

Educating the Appropriate Target Audience for Stewardship Initiatives

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Ideally, we can take scientific data and translate it into a form that enables decision-making or changes behaviour. However, it isn't that easy when the audience is very diverse and constantly changing. Knowledge and behaviour change is also impacted by competing priorities and messages, and it is often difficult for our audience to identify "the expert".

The first step is to understand - Who exactly is our audience? Secondly, what sources of information exist that can help us understand what our audience needs? And finally, do we know what our message is in a concise way that people can understand? When we look at costs and benefits in stewardship or educational programs, we also have to consider the audience. Are the participants the target audience? Are we missing anyone?

One specific target audience was defined as those operators farming more than 10 000 acres of land (either owned or rented), or having more than 500 nutrient units of livestock, operating on the southeast shore of Lake Huron. This project involves identifying "large farm operators", meeting them, and understanding how their business operates. This information is vital to understanding what opportunities their farms offer to broader stewardship initiatives such as natural channel design or agricultural drain management.

A second project identified land rental agreements as a challenge for implementing long term stewardship initiatives. The number of acres managed through land rental agreements is a trend that is increasing in both the US and Canada. Typically, these land rental agreements are verbal and annual, decreasing the potential adoption of stewardship initiatives that are costly or complex.

Finally, the use of precision agriculture has had a positive impact on broader environmental initiatives. Decreasing use of pesticides and targeted application has advantages to the environment and economic advantages to the farm operator. However, precision agriculture has also accompanied the arrival of larger farm equipment, and this has motivated farmers to remove fencerows and other obstacles that make efficient use of such equipment a challenge. This can have a devastating impact on the resiliency of agricultural drains and the flow of surface water across complex topography.

These data sets came from the Remote Sensing Unit at AAFC.