

# Strategic Directions for Agricultural Development in Northeastern Ontario



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NeCN Agriculture Study: Report 2 of 2

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# Executive Summary

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Cochrane District in Northeastern Ontario has a long history of agriculture which continues to have an important presence in the area. However, this sector faces several obstacles, such as aging farm operators with limited succession planning. Therefore, action must be taken in order to ensure the sustainability of current farming operations as well as take advantage of the vast agricultural opportunities present in the area. With this in mind, this study undertook to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats inherent for agriculture in this part of Cochrane District as well as present strategic actions which could be undertaken in order to expand agriculture in the area.

In order to achieve this goal, several research methods were utilized, such as reviewing existing literature and data along with interviews undertaken in the region. Through this work it was identified that the southern part of Cochrane District has soil classifications and climate appropriate for several agricultural products and that obstacles tend to lie in socio-economic factors rather than agroclimatic considerations. While the climate of the area is not ideal for all crops and farming practices utilized in southern Ontario, it was identified that the right selection of crop varieties and adapted farming practices improved the feasibility of a range of products with satisfactory yields.

The final intention of this research was the creation of a range of strategic actions which may be undertaken in order to expand agriculture in the area. These actions were created based on interview findings, NeCN Agriculture Steering Committee feedback, and other research. The listing of actions include such ideas as increasing sales of local products; promotion of products and opportunities outside of the area; increased funding for infrastructure; expansion and better use of local capacity; more consideration and recognition from higher levels of government; facilitate linkages between stakeholders and potential markets; and explore unconventional agricultural opportunities. These 23 actions provide, in some detail, ideas that may be pursued in order to create a vibrant agricultural community in this area of Cochrane District with a range of scales and agricultural models.

The following comprises the second of two reports that make up this study. This report contains the Actions which have been developed which may help expand agriculture in the NeCN catchment area with specific Implementation Strategies being presented in the Report 2 Appendix. Report 1 presents background on the NeCN catchment area as well as the results of the fieldwork presented in the form of a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis. The Appendices of Report 1 also presents a range of technical information relating to the area.

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# Introduction

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Agriculture has a long history in Cochrane District based upon the favourable soils of the Northern Clay Belt. However, since a peak in the mid-1900's this industry has experienced a decline with an economic shift towards other resource-based industries such as forestry and mining. Today, agriculture in the area is comparably limited and existing operations are threatened by an aging farmer population and limited uptake in the new generations. It is in the interest of municipalities and the community as a whole for agriculture to be revitalized in order to re-introduce diversification into a local economy dependent on industries subject to *boom-bust cycles*, along with the other community benefits that agriculture would provide.

With this in mind, the Northeast Community Network (NeCN) in Southern Cochrane District has partnered with Professor Wayne Caldwell of the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development at the University of Guelph to conduct a study on the opportunities for expanding agriculture within this region. This research will evaluate the current state of agriculture in the area including a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis relating to the expansion of agriculture. This will be followed by action strategies for municipalities to consider undertaking in order to expand agriculture in their area. The overall goal of the study is to work with municipalities to identify *actionable* strategies with tangible elements which they may institute in the short and long term in order to achieve this goal.

## *Why Agriculture?*

The rationale behind pursuing an expansion of agriculture in this region is somewhat complex and deeply rooted in culture and history. While the primary motivator is certainly economic development and the use of an underutilized resource in agricultural land for diversification of the local economy, there are additional motivators. Indeed, the fieldwork identified several additional interests or concerns that help to explain this community's interest in pursuing agriculture, particularly agriculture which produces food products.

One key issue that arose through the fieldwork is that of food security as a lens for justifying the pursuit of agricultural expansion. Indeed, due to the remoteness of the NeCN communities there are questions about food self sufficiency, especially in light of future concerns relating to peak oil or climate change.

Another key element which is less tangible, but clearly came through during the fieldwork is the historical roots of agriculture in the area and the cultural value of this industry. While less so today, agriculture was once a major sector in the NeCN catchment area and many respondents had long held ties to their operations, having been passed down through

generations. There was a clear sentiment that past generations had come to the area as pioneers and established farms on difficult terrain and that this history should be preserved.

It was also perceived that while the term was never used, people in the area valued farmland as part of their *cultural landscape* and not just as an underutilized resource. Interviewees often spoke positively of the Timiskaming District landscape and reminisced of a time when a vibrant agricultural community existed in the NeCN catchment area. There was frequent mention of *tag alders* reclaiming abandoned land with a sentiment that went deeper than a lost economic opportunity to potentially losing an element of their culture and history.

An additional intangible element is that of societal factors relating to agriculture. Even those outside the agricultural community with whom we spoke with often indicated an inherent value of agriculture in the area for societal reasons. For instance, farmers create strong, tight knit communities in rural areas with strong, and literal, ties to the land. However, there was a clear disappointment present during the fieldwork that this sector was gradually disappearing. This sentiment was particularly true in the agriculture community with one dairy farmer in particular mentioning that for social reasons he felt a decreasing interest in farming as more operations move out of the area.

Therefore, while the value of agriculture is most often framed in economic terms it is important to recognize that this sector has additional importance to the community which is more difficult to quantify, though every bit as important.

# Purpose and Methodology

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## Study Purpose

The communities situated within Cochrane District in Northeast Ontario are economically reliant on mining and forestry. These industries face a number of challenges associated with what is often referred to as “boom and bust cycles”. As a result, the communities within Cochrane District would greatly benefit from diversification of their local economy, with one option being agricultural expansion.

While agriculture is not a significant economic contributor at present, the existence of favourable soil classifications and adequate crop heat units suggest that expansion of this sector would be feasible. Increasing agricultural land prices in Southern Ontario and forecasts associated with climate change point to the potential for enhanced agricultural opportunities in the fertile lands of Northeast Ontario.

Therefore, this study will utilize a variety of methods to evaluate the current state of agriculture in the Southern portion of Cochrane District while at the same time identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats relating to the expansion of this sector within the region. The primary goal of the report is to build from this foundation to provide actions and corresponding implementation strategies which the member communities of the Northeast Community Network (NeCN) may consider adopting in pursuit of their goals.

## Objectives

The objectives of the study can be broken down into 6 segments as follows:

1. To evaluate the opportunities for agricultural development in Northeast Ontario from a Regional Development perspective.
2. To work with the existing agricultural community to identify opportunities and challenges regarding the role of agriculture in regional economic development.
3. To work with local municipalities and regional development organizations to profile and promote agricultural development as a regional development tool.
4. To develop a case study approach of the Northeast Community Network as a means to identify broader regional opportunities.

5. To evaluate the potential for an expanded agricultural sector resulting from predicted climate change scenarios.
6. Identification of strategic directions that achieve the goal of agricultural development.

The results of these objectives can be found in one of two reports. The first report is entitled *Current and Future Opportunities for Agricultural Development in Northeastern Ontario: A Regional Development Perspective* which contains objectives 1, 2, 3, and 5. The second report is entitled *Strategic Directions for Agricultural Development in Northeastern Ontario* which contains objectives 4 and 6.

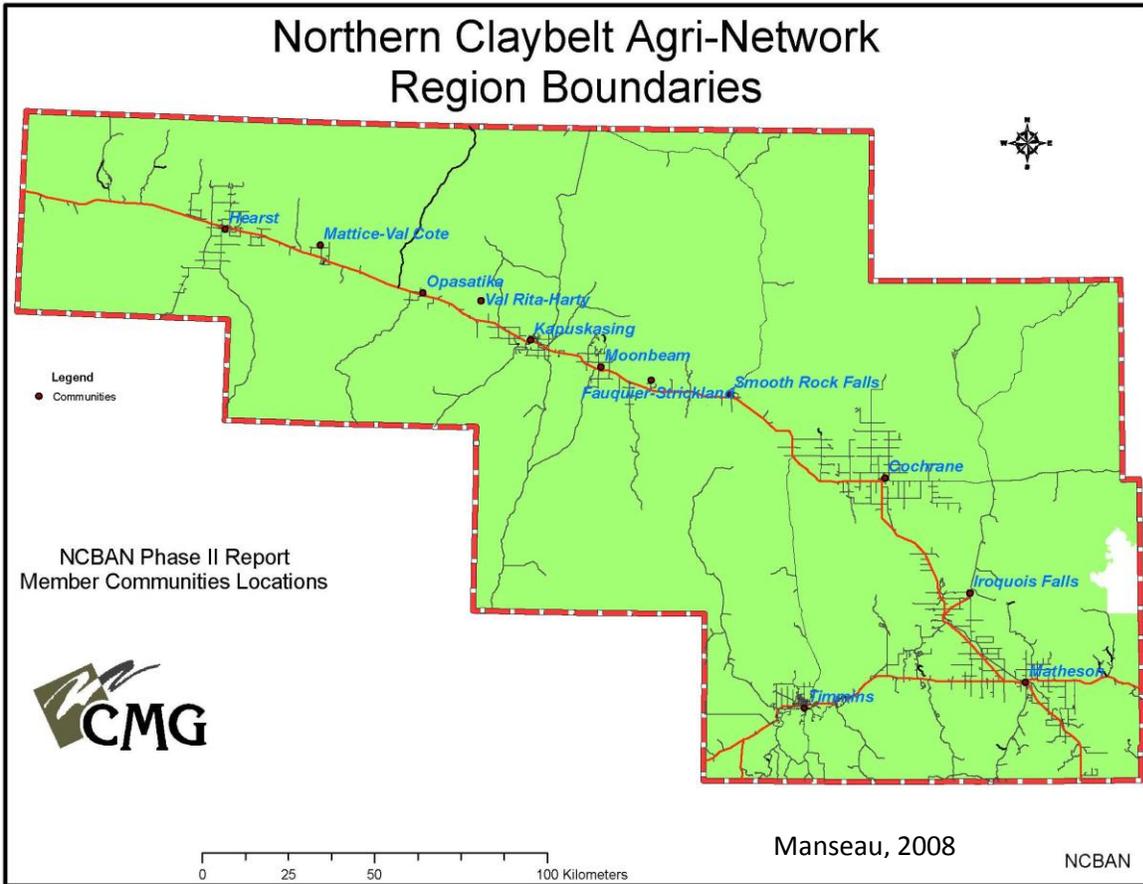
## Methodology

The methodology for this project has been undertaken in several phases. First, secondary research and literature was reviewed to avoid duplication as well as obtain technical and statistical information pertaining to the area. Next, in-person interviews were undertaken in the NeCN area with various stakeholders related to the agricultural sector of the region. Furthermore, strategic action ideas were developed by the researchers in cooperation with the NeCN Agriculture Study Steering Committee which were used to develop individual implementation strategies.

## Study Area

The study area for this report encompasses the boundaries of 12 municipalities and 2 First Nation communities in the South of Cochrane District. While not formally recognized as a political jurisdiction, this area is referred to as the Northeast Community Network (NeCN) catchment area. A map representing the area of study can be found in Figure 1.

Figure 1



It is important to note that because this study area is not a recognized jurisdiction, it is sometimes difficult to find data pertaining exclusively to it; particularly when referring to Statistics Canada information. In these cases data was consolidated based on the Census Subdivision level to create a single NeCN catchment area dataset.

In other cases this was not possible and the closest level of measurement was found at the Cochrane District level. For instance, the Census of Agriculture divides Cochrane District into only two lower units; Timmins and the rest. Therefore, in discussions of agriculture it is generally at the Cochrane District level. Nevertheless, as most (if not all) of Cochrane District's agricultural land falls within the NeCN catchment area as well as most of the District's population it can be considered an accurate proxy.

### *Review of Existing Research and Data*

Throughout the NeCN Agriculture Study existing research and data was utilized to avoid duplication of effort as well as obtain pre-existing data. While several reports were reviewed, two research projects in particular were utilized as good information sources for which the NeCN Agriculture Study would build off of. First, the *Cochrane District Agricultural Economic*

*Impact Study* prepared by Harry Cummings and Associates in 2009 was used as a source of information specifically pertaining to the agricultural situation of Cochrane District. Another source, generally referred to as the *NCBAN Study*, was prepared by Commerce Management Group for the Northern Claybelt Agri Network and was completed in 2009. This study was used primarily for its thorough look at soil information as well as the available farm land base along with a significant amount of GIS information pertaining specifically to the NeCN Catchment Area.

Along with a review of existing research reports, existing data sources were also utilized for demographic and technical information. For instance, socio-economic and agricultural data was obtained from Statistics Canada in the form of Census of Population and Census of Agriculture findings. As well, soil information was obtained from the Canada Land Inventory and climate information was obtained from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA).

### *Fieldwork*

Primary research was undertaken within the NeCN Catchment Area over the period of May 10 – June 17, 2011. This was predominantly undertaken in the form of semi-structured interviews with stakeholders associated with the agriculture sector in the region; a specific breakdown of interviewees is presented in Table 1. The interviews were semi-structured in nature where interviewees were guided towards answering a list of prepared questions however were also encouraged to present their own relevant experiences or ideas outside the interview questions. This allowed for more flexibility to avoid questions irrelevant for an individual's operation, as well as expand ideas, issues, or opportunities not previously considered in the drafting of the interview questions. In essence, the interview questions evolved as the situation of agriculture in the NeCN area became clearer.

The list of interview contacts began as a list prepared by members of the NeCN Agriculture Study Steering Committee and included contacts from across the area. An attempt was made to speak with each stakeholder included on the list however in some cases individuals could not be contacted or declined to participate. In addition to this base list interview participants were asked to recommend any additional contacts that should be included in the study as a form of *snowball sampling*. This process did result in some new contacts being added to the original list. In addition to the interviews, there was also opportunity to visit two key research institutions and speak with employees or researchers at the Kapuskasing Beef Research Farm and the New Liskeard Agriculture Research Station (NLARS). Furthermore, there was an opportunity to attend and participate in a consultation session on the topic of forestry, agriculture, and food for Timmins' strategic planning process on June 14, 2011.

<b>Interview participant category</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Agricultural producers	27
Farming operations visited	21
Agricultural suppliers	1
Agricultural processors	1
Food stores/Farmers' Markets	5
NLARS Researchers	2
Kapuskasing Beef Research Farm Employees	2
Community Futures representatives	4
Economic Development Corporation reps	6
Other municipal employees	1
Representatives of Municipal government	4
NGO/not for profits	5
OMAFRA Representatives	2
Others involved in agriculture or food	1

### *Continued Steering Committee Feedback*

From the outset of the study it was identified that the NeCN Agriculture Steering Committee should play a continuing role in providing feedback and guidance for the project. To date, the Steering Committee has had one face-to-face meeting where the group was provided the opportunity to comment on the project's directions and deliverables as well as some of the early findings of the SWOT analysis. Also within this session, the Steering Committee was asked to provide a list of 3-5 potential actions that they felt would contribute to agricultural development in the NeCN area.

These action ideas were then compiled, summarized, and added to an existing list of strategic actions arising from the fieldwork. In follow up to this exercise, the Steering Committee was asked to provide feedback by prioritizing 5 actions that they felt were of key importance and 5 which they felt were of lesser importance for agriculture in the NeCN area. The results of this exercise were then used in a meeting with other members of the *Prospering with a Stable or Declining Population* research team to come up with implementation strategies for each action, and with particular emphasis paid to those deemed most valuable by the Steering Committee.

# Overview of Report 1

The first of the two reports encompassing this study was entitled *Current and Future Opportunities for Agricultural Development in Northeastern Ontario: A Regional Development Perspective*. This Report presented a range of background information on agriculture in the area, including a look at its current state; the climate and soil conditions; availability of land; a community profile; and climate change projections. The report also included an analysis of the fieldwork in the form of a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis. The key findings from this will be presented here along with a summary provided in Table 2.

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low cost of land/lower taxes</li> <li>• Plenty of privately owned or cleared land unutilized</li> <li>• Certain products do grow well</li> <li>• Presence of ambitious/entrepreneurial people</li> <li>• Good soil quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distance to market</li> <li>• Limited infrastructure, suppliers, product handling, and other services</li> <li>• Limited on-farm infrastructure</li> <li>• Short growing season, frequent risk of frosts</li> <li>• Limited extension, outreach, and knowledge transfer services</li> <li>• Limited drainage</li> <li>• Limited access to farm financing</li> <li>• Limited farming culture</li> <li>• Some available agricultural land is inaccessible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate change</li> <li>• Popularity of niche markets</li> <li>• Cooperatives for inputs and outputs</li> <li>• Land/infrastructure improvements</li> <li>• Advancements in agriculture science</li> <li>• Marketing</li> <li>• Improvements in technology and farming practices</li> <li>• Greenhouses</li> <li>• Opportunity for organic production or those requiring isolation</li> <li>• Agricultural production not for human consumption</li> <li>• Make use of Northern specific products</li> <li>• Access to Northern markets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aging farmers, limited succession planning</li> <li>• Competition for labour</li> <li>• Wildlife</li> <li>• Value of commodities</li> <li>• Perceived indifference from other levels of government</li> <li>• Perception of a limited market for local production</li> <li>• Future energy supplies</li> <li>• Shifts in political priorities</li> </ul>

## *Summary of Key Findings*

This section will summarize the key findings from Report 1. An overarching finding from this report is that agriculture is quite viable in the NeCN catchment area from a climate/soils perspective. Indeed, while crops commonly grown in the South of Ontario, such as corn and soybeans, are not currently viable many other products are; particularly with adapted farming practices.

Key strengths and opportunities that have particularly shone through in the area include the abundant affordable agricultural land that the area contains as well as the opportunity to market this to external audiences. Indeed, this land provides a great resource for the area however there appears to be little interest in its uptake from the local population. Therefore, a key opportunity exists to market this to existing or prospective farmers in the south who are currently subject to obstacles with obtaining land. Similarly, an opportunity exists to market specifically to Mennonite or Amish communities that may be interested in settling in the area.

Another key opportunity for the area is internal promotion of production. While the NeCN catchment area does not have a large population it may be expected that its population presents a sufficient market for selling the wide range of products currently being produced within its boundaries.

Nevertheless, some key weaknesses and threats have also become apparent through the course of this study. Indeed, the long distances to market, limited infrastructure, and somewhat limited crop choice all present challenges to agriculture, particularly in the model that exists elsewhere in the province. Further, the limited farming culture in the new generation and the aging farming community also puts existing farming operations and long-acquired farming knowledge at risk. While not *deal-breakers* by any means, these are issues that must be kept in mind as the goal of agricultural expansion is pursued.

# Actions Identified by NeCN Steering Committee and Fieldwork

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In a meeting on May 25, 2011 the NeCN Agriculture Steering Committee was asked to provide 3-5 potential actions that they felt would contribute to agricultural development in the NeCN catchment area. These action ideas were then compiled, summarized, and added to an existing list of strategic actions arising from the fieldwork.

In follow up to this exercise, the Steering Committee was asked to provide feedback by prioritizing 5 actions that they felt were of key importance and 5 which they felt were of lesser importance for agriculture in the NeCN catchment area. The following listing provides the results of these exercises in descending order of importance as ranked by the Steering Committee.

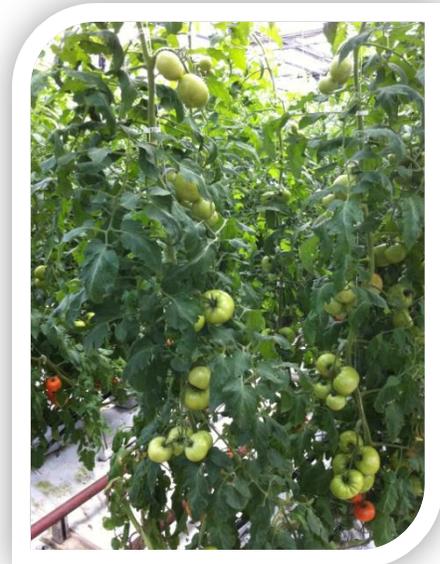
## *1) Promotion and marketing of local products to residents of the NeCN catchment area*

**Issue:** While there are a variety of agricultural products produced within the NeCN catchment area farmers often have difficulty reaching local consumers.

**Recommended General Direction:** Pursue an integrated marketing and promotion campaign resulting in increased production and consumption of locally produced agriculture products.

### **Specific Actions:**

- Awareness campaign within NeCN catchment area
- Use of local food by institutions and events
- Creation of a local agriculture network
- Local brand
- Partnership with High School/College courses
- Encourage and support local food in retail stores



**See Appendix for more details**

## *2) Encouraging a locally owned chain of co-ops or grocery stores selling local food*

**Issue:** Agricultural producers have indicated that due to long distances and time limitations (short market hours and full time jobs) farmer's markets are not sufficient to sell their products or encourage them to produce more. Agricultural producers have also found it difficult to sell within retail stores.

### **Recommended General Direction:**

Encourage a stable, year-round outlet for local agricultural products to reduce time constraints imposed by seasonal farmer's markets and overcome the difficulties of selling to supermarkets.



### **Specific Actions:**

- Provision of indoor space for farmer's markets
- Attempt to overcome obstacle of selling to supermarkets
- Promote ideas and opportunities for local farmers to come together to create outlet stores under a co-operative model
- Promote the opportunity for a privately owned business specializing in local agriculture products

### **See Appendix for more details**

## *3) Promotion and marketing of agricultural potential of NeCN catchment area to external audiences*

**Issue:** In past years the abundant viable farmland in the NeCN catchment area has not seen adequate uptake from local residents. This coincides with low availability, high land costs, and many interested prospective farmers in the South of the province.

**Recommended General Direction:** Undertake a marketing campaign promoting the agricultural opportunities and considerable potential that the NeCN catchment area offers targeted at those in Southern Ontario and beyond.

### **Specific Actions:**

- Marketing campaign promoting the availability of land and viability of agriculture in Cochrane District
- Website including information on agricultural opportunities and viability

- Information on non-agricultural characteristics and benefits
- Organize farm tours to area
- Support for each stage of the settlement process
- Purchasing options on land
- Advertise outside of Ontario or Canada

**See Appendix for more details**

#### *4) Financial support for tile drainage projects*

**Issue:** Almost without exception, farmers interviewed during the fieldwork identified that tile drainage was essential for agriculture in the NeCN catchment area. However, actual tile drainage coverage was found to be quite limited and farmers indicated that the installation of tile drainage systems was often prohibitively expensive.

**Recommended General Direction:** Promote or create available funding specifically for tiling of farmland in the area.

#### **Specific Actions:**

- Compile, confirm, and distribute a listing of existing funding opportunities
- Promote benefits of tile drainage internally
- New funding opportunities for tile drainage projects in the region

**See Appendix for more details**

#### *5) Promote available land to Mennonite communities in Southern Ontario*

**Issue:** Presently, the NeCN catchment area lacks many of the amenities and much of the infrastructure expected for commercial agriculture. However, an opportunity may exist for groups such as Old Order Mennonites or the Amish who may not be hindered due to differing expectations and farming practices.

**Recommended General Direction:** Undertake a promotional campaign targeted at Mennonite and Amish groups in Southern Ontario raising awareness of Cochrane District as an option for settlement.

### Specific Actions:

- Promotional package for distribution within Mennonite and Amish communities in Southern Ontario
- Continued discussions with community leaders and research into viability
- Settlement service and single point of contact within NeCN catchment area
- Tour of region specifically for Mennonite or Amish groups

See Appendix for more details

### *6) More involvement with New Liskeard Agriculture Research Station (NLARS) and the Kapuskasing Beef Research Farm*

**Issue:** These two research stations are a great asset for the NeCN catchment area. However, they do not presently appear to be providing as much value to the community as they could.



**Recommended General Direction:** Request and encourage better use of local research stations by undertaking Northern specific research and disseminating findings to the agricultural community.

### Specific Actions:

- Lobby for changes in research station mandates
- Establish scholarship or research funding
- Facilitate linkages with international partners and private investors

See Appendix for more details

### *7) Liaison with farmers to inform and support funding applications*

**Issue:** Throughout the fieldwork there appeared to be some confusion as to what funding was available for infrastructure improvements, among other opportunities. This coincided with an apparent discomfort with paperwork and a lack or unfamiliarity with computers and the internet.

**Recommended General Direction:** Provide a regular update on funding opportunities as well as face-to-face support in the completion of funding applications.

**Specific Actions:**

- Compilation and distribution of a list of available funding sources
- Increased awareness of existing support services for the completion of funding applications
- New support service to help with the completion of funding applications

**See Appendix for more details**

### *8) Financial support for on-farm infrastructure*

**Issue:** Farmers within the NeCN catchment area could greatly benefit from investments in on-farm infrastructure in order to increase their efficiency, effectiveness, and competitiveness. However, most cannot afford the high costs of obtaining or installing this infrastructure.

**Recommended General Direction:** Encourage the increased use of existing funding programs and new funding opportunities within the NeCN catchment area in order to invest in on-farm infrastructure.



**Specific Actions:**

- Increased awareness of existing funding opportunities
- Apply for region-wide funding
- Lobby provincial and federal governments for dedicated funding programs
- Creation of new funding opportunities through local bodies

**See Appendix for more details**

### *9) Support for new farmers*

**Issue:** It is essential for agricultural expansion in the NeCN catchment area to have new farmers start up in the area. However a significant obstacle is acquiring the loans and financing necessary to start such operations. As well, farmers new to the area will require information on viable crops, farming practices, and settlement support.

**Recommended General Direction:** Support new farmers in accessing the finances necessary to take up farming in the area as well as help newcomers settle in the region.

#### **Specific Actions:**

- Mentorship program
- New farmer network
- Compilation and distribution of information on funding support for new farmers
- Information on farming in the NeCN catchment area
- Settlement support services for prospective and new farmers
- Creation of funding opportunities for new farmers

**See Appendix for more details**

### *10) Consideration of small scale farmers/operations and northern conditions in formulation and enforcement of regulations*

**Issue:** It is commonly stated that small farmers in the NeCN catchment area are unfairly subjected to rules and regulations designed for large scale operators. This is frequently cited in the area of food safety regulations that can create high costs for small farmers and abattoirs with limited financial support to adhere to them. It can also limit the ability to sell at local markets or to larger retailers.

**Recommended General Direction:** Request special consideration for small scale farmers/agri-businesses and northern conditions in the design and enforcement of regulations which impact agriculture.



**Specific Actions:**

- Lobby provincial and federal governments for specific consideration of the conditions of northern farmers and small scale operations in the formulation of policies and regulation
- Meet with Members of Parliament and Provincial Parliament representing the area

**See Appendix for more details***11) Recognition of agricultural value and potential in the NeCN area from other levels of government*

**Issue:** There is a common perception in the NeCN catchment area that agriculture in the region is not valued, or even discouraged, by other levels of government.

**Recommended General Direction:** Request formal recognition and support for the agricultural sector of the NeCN catchment area.

**Specific Actions:**

- Meet with the Minister of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs for Ontario
- Request improved soil and climate data
- Request improved accuracy of estimates for agricultural production

**See Appendix for more details***12) Support existing and beginning farmers with acquiring loans and financing*

**Issue:** A common issue for farmers found to exist within the NeCN catchment area is limited access to loans and financing. There is limited access to agricultural specialists in area banks and no Farm Credit Canada office located within the region.

**Recommended General Direction:** Support improved access to loans and financing for NeCN catchment area farmers at reasonable interest rates.

**Specific Actions:**

- Compilation and distribution of a list of available funding sources
- Discussions with area banks and Farm Credit Canada
- Creation of new funding opportunities for area farmers

**See Appendix for more details**

### *13) Partnership with nearby First Nation communities as well as other communities present along the James Bay Coast*

**Issue:** First Nation and remote communities in Northeast Ontario are often lacking in fresh and affordable food products. At the same time, NeCN catchment area farmers have the ability to produce quality meats and vegetables but often lack a market or find it difficult to compete when shipping to markets in the south.

**Recommended General Direction:** Establish linkages between NeCN catchment area farmers and nearby First Nation and remote communities to meet the needs of both groups.

#### **Specific Actions:**

- Mediate linkages between NeCN catchment area farmers and First Nation and remote communities
- Applications for funding
- Support area farmers in navigating distribution channels necessary for accessing these communities
- Establish produce depots within the NeCN catchment area

**See Appendix for more details**

### *14) Encouraging and supporting off-farm infrastructure*

**Issue:** A lack of off-farm infrastructure within the NeCN catchment area is widely recognized as a major hindrance to agricultural expansion. This includes suppliers for machinery as well as inputs such as fertilizer, feed, seeds and other agriculture needs. It also includes the lack of a grain elevator or rail depot. It was identified that abattoir services are lacking or inadequate and would benefit from support. Further, a limited distribution network was identified as an obstacle for transportation to markets.



**Recommended General Direction:** Encourage and support investments in off-farm infrastructure to help keep existing operations viable and attract new operators.

**Specific Actions:**

- Promote business opportunities to private sector
- Raise awareness of existing off-farm infrastructure and support their development
- Mediate and foster the creation of co-operatives for off-farm infrastructure developments
- Support the development of new off-farm infrastructure initiatives

**See Appendix for more details**

*15) Create opportunities for cooperation between existing stakeholders*

**Issue:** There are many individuals and groups within the NeCN catchment area currently pursuing similar interests but operating independently. At the same time, it was sometimes stated that the agricultural sector does not have a cooperative attitude in the NeCN catchment area.

**Recommended General Direction:** Promote improved cooperation within the NeCN catchment area's agricultural community.

**Specific Actions:**

- Establish a forum for farmers to come together and discuss their shared issues and means to resolve them
- Mediate disputes or disagreements within farming community
- Promote champions and role models within the community

**See Appendix for more details**

*16) Dedicated resources for implementing an agriculture strategy in the NeCN catchment area*

**Issue:** In some cases good ideas are never implemented due to resource constraints such as personnel or finances. At the same time, there are sometimes adequate resources which are not tied to a project or objective thereby causing confusion over *who* will be responsible.

**Recommended General Direction:** Dedicate human and financial resources to the revitalization of agriculture in the NeCN catchment area.

**Specific Actions:**

- Specific allocation of duties and responsibilities to NeCN members

- Dedication of financial resources
- Personnel specifically responsible for agricultural development in the NeCN catchment area

**See Appendix for more details**

### *17) Create and promote opportunities for learning within the agriculture community*

**Issue:** The NeCN catchment area contains few opportunities for learning within the agricultural community such as limited extension and outreach services.

**Recommended General Direction:** Create and promote opportunities for learning within the agricultural community through the use of peer-learning, extension, and outreach.

**Specific Actions:**

- Promote existing opportunities for learning
- Request increased involvement of research stations in outreach and information distribution
- Support the creation of a peer-to-peer learning network
- Request a dedicated OMAFRA extension office located within Cochrane District

**See Appendix for more details**

### *18) Better compensation for wildlife damage*

**Issue:** While not a major issue for agricultural operations in the area, wildlife damage is a common problem that most farmers do contend with. Farmers also often perceived that existing compensation mechanisms were insufficient.

**Recommended General Direction:** Request for more sufficient wildlife damage compensation considering the conditions of Northeast Ontario.

**Specific Actions:**

- Request new or expanded wildlife damage compensation programs

**See Appendix for more details**

### *19) Services/subsidies comparable to Quebec to even playing field*

**Issue:** There is a widely held perception among NeCN catchment area farmers that farmers on the Quebec side of the border have a competitive advantage resulting from an increased number of service and subsidies from their provincial government.

**Recommended General Direction:** Request improved services and subsidies comparable to Quebec for agricultural operators in Northeast Ontario.

**Specific Actions:**

- Request services and subsidies equivalent to Quebec’s for Northeast Ontario farmers
- Make use of the situation in Quebec in arguments for improved services and support

**See Appendix for more details**

### *20) Inclusion of agriculture and food into school curriculum*

**Issue:** During the fieldwork it was sometimes mentioned that agriculture was not considered to be a major part of the history or culture of NeCN catchment area residents. This situation may contribute to the limited interest in farming apparent in the younger generations of the NeCN catchment areas as well as the limited value that agriculture is perceived to have within the area. Furthermore, across the province there is concern over the health of youth and dietary choices.



**Recommended General Direction:** Promote an increased presence of agriculture and food in school activities and the taught curriculum.

**Specific Actions:**

- Fieldtrips to area farms from local schools
- Increase awareness of local food and its benefits
- Request inclusion of agriculture and food in school curriculum

**See Appendix for more details**

Along with these 20 items proposed to the NeCN Agriculture Study Steering Committee, new ideas were provided by members. These were not ranked by other members and have been included below:

### *1) Support and encourage energy production through agricultural operations*

**Issue:** There are some limitations on what products the NeCN catchment area can grow as well as questions raised about the yields necessary for competitiveness. Therefore an alternative has been raised that energy production could be pursued either as a supplement to traditional agriculture or as an alternative venture.

**Recommended General Direction:** Encourage the opportunities for energy production on agricultural operations and support the necessary infrastructure.

**Specific Actions:**

- Promote opportunities for energy production through agriculture operations
- Support the infrastructure necessary for energy producing agriculture

**See Appendix for more details**

### *2) Evaluate and disseminate opportunities for non-food producing agriculture*

**Issue:** Due to the somewhat limited choice in crop production within the NeCN catchment area along with long distances to markets and associated spoilage, there may be an alternative in non-food producing agriculture.

**Recommended General Direction:** Evaluate the viability of agriculture for industrial purposes and disseminate opportunities.

**Specific Actions:**

- Undertake specific research on opportunities for non-food producing agriculture
- Promote opportunities for non-food producing agriculture

**See Appendix for more details**

### *3) Evaluate and promote the potential of unconventional agricultural opportunities.*

**Issue:** Questions have been raised regarding the competitiveness of the NeCN catchment area for traditional agricultural operations. Therefore opportunities to make use of the area's assets and competitive advantages may be available.

**Recommended General Direction:** Evaluate the potential of unconventional or non-traditional agricultural ventures and promote opportunities.

**Specific Actions:**

- Evaluate opportunities for unconventional and non-traditional agriculture
- Promote opportunities for unconventional and non-traditional agriculture

**See Appendix for more details**

## Conclusion

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To conclude, this report has presented possible actions which could be pursued in order to achieve the goal of an expanded agricultural sector in the NeCN catchment area. These actions were created through community consultation and prioritized by the representatives of the NeCN Agriculture Study Steering Committee. Within Appendix 1 of this report Implementation Strategies relating to these actions can be found. These will present a starting point to ignite action towards the goal of agricultural expansion as well as provide guidance towards its pursuit.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Manseau, R. (2008). Northern Claybelt Agri-Network Phase I Report: Land Inventory & Soil Classification Update & Analysis. Timmins, Ontario: Commerce Management Group (CMG).

**Photo Credits:** Each photograph included in this report was taken within the NeCN catchment area by one of the researchers.