The Transformation of Soil Advisory Services in Ontario

Presenter: Ezekiel Martin
Advisor: Dr Ataharul Chowdhury
Funding: Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance
(KTT)

Outline

About the research

Background
Knowledge gap being addressed
Stakeholders engaged

Results

Advisory service providers networks
Advisory organizations/agents
Funding partners

Implications for Rural Ontario

Challenges and opportunities
Key takeaways

About the Research

Background

- Dramatic Transformation of Soil advisory services
 - 1990 largely publicly funded
 - 2000 budget cuts and structural changes
 - Major reforms in extension and advisory services new players
 - 2010 rather than a disappearance a transformation.

About the Research

Knowledge Gap Being Addressed

- At this point no recent studies exist that has comprehensively evaluated the current system of Ontario's Soil Advisory Services.

•Objectives

- Determine the networks and partnerships
- Assess organizational capacities to achieve service goals.
- Assess effectiveness of tools and methods.
- Make policy recommendations for improving soil advisory services.

About the Research

Method

- The data were collected using key informant interviews with a purposively selected advisors.
- Seven key informants were interviewed representing variety of soil advisory service providers.

Results

Soil Advisory Services Network

- Multiple players/actors in soils advisory services sphere (Pluralistic)
- Producer NPO most frequently cited by respondents for collaboration in offering advisory services.
- Arrangements were both formal and informal.
- Some respondents referred to OMAFRA as unbiased information source.
- Expertise, shared vision, funding and reach were identified by respondents motivation for partnership.

Results

- 83 years combined total experience in soil advisory services.
- Respondents indicated PhD highest level of education for soil advisory professionals, MSc was highest among respondents.
- For practice of individual crop advisory agents, 80- 90 % time devoted to front office activities, 10 – 20 % devoted back office activities.
- Respondents revealed continuous participation in capacity building education and training programs for advisory agents.

Results

- Respondents indicated that a mix of advisory methods are utilized to satisfy farm advisory services needs.
 - The most favoured were workshops and in-person training.
 - Greater reliance on internet resources via variety websites, social media, specific programs and apps.
 - All respondents stated that they were able to pivot to continue offering their services online due to COVID19 impacts.
 - Respondents self scored average of 3 (1 – 5 satisfaction scale) for advice uptake.

Results

Soil Advisory Services Funding Partners

- Respondents identified variety of funding partnership mechanisms.
- Key linkage – OMAFRA Provincial and Federal collaborations
- OMAFRA partnerships with producer NPO for project/program delivery.
- Membership fees important part of funding for Producer NPO
- Input Dealers were self-financing.
- Motivations for such partnerships included reach, advisory needs, efficiency, shared vision.

Implications for Rural Ontario

Challenges and opportunities

- Access

- Getting high quality advice that's credible and appropriate.
- OMAFRA continues to be perceived as honest broker, however not as accessible as before for one on one consultations.
- Greater collaboration.
- Unreliable or unavailability of internet services
- Need to expedite build out of broadband infrastructure across underserved areas.

Student Impact

1. Raised awareness and appreciation of connection of research and practice
2. Enhanced research and critical thinking skills
3. Expanded my understanding of Capacity development and extension beyond the classroom.