

CCAs and OSCIA team up to deliver the Farmland Health Check-Up

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Farmland Health Check-Up, the newest installment of the Great Lakes Agricultural Stewardship Initiative (GLASI) suite of programs, is now open. The Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association has forged a unique partnership with Ontario's Certified Crop Advisors (CCAs) to make the Farmland Health Check-Up available for farmers in the Lake Erie and Lake St. Clair watersheds and the Lake Huron southeast shores watershed.

This program is designed to help farmers identify Best Management Practices that aim to improve the health and sustained productivity of their farm operations as well as the broader health of the Great Lakes. The Farmland Health Check-Up was developed by specialists from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs with assistance from the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association and the Ontario Certified Crop Advisors Association.

The Farmland Health Check-Up provides farmers with a unique opportunity to work with a CCA free of charge. Utilizing the expertise of CCAs, the Farmland Health Check-Up helps farmers assess challenging areas on their farm and identify BMPs that will improve the soil and pollinator health on their operations. "We can sometimes overlook some of the most critical aspects of our soil health; going through the Check-Up with a local CCA will help bring those crucial areas to the forefront," said Alan Kruszel, President of the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association.

Each Farmland Health Check-Up will be conducted by a local CCA, chosen by and at no cost to the producer. In exchange for a Farmland Health Check-Up coupon, a CCA will provide up to three hours of their time to help a farmer located in the eligible areas to complete a Farmland Health Check-Up on-farm assessment for their operation. Farmers will be able to access the coupons online at ontariosoilcrop.org, by picking up a coupon in store at participating agricultural retail locations across the eligible area, and by clipping the coupon from agricultural print publications. Completing the Check-Up with a CCA is a prerequisite for funding that will become available later in 2015 to help implement eligible BMPs identified during individual Check-Ups.

"Working in partnership with Ontario's CCAs, the Farmland Health Check-Up has the capacity to make a big impact for many farmers, and an even bigger impact on the health of the watersheds. A pilot project took place in March with a number of CCAs who took the Farmland Health Check-Up to the countryside to test its applicability and the process that's been put in place. The results were extremely encouraging," said Christine Schmalz, Environmental Programs Manager.

"The Ontario Certified Crop Advisor Association is very pleased to be partnering with Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association on this proactive stewardship program. The CCAs involved in the pilot reported it was a great opportunity to talk in-depth with growers about soil health and to jointly look at beneficial stewardship practices that also improve yields," expressed Susan Fitzgerald, CCA Executive Director.

The Farmland Health Check-Up will run until January 2018, as annual budgets allow. For more information, please visit our website at ontariosoilcrop.org/en/programs.

For any questions, please contact Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association by phone (226-706-8669) or by email (GLASI@ontariosoilcrop.org).

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