

## **Trail signs highlight “green” farming**

Lilian Schaer

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A series of hiking trail signs highlighting environmental accomplishments by farmers were unveiled recently in Ontario’s Greenbelt.

Sixty signs have been installed along popular hiking trails covering more than 1,000 km in the Greenbelt – an area of permanently protected farmland, forests, wetlands and green space in southern Ontario – as a way of showcasing the many environmental improvements farmers make to land, air and water.

“Farmers are proud of their efforts to protect our air, soil and water,” said Jackie Fraser, Executive Director of AGCare, the group leading this initiative, about the three-year project. “This includes everything from general environmental planning on farms, to specific achievements in greenhouse gas reduction and reduced energy use.

The signs host information on Environmental Farm Plans, how farmers are reducing greenhouse gas emissions, how farmland provides us with many environmental benefits such as wildlife habitat, how farmers are protecting water quality, and the importance of buying local food. For example, greenhouse gas emissions have been reduced by the equivalent of taking 125,000 cars off the road through improved soil conservation measures. Farmers have spent at least \$600 million on environmental improvements and 300,000 days in environmental training. Over 70 per cent of them have voluntarily participated in the Environmental Farm Plan program.

The Agriculture Hits the Trails project was designed to share this information with trail users within the Greenbelt. Many hiking trails within Ontario’s Greenbelt are located on or near farmland, allowing trail users the opportunity to see farmers’ commitment to the environment first-hand. Regions where city meets farm are also where the greatest efforts are needed to boost understanding between urban and rural dwellers, especially with regards to farming and farming practices. Only approximately two per cent of Canadians are directly involved in agriculture.

The project’s media launch in early October, designed to coincide with Ontario Hiking Week, was very successful, with coverage on Rogers Cable TV 63 in Orangeville, Rogers Cable TV 20 in Kitchener, AM 570 radio in Kitchener, 101.5 FM radio in Erin, the Guelph Mercury, Erin Advocate, and the Ontario Farmer.

The signs can be found along the Bruce Trail, Oak Ridges Trail, Elora Cataract Trailway, and within conservation areas operated by Credit Valley Conservation, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, Conservation Halton, Hamilton Conservation Authority and the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority.

The signage artwork and messaging are available from AGCare for other groups to use to develop and install additional signs in other regions of the province.

Partnering with AGCare (Agricultural Groups Concerned About Resources and the Environment) on this project were the Ontario Farm Animal Council, and the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation, as well as conservation partners like Conservation Ontario, Credit Valley Conservation, Conservation Halton, Hamilton Conservation Authority, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority, the Bruce Trail Association and the Oak Ridges Trail Association.

More information about the project can be found on [www.caringfortheland.com](http://www.caringfortheland.com).