

# Ontario Forage Research Priorities 2025 ROAD MAP

## Introduction

On November 13, 2025, the Ontario Forage Council (OFC) convened producers, researchers, government, and industry partners to update Ontario's forage and grazing research priorities, building on the original 2019 framework. The session highlighted significant provincial and national research developments, identified current gaps, and emphasized the need for stronger coordination, economic analysis, and effective knowledge translation and transfer (KTT).

Although the brainstorming session explored six themes, priorities ultimately aligned under three broad categories: breeding research, management research, and research demonstrating the economic and societal value of expanding forage acres. There was broad consensus that forages play a central role in soil health, climate resilience, and long-term farm sustainability. Cross-sector collaboration remains essential for progress.

This roadmap provides direction to guide future research, collaboration, and KTT initiatives across Ontario's forage sector. Priorities are organized into four categories.

### What Can Be Borrowed from Other Jurisdictions?

- Evaluate contributions of white clover, forage sorghum, and other forage species to a corn silage system



## What Research Should Be Done Nationally?

- Forage breeding (national breeding and testing programs)
- Conversion of boreal forest to cropland – approaches to maintain carbon levels when breaking new land
- Determine how much carbon is sequestered when converting annual cropland to perennial forage



## What Research Should Be Done in Ontario?

- Test varieties for Ontario, tracking traits such as drought tolerance, climate resilience, digestibility, disease resistance, and winterkill resilience (for efficiency, this could be aligned with national breeding and testing programs)
- Determine the economic impact a perennial forage crop provides on the yield of other crops, soil health, and the societal benefits associated with increased hay acres
- Compile data package on crop fertility to support updated forage crop nutrient
- Determine the nitrogen credit available when alfalfa or other perennial legumes are terminated
- Evaluate alternative methods for making or storing forages, including options that reduce or eliminate single use plastic (bale wrap and silo covers)
- Assess perennial warm season grasses as a forage crop option to support climate change adaptation

## Where to Focus KTT Efforts

- Provide evidence showing that cash crop producers benefit economically from grazing cover crops and/or crop residue
- Share livestock compaction research – impacts on cover crop grazing and soil health
- Share best management practices for forage crops as they become available to encourage forage production
- Evaluate and communicate best practices for drone seeding to extend the grazing period, including species selection and management recommendations
- Develop communication materials to support silvopasture system adoption in Ontario



# Collaborative Ideas for Joint Extension and KTT

- OFC can use this roadmap to guide research development, support collaboration, and track progress
- Opportunity for Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFRA) Summer Student to select 1–2 KTT gaps and compile material that advance sector knowledge
- Webinars in collaboration with: Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO), Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA), and Knowledge Sharing Events (KSE)
- Leverage high engagement from Dairy Farmers of Ontario (DFO) weekly newsletters (60%+ click-through)
- Provide content for Sheep District meetings, explore the Ontario Sheep Farmers (OSF) “Flock Talk” podcast for dissemination
- Utilize OSCIA as field representatives’ as extension vectors
- Engage Certified Crop Advisors (CCAs) as key influencers
- OFC has strong success in event planning, pasture walks with cross-sector collaborations, building partnerships and convening groups , and offering eligible programming for CCAs

## Summary

The 2025 discussions emphasized the need for forage research that recognizes the societal benefits of healthy forage systems and applies a One Health perspective, linking animal health, forage quality, and environmental sustainability. Perennial forages deliver significant soil, carbon, and climate-resilience benefits, reinforcing the need for greater investment and stronger economic analysis to support adoption.

The updated priorities reflect shared direction across Ontario, recognizing forages as key drivers of soil health, climate resilience, and long-term agricultural sustainability. Ongoing national breeding efforts, regional trials, and coordinated KTT initiatives will be essential. This roadmap will help guide research development strength collaboration, and support progress and growth in Ontario’s forage sector.

*Full detail can be found in the Ontario Forage Research Priorities (2025) – Full Report.*

