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Recommendation to: NOFIA Board of Directors June 25, 2014

By: Jean-Denis Methot

NOFIA - One voice for northern Ontario

Regional groups like RAIN and NeCN are working actively for the benefit of agriculture in their regions are not understanding all the benefits of collaboration so as to have one voice for northern Ontario.

OMAF and other funding sources are well aware of the fact that NOFIA is not yet considered the association which can speak on behalf of all of northern Ontario. This must be addressed urgently, before proceeding with other recommendations.

Options:

- 1) Meeting with the Board of Directors and members of each association to discuss benefits of collaboration, determine their concerns and find a way to reassure them that they can continue to maintain an important role within their region while working together to obtain funding for the entire north. Reducing the risk of duplication of work and eventually having researchers oversee all the work across the north will also be seen positively by all funding sources.
- 2) Meeting with all the associations at a meeting in a central location.
- 3) Negotiate funding for the north without having all associations on board

Recommendation: Option 1 - meet with each association. There would be benefits in having a researcher or a spokesperson not affiliated with NOFIA to set the tone of the meeting and mediate the discussions so as to reach a positive resolution.

NLARS Infrastructure

Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario (ARIO) owns the infrastructure of the research stations and is responsible for its maintenance costs: their concerns are that there is 28 buildings, significant cost to run facilities, significant capitals repairs anticipated in the future and aging infrastructure, which costs are covered by ARIO. Some buildings have been neglected to the point where it would be best if they were demolished. Others have limited use and could be sold, or destroyed.

Options:

- 1) NOFIA takes over ownership of NLARS at a nominal cost, only essential buildings for Agronomy, Horticulture/SPUD and the beef herd should be taken over and maintained.

NOFIA then takes over responsibility of infrastructure and all its related costs, including repairs and improvements, insurance, etc.

- 2) NOFIA also takes over ownership of NLARS, including buildings leased to other tenants

NOFIA is then responsible for costs associated with the maintenance and upkeep for buildings leased to other tenants, extra costs and staff. Lease income is currently almost \$400,000/year and it has been running at a break-even level.

- 3) NOFIA leases the land and only essential buildings directly with ARIO, similar to the Vineland arrangement.

- 4) The University of Guelph continues to administer NLARS for ARIO, which includes the administration of buildings leased to other tenants. NOFIA request an MOU with the University of Guelph in order to be involved with NLARS and help find partners for projects at the station. The University has signed an agreement (in regards to Alfred campus of the University of Guelph) with the Union des cultivateurs franco-ontariens in 1997, therefore a precedent has been set. They may be reluctant to sign an agreement with NOFIA.

Recommendation: whereas option 3 and 4 are less risky for NOFIA, it also has the least amount of control in those situations. Option 2 means being responsible for tenants, which can be costly and time consuming. Option 1 gives NOFIA complete control but means that it becomes fully responsible for the station and the buildings needed at the station. NOFIA should determine how much risk it is willing to take before choosing the preferred option.

Infrastructure - former teaching arena and horse barn

The NLARS multi-use building and former horse barn located next to it offer potential for a number of options which include:

Farmers Market – looking for a new site

Equine shows and other activities

Agri-Food Pavilion (to complement the agricultural museum) an indoor facility to promote agriculture, agri-food, innovation with displays. Agro-forestry could also be considered

Lease for commercial ventures such as a company needing a facility for its initiative. Even though the heat costs are high, companies obtaining Department of Health contracts to grow marijuana for medicinal use have no concerns with the high costs associated with growing the crop in greenhouses or buildings not originally designed for use in the winter.

Recommendation: whereas NOFIA's mandate is innovation, negotiate with ARIO for the use of the multi-use building with an option of lease of the former beef barn. Apply for funding for the conversion of this building to showcase agriculture and particularly innovation in the north.

ARIO – NLARS Beef Station Manure Management

ARIO expresses real concerns with a \$2 million price tag for manure storage improvements required for the beef herd at NLARS. An engineering study offered many scenarios, from no cost to \$2 million. The most expensive scenario was selected by the University of Guelph, this to allow for enough storage in case the herd is increased to fill all the barns, and incorporates liquid manure. This is not an option that would ever be used by a beef cow-calf producer. There is an opportunity to experiment and come up with a practical and cost-efficient system that beef producers could put in place on their farms at a reasonable cost. Beef researchers from AAFC and UQAT support this low-cost design initiative since manure storage and handling is an issue affecting not only Ontario, but Quebec and other provinces.

- 1) Apply for funding for the design of an efficient system, and for the monitoring of the system to determine how it performs from an environmental perspective.
- 2) NOFIA to ask ARIO to request that the University of Guelph needs to go back to the drawing board and choose a cheaper option.

Recommendation that funding be found and that a cheap and efficient manure system design be put in place as a demonstration for all beef cow-calf producers from northern Canada. Carole Lafrenière, UQAT, has ideas and NOFIA can work closely with her to come up with solutions.

Inform ARIO that there is no need to spend \$2 million to address the problem with the current system.

Beef and Forage Research

Beef Research at NLARS is expensive. The biggest cost is labour, this due to several factors including the need to have two employees work at the station for safety reasons, the research which requires labour intensive tasks such as feeding animals individually, weighing them regularly, etc... This unit is carrying a cumulative loss of \$500,000. This is under the University of Guelph administration therefore not of issue to NOFIA. The herd belongs to Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO). The beef researchers are located in Guelph.

A local beef and forage researcher from the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue (UQAT) is located twenty minutes away from New Liskeard. UQAT industry relations staff met with the Director of Kemptville last winter to discuss an agreement or MOU to do research at New Liskeard. UQAT currently do research at the station without any legal agreement, other than through projects where funding is involved. The University of Guelph did not respond.

Ideas have been brought forward by UQAT for the Quebec-Ontario Cooperation for Agri-Food Research call for proposal. The University has not responded. How many other Opportunities have been missed due to the lack of response? UQAT recently built a very well equipped research laboratory in Notre Dame du Nord, this to be in close proximity to the New Liskeard Research Station.

A new Quebec Beef Development Center is also being considered in northern Quebec, again close to New Liskeard. The proposed center will include a researcher, an agro-economist, a Director and an administrator, this at a cost of \$330,000/year. The objective is to eventually bring more researchers on Board, and each one will be expected to work on 2 projects at a time, which brings around \$300,000 per year in research income. If the contract researchers are able to bring in funding for a few years, they will become permanent employees. This is an excellent incentive from a researcher's point of view.

UQAT plans are to diversify from beef and research to new areas in agriculture, which will open the door to other opportunities for NOFIA. If funding is secured for the diversification strategy in Témiscamingue, ultimately there will be 6 researchers in beef, forage and diversified research. UQAT is missing one key ingredient, a research station, which makes NLARS a strategic partner for the long run. This makes for a unique opportunity for the industry from 2 provinces to work close together. Quebec and Ontario's beef cow-calf industry and its future are in the north, therefore it only makes sense to join forces for northern research. GF2 funding should be explored. OMAF has staff in northern Ontario with expertise in the beef industry, they should be more involved in this proposed partnership. This would be of benefit to the entire northern Canada beef industry.

Recommendations:

If NOFIA chooses to take over the station, NOFIA to negotiate an agreement with UQAT for a partnership which will combine resources from NLARS and UQAT to provide a complete suite of research, technology transfer and extension to the beef/forage industry in northern Ontario and Quebec.

If NOFIA chooses to let the University of Guelph continue as administrator, works closely with UQAT and the University of Guelph to ensure that partnerships and agreements or MOU's are in place to take advantage of the beef research facility in New Liskeard, the new UQAT laboratory and proposed beef development center, and to make good use of the beef researcher from UQAT and of any future researchers hired by UQAT. NOFIA also needs to ensure that there are no missed opportunities by the University of Guelph.

Regardless of scenario chosen, no major changes to the management of the NLARS beef herd should be allowed without consultation with researchers and industry. For instance, in order to reduce costs, going from cows bred for split calving (March and June) to a single calving season. This is the only beef herd to do split calving and it is considered of benefit by beef researchers.

Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO)

They are the legal owners of the beef herd at NLARS. They return the proceeds from the sale of animals to NLARS. The University of Guelph has been negotiating funds for the construction of a beef barn at Elora. Once the barn is built, the future of the Beef Unit at NLARS is at risk. BFO has set a number of conditions for them to help with the funding of the new beef barn at Elora, including securing more land and 3 researchers. Given the financial situation at the University, it will take a few years for the University to meet all those conditions (3-5 years), which gives NOFIA time to address the sustainability of the Beef Unit at NLARS.

BFO was not aware of the level of interest of UQAT for a partnership with NLARS. They clearly understand that the future of the beef industry is in the north, including northern Quebec. They are asking to be kept informed of the progress made by NOFIA.

Recommendation: keep BFO in the loop, once the future of the station is determined, meet with BFO to discuss the possibility of selling genetics of the NLARS herd, which will not only benefit buyers of this genetics, but will also increase the amount of funding available for the beef sector. Discuss ways to ensure that the beef herd remains at NLARS. The soon to be released Cochrane District study may help for this cause. And a partnership with north western Quebec (UQAT) will give NOFIA a far stronger case to keep the BFO herd in New Liskeard. Ultimately, once a solid case is established for beef and forage research in the north and for the north, negotiate that the livestock remain at New Liskeard.

Agronomy Research

Some research stations are well established in their regions, others are just starting, all are funded differently; one station has a researcher. Given the sudden interest in farming across northern Ontario, and the arrival of farmers who are new to the northern climate and soils, there is real value in all research stations working closely together so as not to duplicate work, work collaboratively and have a standardized approach for research plots and demonstration plots so that the results are meaningful when compared from station to station.

Options:

- 1) All stations get together to determine research and demonstration needs, this while ensuring that regional needs and gaps are addressed, apply for funding jointly, and ensure that there is at least one crop researcher for northern Ontario. This researcher's role will be to ensure consistency in how plots and demonstrations are done across the stations, be available for advice and for the interpretation of results. When a stakeholder wants to do testing across the north, this researcher will ensure that all stations are involved and have equal access to funding from this client.
- 2) Individual stations focus on the needs of their regions and are on their own to find funding. This is not an efficient use of resources and there is a risk of duplication of research.

Recommendation that NOFIA aims for all stations to work closely together, while retaining some level of autonomy to address regional needs.

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Agronomy: new opportunity for cash crops

The north west region of Témiscamingue has set a new priority for the development of its agricultural industry in its strategic plan, this as a result of increased interest in cash cropping. Their focus will be diversification, developing new crops. Funding is to be expected for this new priority. There will be a desire to have at least one researcher for this priority. This is an opportunity for research stations in northern Ontario since there are no research stations in that area. There is a great deal of interest for diversification in northern Ontario as well.

Recommendation: NOFIA to make contacts and explore a partnership for research. Joining forces will result in obtaining funds in both Quebec and Ontario. The diversification mandate will be at the north eastern Canadian level. From a researcher level, this will offer better opportunities for funding and be more attractive to move north to do research.

Horticulture/SPUD

This Unit has some interesting work with the Ontario Berry Growers and other clients. Its SPUD unit provides high quality seed propagation services to clients across Canada and south. The fees should be reviewed to determine whether the station needs to charge more in order to cover its costs. The staff have excellent expertise. A researcher is responsible for this unit until her retirement, which is likely to be in 2018. This expertise could be utilized for other interesting work with those interested in organic horticulture, new berries, producing for farmers markets, or work associated with nutritional value of food in diets and for better health. Potential partners include community colleges across the north. This would also be a means to increase revenues of the horticultural and SPUD unit. This researcher finds herself dealing with administrative responsibilities which can be taken over by NOFIA.

Recommendation that NOFIA works with potential stakeholders, including local associations and community colleges whose mandate is better food for Northern residents, including Aborigines.

Projects may include such prototypes as small solar passive greenhouses, high tunnels, and other means to increase the number of days of growth in communities across the north. There is a good interest in growing new berries and horticultural crops. The diversification strategy for Témiscaminque may also bring in opportunities to explore for horticulture.

In other countries, it was noted that once the consumer appreciates the value of consuming good and healthy food grown locally, it becomes a strong supporter of agriculture. Whereas this area will not necessarily make a difference on most commercial farm enterprises, it is worthwhile to support in order to gain local support of agriculture.

Administration of NLARS is currently done by station staff, who report to the Kemptville campus of the University of Guelph. This includes the Emo and Verner sites. Agronomy, SPUD, Horticulture, Beef, and Operating Accounts under the OMAF base budget; Agronomy, Horticulture/SPUD and Beef research funding normally goes into the researcher's University of Guelph Research Trust Fund and some of the incremental costs covered by NLARS are covered by the trust fund. The OMAF base budget is approximately \$1 million per year.

Recommendations:

- 1) NOFIA takes over the administration of NLARS directly from OMAF, in a partnership agreement or MOU, in return for an annual base allocation.
- 2) NOFIA negotiates additional funding for all research stations and the administration of other programs, or initiatives across northern Ontario, including Emo, Thunder Bay, Algoma/Manitoulin, Verner, New Liskeard and Cochrane District, this on behalf of all northern associations/groups trying to obtain funding for local initiatives. This brings the costs to \$1.7 million. Assuming that \$500,000 in revenues could be generated, the base budget needed is \$1.2 million/year. Negotiate funding from OMAF/MRA/MNDM. Explore GF2 funding. Funding request could be increased to hire extra researchers. This represents an extra \$125,000 per researcher per year, including benefits.
- 3) NOFIA to consider signing an agreement with the University of Guelph to cover their employee expenses and continue to benefit from the University of Guelph expertise, access to goods and services at reduced costs, etc. Researchers must have trust in the research station staff, especially when they are not on site. Losing experienced staff and the risk of remaining staff from the University being demoralised during a transition, combined to bringing new employees on board, is a serious threat to research. If the research is not conducted properly, the research will be of poor quality and reflect on the station and the researcher. It will make it more difficult to obtain funding for future projects and will ultimately put the station and NOFIA at grave financial difficulties.
- 4) The University of Guelph continues to administer the stations as per the OMAF/UofG partnership Agreement until 2018. An MOU between the University of Guelph and NOFIA to provide northern agriculture an opportunity to provide input and bring along partnerships to the table for research, technology transfer and other opportunities. In this scenario, it would be best to reduce the number of layers within the University of Guelph administration. Currently, for administrative purpose, NLARS reports to the Kemptville campus and researchers work through the Office of Research Trust Funds. Reporting exclusively to the University Office of Research would be best.

Recommendation: NOFIA should consider implementing recommendations 1, 2 and 3. Whereas recommendation 4 would keep the University of Guelph responsible for the station, this option should only be considered if NOFIA can have more control over what happens at the Station, and can ensure that there are no longer missed opportunities for the north.

NOFIA administration/staffing

There are needs for research, technology transfer, extension and learning across northern Ontario. The recent interest in buying farm land in the north brings in newcomers who will be looking for advice and information in farming in the north. Working closely with the regional associations and groups, including the regional provincial government staff, there should be regional advisory sessions to gather the industry needs. A rollup of those needs at the northern level will help determine which ones are common for the north and which ones are specific to individual regions or a group of regions.

Once those needs are determined, working closely with the regional associations, OMAF/MRA/MNDM and researchers, determine where the gaps are and explore funding sources to address those gaps. Knowing the priorities of various departments and ministries will help with the securing of funds to address the gaps. Innovation programs look at industry contributions. Therefore industry must be willing to provide some of the funding to address the gaps.

There are promising partnership leads in the horizon. This with community colleges and agri-businesses. There needs to be a discussion and building of relationships with some organizations whose members doubt that NOFIA should have a northern mandate as its board of directors does not currently have representation outside of New Liskeard and Cochrane Districts. NOFIA can speak on behalf of everyone from the Manitoba border to the Quebec border and down to Nipissing and Parry Sound if it first gets an advisory structure in each region, rolls it up and shows its intentions of working hard for everyone across northern Ontario. NOFIA will also need to take a leadership role to work closely with partners and funding agencies in the near future. Some of the potential partners are already asking for a meeting with NOFIA.

There are innovation programs taking in applications, therefore once gaps are determined, and proposed projects in order to address those gaps, applications need to be submitted.

Recommendation that NOFIA considers working with each District or Region to have initial meeting to explain its vision for northern agriculture, and do a brainstorm session to gather needs of each region.

Recommendation that funding be found and that additional staff be hired by NOFIA, first on a contract basis, to work closely with all stakeholders across northern Ontario, and to find funding sources to address gaps in agricultural research, technology transfer and outreach/extension. Part of this exercise will assist NOFIA in determining the extent of the role of all stations across the north, including the recently closed Kapuskasing Experimental Farm.

Northern regions need to feel included, one way to do so is to create a permanent northern advisory committee where each region or District nominates one member and one alternate. This committee has regularly scheduled conference calls and meets in person once per year. NOFIA needs to ensure that the information that comes out from projects is available to everyone. A web page which includes reports from all research stations and for all project results across the north is essential. An opportunity for people to post questions about all activities, including research, should also be explored.

OMAF/MRA/MNDM/other governments and agencies

The provincial government recognizes the potential for agricultural development in northern Ontario and has set up an internal joint OMAF/MRA/MNDM strategic committee to explore how to develop the north, the last remaining vast acreage of land with ~~agricultural~~ ^{agricultural} potential in Ontario. They want to see industry leading this development across the north, which becomes another opportunity for NOFIA.

Recommendation: NOFIA to request a meeting with this committee to explore ways it can play a role with the development of agriculture and agri-food in northern Ontario.

Those provincial ministries have regional staff with knowledge and an established network across the north. In speaking to some of the regional staff, they would like to have a more important role with the stations. There is an opportunity for NOFIA to network with those provincial employees to add additional value at the table. NOFIA to ensure that provincial government regional staff have the opportunity to participate and provide guidance to NOFIA while getting results from stations and programs which they can then share in their extension/outreach efforts.

- Bring Northern Ontario together.
- Get Funding.

Steph - leaving on July 1 - July 18/14

AAC - Infrastructure ✓

+ 50 people

AMNIC -
35-40

+

TBARS 5
RAIN
NECAN
NOFIA
Kap Heust.

Rainey River
Kenora
Dryden
Thunder Bay
Sault
Mantoulin
Sudbury East
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Powassan
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