

CULTIVATING SMART WATER USE: The Facts For Farmers On Protecting Water



FACT
SHEET

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Source Water Protection is a provincial program to protect our municipal drinking water sources (water found in lakes, rivers and underground) from contamination and overuse.



Building upon farmers' best practices

No one understands the importance of healthy water, soil and air more than farmers. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture reports that about 70% of farmers have participated and invested over \$600 million in on-farm environmental improvements over the last 20 years.

This fact sheet is intended to build upon the best practices farmers already engage in by introducing Source Water Protection, a program that adds another layer of protection for our drinking water.



Drinking water comes from water found in streams, rivers, lakes and from underground aquifers. This "source" water can become polluted when contaminants like nitrogen, phosphorus, pesticides and bacteria get into groundwater and surface water.

POTENTIAL THREATS

- **Manure run-off from animal waste and livestock in watercourses**
- **Fertilizer application run-off (nitrogen and phosphorus)**
- **Improper pesticide storage, application or handling that leads to spills or run-off**
- **Chemicals or pharmaceuticals in livestock waste**
- **Failing septic systems and abandoned wells provide gateways for contaminants to enter surface or groundwater**



Protecting our sources of water

Source Water Protection starts with identifying if your property is located in a vulnerable area, such as a Wellhead Protection Area (WHPA) or an Intake Protection Zone (IPZ). In these areas, certain activities can pose a "threat," or in other words they can potentially contaminate the sources of our drinking water.

The *Clean Water Act* and resulting Source Water Protection policies ensure that the activities don't become a significant drinking water threat.

A relatively small number of farms in Ontario (around 4%) are located within a vulnerable area.



Working together to protect water

If your farm is located within a vulnerable area, then a Risk Management Official (RMO) will be in touch with you. Your Risk Management Official partners with you to identify potential drinking water risks, if any. Then you'll explore options and come up with solutions that you both agree on, which will be formalized in a document called a Risk Management Plan. Once negotiated, it becomes a legally binding document. Many farmers will not have a significant drinking water threat on their property.

The Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition (OFEC) has developed a framework modeled after the Environmental Farm Plan Program, which can help farmers in vulnerable areas by evaluating farm practices that maintain, improve or protect water quality. This can prepare farmers for the process of developing their Risk Management Plans. For more information visit the Ontario Federation of Agriculture website at www.ofa.on.ca.



Financial support may be available

If you are in a vulnerable area and need to put new practices in place – for instance improved manure storage – there may be funding available for your project. Ask your Risk Management Official if there are any options in your area. Government ministries, conservation authorities, and groups like the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association have programs available.



Private wells are your responsibility

The measures put in place to protect municipal drinking water supplies do not include private drinking water wells. As a private well owner, you still need to be regularly testing your water and you need to make sure you're maintaining your well. If you have any health concerns about your well water, contact your local district health unit.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT

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