

PRESS RELEASE | OAAS BUILDING COMMUNITY LEADERS PROGRAM

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OMAFRA \$836,250 FUNDING ANNOUNCEMENT FOR OAAS 'BUILDING COMMUNITY LEADERS' PROGRAM

For Immediate Release

March 5, 2024, STIRLING, ONTARIO — The Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies (OAAS) is pleased to announce the launch of **Building Community Leaders**, a leadership and governance training program for agricultural societies. The impact of the *Building Community Leaders* program, delivered with the support of the Rural Ontario Institute (ROI), will ensure increased leadership, governance skills, and risk management practices in Ontario's agricultural societies and, by extension, the agri-food sector in Ontario.

"Ontario agricultural societies are at the front line leading vibrant rural community activities. The *Building Community Leaders* program will leverage the good work done by agricultural society volunteers to strengthen that capacity," said Vince Brennan, Executive Director of the Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies.

Lisa Thompson, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), announced program funding of \$836,250 over three years at the OAAS Annual Convention in Richmond Hill on February 23rd, 2024. Educational supports and agricultural society training workshops provided by the OAAS and ROI will target leadership and governance skills and management practices among rural boards of directors and volunteers throughout the province.

"Ontario's agricultural societies play an important role in leading amazing, annual rural community activities. This educational initiative will enhance the leadership, governance skills and best management practices in important rural organizations, and by extension, our agriculture and food industry across the province," said Lisa Thompson, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. "By investing in people who give so much to maintain our rural traditions and communities, we are showing our appreciation for their commitment and leadership."

"This support is an investment in the future of agricultural societies across Ontario by developing strong leaders who ensure the vitality of the agri-food sector and rural communities," said Vince Brennan.

The *Building Community Leaders* program will engage more than 210 agricultural societies across the province and support the development of leadership resources to strengthen agricultural societies that organize and hold fairs and events promoting agriculture and the agri-food industry.

"The Rural Ontario Institute shares the vision for a sustained and healthy rural Ontario, and agricultural societies have been at the forefront for generations, leading vibrant rural community activities – not only at rural fairs but all the work done in communities," said Ellen Sinclair, ROI Executive Director. "Strong agricultural societies rely on strong leadership and strong governance."

Agricultural societies are run mainly by volunteers and play a critical role in educating people about the importance of agriculture and celebrating a rural way of life. Supporting this important sector will ensure agricultural societies' long traditions and economic contributions continue to thrive and attract new talent. By building leadership capacity and involvement within the agriculture and food industry, this investment will further benefit rural communities and the rural fair tradition where the 'best of the best' in the community, the homecraft division, and agricultural competitions continue to be celebrated.

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