudbury
- Online Program | Dec. 6-9 via Zoom

More details to be shared in the weeks to come!  
To learn more visit: <https://efao.ca/>