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ONTARIO SOIL AND CROP IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

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For Immediate release

The Water's Edge Transformation Program (WET) available for Lake Simcoe area farmers

By Mary Ellen Wales for the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association

Guelph, ON- The Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association is currently accepting applications for the Water's Edge Transformation program (WET). The program is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food and is available to farm businesses located along a watercourse in the Lake Simcoe, Severn Sound and Nottawasaga Watersheds.

The program was first introduced in 2013 and aims to reduce nutrient risks to freshwater resources through the uptake of various on-farm Best Management Practices (BMPs). The program is a byproduct of the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan, which aimed to launch initiatives that unite local landowners, businesses and governments across the watersheds to strengthen the health of waterways in the Lake Simcoe area.

"The WET program is a great opportunity for farmers who want to protect on-farm water quality," says Shannon Stephens, the Healthy Waters Program Coordinator at the Nottawasaga Conservation Authority, one of the partnering stewardship groups working on the program. "These projects are critically important for improving the health of our lakes and rivers."

Through the program farmers identify which key Best Management Practices (BMPs) they plan on implementing in return for cost-share funding. A technical specialist from one of the three partnering stewardship groups will visit the farm property and provide ideas and recommendations for improved performance of the riparian area.

Some of the BMPs eligible include installing eaves troughs on barns to divert clean water away from livestock areas, fencing off watercourses to prevent livestock access and planting trees and shrubs to create buffers along sensitive areas.

Once the chosen BMPs are identified through consultation with a technical specialist from one of the local stewardship groups, farmers determine the level of funding necessary to complete the project. This competitive bid process allows for determination of the projects' environmental benefits and provides farm businesses with an opportunity to tell OSCIA how much funding they need to complete their projects.

"Cost-share for on-farm environmental projects is important for farmers," states Allan Mol, President of the OSCIA. "Collaboration from various groups strengthens the WET program and demonstrates that riparian health is an important issue that farmers can play a central role in addressing."

“There’s still time to get involved,” assures Brittany Ballagh of the Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority. “With the March 31st deadline coming up there is still time to complete assessments.”

To be eligible for the program, farm properties must be located alongside a watercourse or have a stream, shoreline, wetland, pond or river on the property. Farm properties must be actively farmed (be able to provide a FBRN or equivalent) and have completed a 3rd or 4th edition Environmental Farm Plan.

Applications are being accepted until March 31st, 2014 and are completed online. For more information, interested farm businesses are encouraged to visit the OSCIA website at <http://www.ontariosoilcrop.org/en/programs/wet.htm> to learn more or contact Brad Carberry, OSCIA Project and Claims Reviewer, at 1-226-979-2465.

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Suggested caption: The WET program offers funding for farm businesses located along a watercourse in the Lake Simcoe area. Photo by Andrew Graham.