

<b>To:</b>	Chair Lorie Smith and Committee Members
<b>Committee Date:</b>	December 10, 2025
<b>Subject / Report No:</b>	CAOR-AAC-19-25
<b>Title:</b>	Experimental Acres – 2025 Program Update
<b>Prepared by:</b>	Linda Scott Swanston, Climate Change Initiatives Manager
<b>Reviewed by:</b>	Niall Lobley, Deputy CAO
<b>Lower Tier(s) Affected:</b>	All

## Recommendation

1. That Report CAOR-AAC-19-25 regarding the Experimental Acres 2025 program outcomes and next steps be received for information.

## Executive Summary

This report outlines the outcomes of the 2025 Experimental Acres Program. Six producers participated in the 2025 Experimental Acres program in Grey County, directly impacting 265 acres of production, and indirectly impacting hundreds more over time and through knowledge sharing. Grey Agricultural Services continues to lead program coordination and administration, providing participant support, organizing knowledge sharing events and resources, and conducting on-farm soil testing. Since 2023 the program has involved 19 projects supporting over 440 acres. The program is recommended to continue and modestly expand in 2026 to enable multi-year projects to better capture soil improvements over time.

## Background and Discussion

### About the Program

Experimental Acres is a micro-grant program for on-farm trials of practices that aim to improve soil health, increase carbon capture, and build resilience on farms. The program supports Action 3: Capacity Building in Sustainable Agricultural Best Practices in *Going Green in Grey*, the County's climate action plan.

Farmers know their land best, which is why participants design their own projects. Each farm has a unique question they are trying to answer, based on their goals and interests. In addition to financial support, the program also offers soil testing and knowledge sharing opportunities.

The Experimental Acres pilot program was developed as a part of Guelph-Wellington's Our Food Future initiative, funded by Infrastructure Canada. Launched in 2022, Wellington County facilitated the program in Wellington and Dufferin Counties and expanded to Grey County in 2023.

In 2024, Grey Agricultural Services took on the coordination of the program in Grey County and also took the lead for Dufferin County. Wellington now runs the program independently, however, continues to share knowledge and lessons learned. Having a consistent program framework across the three counties provides an opportunity for regional collaboration, increasing awareness of the program and leveraging learnings and best practices from across the region.

## 2025 Program Outcomes

In 2025, the Experimental Acres program received 15 applications and six projects were selected, directly impacting practices on 265 acres of farmland. These projects were selected based on the proposed project's feasibility, design, replicability, potential for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, innovation, and alignment with program objectives:

- Keeping roots in the ground;
- Maintaining green cover;
- Integrating animals into the rotation;
- Reducing mechanical intervention; and,
- Increasing biodiversity.

From May to October, Grey Agricultural Services completed a total of 14 farm visits to conduct infiltration, soil, and compaction testing. Visits occurred as needed and varied depending on nature and needs of the farm trial.

## Knowledge Sharing Events

On September 15, 2025 Grey Agricultural Services coordinated an Experimental Acres farm tour that included stops at three Grey County farms. A total of 15 Experimental Acres participants and staff attended the farm tour to learn about farm trial results firsthand.

On November 3, 2025, there was an evening networking and knowledge sharing event hosted at Grey Agricultural Services boardroom. A total of 19 program participants and staff attended to share lessons learned and best practices.

Staff will also be sharing the program outcomes and project results at Grey Bruce Farmers Week in January 2025.

## Project Outcomes

Participating farms ranged in size and type from smaller scale fruit-tree and flower growing operations, to larger scale livestock and cash crop operations. The farm trials ranged from .25 to 210 acres in size, directly impacting 265 acres in total. The participating farms were in the Township of Chatsworth, Municipality of Meaford Township of Southgate and Municipality of West Grey. Through the partnership with Grey Agriculture Services to coordinate the program,

the 2025 program was able to provide detailed reporting of the results of each farm trial to disseminate best practices and learnings to other producers in Grey County and beyond. For complete details about each farm trial, please refer to Attachment 1 to CAOR-AAC-19-25 - Experimental Acres 2025 Project Outcomes.

## Next Steps

Given the overall program outcomes and results and lessons learned from individual projects, staff recommend continuing the program in 2026, including the expansion of the program to include up to two-year projects to enable longer-term monitoring of soil benefits. This recommendation has been included in the draft 2026 Budget for Council's consideration. Staff plan to share findings at Grey Bruce Farmers Week in January 2026.

Pending Council approval in 2026 budget deliberations, staff plan to:

- Continue to partner with Grey Agricultural Services for 2026 program delivery.
- Continue to collaborate with Grey Agricultural Services and other agricultural organizations to promote the program, solicit applications, and share learnings.
- Promote the program as part of Grey Agricultural Services' winter course offerings and provide additional support in helping applicants develop an effective farm trial.

## Financial and Resource Implications

This program had a budget of \$23,000, funded in the 2025 Climate Change Capital budget. Proposed 2026 program costs are a \$5,000 increase to enable the inclusion of two-year farm trials, and will be brought forth in Council 2026 budget deliberations.

## Relevant Consultation

Internal (list)

AODA Compliance (describe)

Contribution to Climate Change Action Plan Targets:

Supports Action 3: Capacity Building in Sustainable Agricultural Best Practices that aims to have 60% natural land for pasture, 90% cropland and 50% manure are under best management practices to minimize greenhouse gas emissions and maximize carbon capture by 2050.

External: Grey Agricultural Services

## Appendices and Attachments

- Attachment 1 to CAOR-AAC-19-25 - Experimental Acres 2025 Project Outcomes