

For Immediate Release
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FUNDING PROPOSED TO PROTECT DRINKING WATER IN RURAL ONTARIO

*Initial Investment from New Multi-Million Dollar Program
Helps Farmers And Small Businesses*

TORONTO – The Ontario government is proposing changes to Bill 43 that would create a drinking water support program for rural Ontario, Environment Minister Laurel Broten said today. The financial assistance program would initially invest \$7 million to support farmers and small rural businesses for activities that reduce threats to drinking water.

“We’re investing in the health of rural Ontarians,” said Broten. “We believe that a preventive approach to protecting our drinking water sources is better for the environment. This funding would make it easier for farmers and small rural businesses to keep our sources of water free of contamination.”

The motion filed today as part of proposed amendments to Bill 43 (the Clean Water Act) would enshrine the financial assistance program in legislation. If the amended bill is passed and enabling regulations made, the program would initially make \$7 million available in 2007/08 for early action to protect drinking water, including:

- \$5 million to support early action to protect land and water surrounding water wells (wellhead protection areas) and close to municipal water intakes (intake protection zones); and,
- \$2 million to support local education and outreach related to source protection planning.

“This initial funding is only the first stage of our commitment to rural Ontario,” said Broten. “As communities complete their source protection plans, we’ll know better what the costs of implementation are and how to effectively direct sustainable future funding to address that.”

Broten also proposed to establish a special advisory panel made up of agricultural, municipal and conservation authority representatives to provide advice on how the funding should be administered and allocated in future years.

“We heard the need for financial assistance and we have responded,” said Leona Dombrowsky, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. “Rural Ontario will continue to have a voice in how this money is invested.”

“This first stage financial assistance goes a long way toward addressing the concerns of the farming community,” said Ron Bonnett, President of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. “The government is clearly listening to the concerns of rural Ontario.”

"This is an encouraging announcement and indicates that agricultural concerns have been taken into account," said John Maaskant, Chair of the Ontario Farm Animal Council and co-Chair of the Ontario Farm Environmental Coalition. "The government is demonstrating that farmers are effective partners in ensuring clean water."

"This step is an important one to help protect drinking water sources in rural Ontario," said Richard Hibma, Chair of Conservation Ontario. "We look forward to working with the government, local agencies and landowners to protect water quality in Ontario's watersheds."

"This initial investment of financial assistance will facilitate real action in smaller communities," said Doug Reycraft, President of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. "It means municipalities and property owners can better work together to protect local water supplies."

"An investment in more local education and outreach is essential," said Dr. Rick Smith, Executive Director of Environmental Defence. "This will encourage more property owners to take quick action to protect local water sources."

This financial assistance program is another example of how the McGuinty government is protecting the environment and helping rural Ontario. Other examples include:

- \$120 million to help municipalities and conservation authorities across Ontario study and assess their watersheds and undertake water budgets to give watershed plans the strongest possible scientific foundations;
- The \$23.7-million Nutrient Management Financial Assistance Program, which provided eligible farmers with up to 60 percent of the funds needed to make environmental improvements; and,
- Amendments to regulations 170 and 252 for small water system operators to make them more workable while protecting the environment and public health.

A copy of the complete proposed amendments is available at www.ene.gov.on.ca.

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