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ONTARIO SOIL AND CROP IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

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Media Release

New program to support Ontario on-farm grassland habitat projects

Funding opportunities available for farmers to implement best management practices

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Guelph ON – Funding for on-farm projects to protect grassland habitats is now available to Ontario farmers through an innovative new government program for the 2012 and 2013 cropping years.

The Grassland Habitat Farm Incentive Program (GHFIP) provides cost-share funding through a competitive bid process for farmers to implement best management practices that will help provide and protect grassland habitats. Many grassland wildlife species in Ontario depend on hayfields, pastures, meadows and native prairies to nest and feed their young. GHFIP will be delivered by the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA) with funding provided by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources through the Species at Risk Stewardship Fund.

“Although farmers have been helping to meet the habitat needs of many grassland species over the years, we recognize that more must be done to stop the decline of vulnerable species and enhance the agricultural systems that provide this valued habitat,” says OSCIA President Joan McKinlay. “This new funding will help farmers with grazing livestock, meadows and hayfields protect these species while enhancing their farming operations.”

GHFIP will use a competitive online bid structure to deliver funding, replacing the first-come, first-served application process that is in place for many other cost-share programs. The bid package will include details about the farm and proposed project, accurate and specific project costs, the amount of funding requested by the farm business and an Environmental Benefit Index score that evaluates the benefits of the proposed project for grassland species. The initial application submission deadline is October 15, 2012.

“This approach offers more flexibility so that farmers can identify the amount of funding necessary to complete a project, instead of being limited to a prescribed cost-share formula,” says McKinlay. “And by evaluating the habitat benefits of projects, we can focus agricultural conservation methods in areas where they are most needed.”

This is the first time OSCIA has had a program application process that will be entirely online. The procedure is straightforward and streamlined to ease the process for interested farm businesses.

Pasture improvements, improved grazing systems, marginal land retirement and forage harvest management are some of the actions supported through the program. Specific practices of interest include removing invasive plant species to improve pasture quality, providing alternative livestock watering opportunities to enhance grazing, preventing the invasion of trees and shrubs into grassland areas through mowing, and reducing or eliminating hay cutting during grassland bird nesting season.

Only bid submissions with the highest cost/benefit ratio will be approved for funding. Local OSCIA program representatives are available to make farm visits and provide assistance with the bid submission process.