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## ONTARIO SOIL AND CROP IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

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### **Fencing and watering system protects species at risk**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 20, 2015

By Lilian Schaer

A Northumberland County farmer is converting a former cash crop farm back to pasture and grassland.

Not only is this helping him grow his grass-fed beef herd, but it's also creating habitat for at risk wildlife species in the area.

Jon Curran has been on his 100 acre farm near Roseneath for about three years and this past year was able to access cost-share funding through the Species at Risk Farm Incentive Program (SARFIP) to install cross fencing and a remote watering system to begin rotationally grazing his cattle.

"I have Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark birds on my farm, and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry has identified other species at risk too, including Snapping and Northern Map Turtles and Eastern Hognose [Snakes] and Milksnakes," says Curran.

The moveable fencing means he can keep his cattle away from grassland bird nesting areas. His longer-term goal is to graze cattle as long as possible instead of cutting forage, which will benefit the at-risk birds as well.

"I will leave nest areas until I think the birds are no longer vulnerable and I can then graze those areas instead of using mechanized harvest. Grazing is far less invasive than machinery if done properly," he explains.

Rotational grazing is also helping him better manage manure and his pastures' productivity. The temporary fences divide up the pastures to extend the grazing season, letting the cattle evenly distribute their manure on the fields and resulting in less manure to deal with in the barn yard.

Curran's watering system has allowed him to keep his livestock out of the spring-fed creek and pond at the back of his property, protecting the wetland in the area and ensuring his cattle have access to water regardless of where they are on the farm.

Even before he became aware of the SARFIP cost-share opportunity, Curran had developed a plan for implementing rotational grazing for his herd of Red Devon cattle, a heritage breed that he's raising to meet growing consumer demand for grass-fed beef.

“Sustainability, healthy land, and wildlife are things I’ve always been passionate about. I was quite pleased to get the SARFIP funding and because I’ve been able to get some assistance, I can now move forward much quicker,” he says. “I can still do a lot more on my farm and this will let me move onto my next project.”

SARFIP is available for the 2015 season (April 1, 2015 – December 15, 2015) to farmers wishing to implement best management practices that help protect essential habitats of species at risk located on-farm. The range of possible activities under the program applies to croplands, grasslands, stream banks, shorelines, wetlands, and woodlands.

In order to qualify for cost-share funding of approved project costs, eligible Ontario farm businesses have to have completed a third or fourth edition Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) workshop and an Action Plan verified by OSCIA. They must also have a plan to implement at least one of the eligible best management practices from the SARFIP 2015 Brochure that relates directly to an action identified in their EFP action plan. The SARFIP 2015 Brochure and forms are available on the SARFIP page of the OSCIA website, alongside resources to help farmers and agricultural landowners apply for funding.

SARFIP is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry through the Species At Risk Stewardship Fund, and the Government of Canada through the Habitat Stewardship Program for Species At Risk.

More information about SARFIP is available at [www.ontariosoilcrop.org](http://www.ontariosoilcrop.org).

SARFIP is linked to the Canada-Ontario EFP that is supported by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs through Growing Forward 2, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative. OSCIA delivers the programs to agricultural producers.

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Photo by: Jon Curran