

GREAT LAKES ST. LAWRENCE

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE ACTION AGENDA

GREAT LAKES
ST. LAWRENCE
GOVERNORS
& PREMIERS



INTRODUCTION

The Great Lakes St. Lawrence region is comprised of eight U.S. States and two Canadian Provinces and home to more than 110 million people, a \$9.3 trillion (US) economy, and abundant natural resources including water, forests, wildlife, and fertile soils. This region supports one of the world's richest and most diverse agricultural industries, uniquely positioning the region's eight States and two Provinces to be a center for innovative and collaborative solutions to address the challenges currently facing the agricultural industry.

Contributing over \$1 trillion (US) to the region's economy and employing over 6.5 million people, the agricultural industry plays a critical role in the region's economic prosperity and long-term vitality. The region's producers operate across diverse landscapes, production systems, and market conditions, yet share common opportunities and challenges related to resource management, profitability, changing environmental conditions, and access to technology, land, labor, and capital.

This Great Lakes St. Lawrence Sustainable Agriculture Action Agenda (Agenda) was developed by the Conference of Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers (GSGP) through its Sustainable Agriculture

Initiative which unites the region's Departments and Ministries of Agriculture. This Agenda builds on GSGP's Sustainable Agriculture Research Agenda and provides a regional framework for advancing agricultural outcomes through collaboration on research endeavors or specific projects among State, Provincial, and Federal agencies, producers, industry, and research institutions.

While agricultural decisions are made locally, many of the factors influencing success in the agricultural sector including markets, supply chains, research priorities, shared water resources, and environmental goals extend beyond jurisdictional boundaries. This Agenda emphasizes the importance of a regional approach to help improve coordination, harmonize monitoring efforts, accelerate knowledge exchange, and identify opportunities for collective action.

The region's Departments and Ministries of Agriculture acknowledge that strong agricultural outcomes depend on both economic and environmental factors which are reflected throughout this Agenda. Success requires practical, science-based approaches that support producer decision-making, improve competitiveness, strengthen natural resource management, and encourage innovation.

Collaboration with universities, Federal agencies,

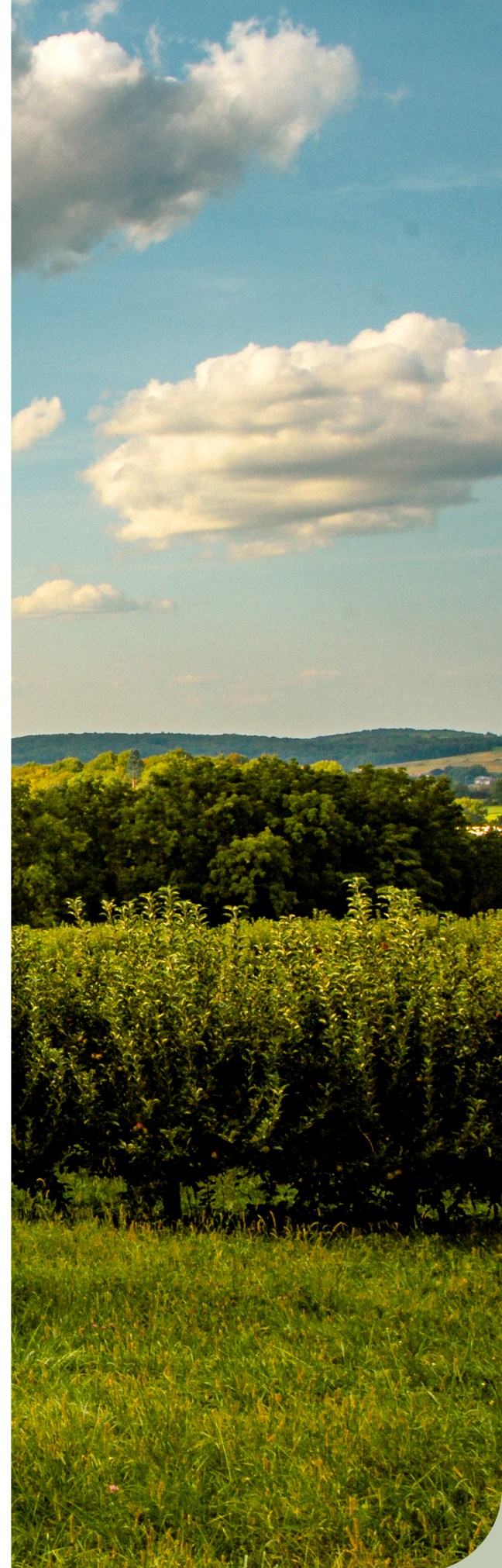
extension offices, NGOs, industry partners, conservation organizations, and other institutions working to advance sustainable agriculture will be critical to ensure the actions identified in this Agenda are completed. Beginning in September 2026, GSGP, in collaboration with the State and Provincial Departments/Ministries of Agriculture, will undertake a formal process to identify partner institutions that are well positioned to coordinate and lead identified actions. These lead institutions may undertake the work directly or convene and collaborate with other organizations and partners to support implementation and advance progress toward the broader Agenda goals.

MONITORING PROGRESS

The following goals have been prioritized because they are linked to coordinated actions that can help advance agricultural productivity, profitability, and environmental performance throughout the Great Lakes St. Lawrence region.

Harmonizing metrics and monitoring to create a cohesive regional narrative on the advancement of sustainable agriculture across the Great Lakes St. Lawrence region is foundational for the success of the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative. Within the first year of the Action Agenda, the Departments and Ministries will collaborate to develop metrics and common measurements that each jurisdiction can contribute to based on available data to report on and track progress toward these goals.

This Action Agenda will be in effect for five years and, in year three, GSGP will assess progress toward the identified actions and determine how and when additional actions can best be addressed. The Action Agenda will be updated as appropriate at that time.



GOAL 1: SOIL HEALTH

Healthy soils are fundamental to agricultural productivity, sector resilience, and the long-term performance of farming across the Great Lakes St. Lawrence region. Soil health influences crop production, nutrient and water management, input efficiency, biodiversity, and water quality outcomes. While implementation of conservation practices aimed at improving soil health have expanded across the region, adoption and success vary across communities, landscapes, production systems, and soil types. Additionally, the benefits of soil health practices are not consistently measured or communicated, limiting the ability to compare results, demonstrate benefits, and guide future investments.

Actions

1. Review existing State and Provincial soil health program goals to develop an understanding of opportunities to more consistently track, measure, and report on outcomes to better communicate results, demonstrate benefits, and inform future investments in the region.
2. Explore the linkages among soil health, farm profitability, and yield stability across major cropping systems and soil types.
3. Identify priority watersheds or landscape characteristics where soil health program implementation can generate the greatest environmental, economic, and water quality benefits while evaluating potential trade-offs.
4. Identify core soil function indicators that are or could be tracked by State, Provincial, or Federal agencies, for example, water holding capacity, infiltration, and soil organic matter, to improve consistency in measuring performance and track trends to understand what level of soil health improvement is necessary to achieve regional soil health outcomes.



GOAL 2: HEALTHY ECONOMY

A strong agricultural economy is essential to the long-term competitiveness of the Great Lakes St. Lawrence region. Agricultural producers are increasingly asked to meet market, environmental, and consumer expectations while managing financial and operational risks. Many early-adopting producers currently implement conservation and sustainability practices; however, uncertainty regarding costs, returns, and market opportunities can limit future adoption by additional producers. Similarly, the cost and administrative requirements, including data tracking and reporting, to provide incentives can be prohibitive for institutions leading programs focused on positive environmental outcomes. Improved understanding of economic outcomes, expanded market opportunities, and effective incentive structures are needed to help producers and policymakers improve the financial viability of conservation and sustainability programs, make informed decisions, and strengthen farm-level profitability.

Actions

1. Inventory sustainable sourcing and procurement programs led by consumer goods brands, retailers, cooperatives, States/Provinces, and other providers offering incentives to producers.
2. Assess the barriers for industry (e.g., retailers, consumer good brands) that limit the availability or impact of incentives for sustainably grown/raised goods.
3. Identify and explore ways to adopt and expand consistent, regional economic metrics that quantify farm-level returns from adoption of sustainable agricultural practices.
4. Continue producer education including peer-to-peer knowledge sharing regarding market-based incentives and available sustainability programs.
5. Document and publish case studies of successful sustainable sourcing, procurement, and market-driven programs that encourage producers to implement sustainable agricultural practices or achieve specific environmental outcomes.



GOAL 3: INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Emerging technologies and innovation can help producers achieve the triple bottom line (profit, people, and the planet) by increasing operational efficiency, augmenting labor, improving quality of life, enhancing management decision-making, and creating new business opportunities. Advances in precision agriculture, automation, decision-support tools, and data technologies continue to expand, yet adoption varies widely across farm sizes, production systems, and geographies. Factors including cost, connectivity, technical support, access to information, and producer awareness can affect adoption. Greater understanding of technology performance, return on investment, and effective implementation pathways are needed to support a broader and more effective use of agricultural innovation across the region.

Actions

1. Assess how producers access technology, including retailer-, cooperative-, and service-provider-based delivery models, and use this assessment to identify factors that limit the adoption of new technologies.
2. Develop and share case studies quantifying economic and environmental returns from technology adoption.
3. Explore ways to expand access to technologies that improve environmental outcomes, quality of life, productivity, and market access while reducing producer costs and/or labor requirements. This could include increasing technical support, improving communication, including internet connectivity, creating and incentivizing peer-to-peer learning networks, or bolstering financial assistance.
4. Develop and share results from demonstration projects or farms that provide technical assistance, facilitate peer-to-peer learning, and support interpretation data for new technologies that improve labor efficiency, environmental performance, and farm profitability.



