



# STRATEGIC PLAN 2020- 2023

Proactive change  
for long-term prosperity

Ontario Soil  
and Crop  
Improvement  
Association

Facilitated by:



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## VISION

Actively seeking, testing and adopting optimal farm production and stewardship practices.

## MISSION

OSCIA will facilitate responsible economic management of soil, water, air and crops through development and communication of innovative farming practices.

## CORE COMPETENCIES

Core competencies are the capabilities of an organization that enables it to deliver significant value to its members and partners, differentiating its brand from other organizations. OSCIA's core competencies are (in no particular order):

- Producer Education
- On-Farm Applied Research
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Program Delivery
- Local Leadership development

## SWOT ANALYSIS:

The analysis of OSCIA's current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats highlights specific areas that require strategic action.

- Key **S**trengths need to be further supported and reinforced.
- **W**eaknesses that are seen as inhibitors to future success need to be addressed.
- The most promising **O**pportunities should be leveraged.
- And action should be taken to mitigate **T**hreats where possible.

Below are the findings gathered through survey and group discussion.

## STRENGTHS

### Our Staff

OSCIA has a wealth of expertise and experience within their staff, who are well networked and respected within the agricultural communities for education and knowledge transfer. They know the industry, the players in government and can get things done. Field staff are uniquely close to primary producers, which is key to the successful delivery of OSCIA programs and special projects.

### Program Delivery Capabilities and Reputation

OSCIA is recognized as an efficient delivery agent of programs. OSCIA can quickly and effectively design and deliver programs from start to finish on behalf of government and other organizations. Extensive expertise and infrastructure have been established that enable OSCIA to promote programs, accept and qualify applications, deliver educational workshops, and disburse funds in adherence to strict guidelines.

### Province-wide Network of Grassroot Activity

The OSCIA membership is comprised of farmers situated across Ontario, representing all ages, farm types and philosophies. Activities are led by farmers, for farmers within the 53 county/district associations. Activities include a wide array of educational and knowledge transfer events and on-farm research projects. This active and diverse membership enables widespread communication to the agricultural community. It also becomes an invaluable resource for gathering ideas and feedback regarding the needs of Ontario farmers.

## **WEAKNESSES**

### **Unclear Organizational Structure**

There are requests for more clarification on the structure of OSCIA. Uncertainty lies in the role of regions and the positions therein (regional director vs regional president vs regional communication coordinator). Communication between leadership and grassroots can be challenging given the confusion in roles and inconsistency between regions. The current regional structure was introduced in 2000 to improve and streamline communication. Communication needs and channels have changed considerably over the last twenty years, and therefore a review of the structure would be warranted.

### **Inconsistent Grassroots Engagement**

Some local/regional associations struggle with member engagement, as demonstrated by few activities planned and implemented. Contributing factors may be: competing priorities, poor communication or the absence of a lead person to ignite interest. Low activity can negatively affect the perception of membership value, which can therefore lead to declining membership renewals. As seen in active associations, a reinvigoration can be achieved if targeted action is taken.

### **Brand Image<sup>1</sup>**

OSCIA has a strong brand identity, as reflected by the consistent use of a professional logo, colours and messaging. Challenges lie in how the brand is perceived. Is OSCIA an extension of the government, delivering cost-share programs to improve the environment? Is it an organization that supports farmer-led research and educational events to improve farm production and stewardship practices? Its vision and mission would indicate the latter yet some members feel that program delivery overshadows grassroots activities. Other concerns lie in the perceived value of membership, and offering benefits that are relevant and unique to OSCIA members.

### **Varying Employee Satisfaction**

Survey comments indicate some evidence of employee discontent (full-time and part-time) in areas of workplace policies, communication between departments, reduced workload for field staff, and overall respect. Given the significant value of current staff, more information needs to be collected to address concerns.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

### **To Expand Applied Research and Knowledge Transfer**

OSCIA is unique from other organizations in its ability to lead on-farm applied research with guidance and support of industry partners. On-farm applied research continues to be strong, attracting farmers to participate in research projects or attend events to see the results. Opportunities lie in the area of doing more and enhanced research projects. More projects, on a larger scale, featuring new technology, with new partners would strengthen OSCIA's position as the lead coordinator, and increase member interest and engagement. Opportunities also lie in the communication of research results. To accomplish OSCIA's vision and mission, more can be done to increase the adoption of best practices through improved communication of research results. Ideas to consider are: hosting online events, improving online access of results, and leveraging partner communication channels (such as their newsletter and website).

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<sup>1</sup> Brand image is how members perceive OSCIA's brand. Brand identity, on the other hand, is how OSCIA portrays itself to the members (i.e. logo). It's how the brand wants members to perceive it. OSCIA has less control over the brand image and should strive to align the brand image with the desired brand identity.

### **To Attract New “Customers”**

OSCIA has traditionally served the needs of primary producers. With the declining farm population, there is opportunity to diversify the customer-base. Farmers will continue to be OSCIA’s primary customer. Secondary groups may include farm sector groups, agribusiness, rural land owners, non-agricultural organizations, municipalities. There may be opportunity to seek new ways to leverage OSCIA’s expertise and capabilities for the benefit of other target audiences. The potential benefits would be to attract new research partners, new sources of funding/revenue, and optimize the availability and expertise of current staff.

### **To Scale-up Education Events**

OSCIA has a strong learning environment. There is opportunity to build upon this culture and position the organization as the leader in showcasing new and emerging trends that address environmental impact. Partner to provide more in-depth workshops on high-interest topics (soil health, nutrient management) and demonstrate new technology (autonomous field equipment). Scale-up selected regional events to generate revenue and bring more value to members, so they can learn about new tools and activities that improve farm production and stewardship practices.

## **THREATS**

### **Unpredictable Government Actions**

OSCIA has a long history of strong relations with government organizations. However, OSCIA is not immune to changes and actions triggered by government decisions that may negatively impact agricultural organizations. Small changes in policy, staff relations or government priorities can have a negative impact on funding, research, and overall operations of program delivery.

### **Dependency on Relatively Few Revenue Streams**

OSCIA’s revenue is primarily sourced from government grants and funding agreements, with specifications on use of funds. Numerous small and large delivery agreements have been struck repeatedly with several provincial ministries and federal departments. Funding agreements are short-term (i.e. 1-5 years) and while there has been historical success, there are not guarantees on their renewal. In addition, there has been continued pressure from funding partners to reduce administration costs. There is a sentiment that OSCIA is too dependent on program delivery to operate, and diversifying revenue streams would improve financial security.

### **Other Farm Organizations**

There are numerous farm organizations competing for the time and membership dollars of fewer farmers. More specifically, there are other groups pursuing environmental innovation that may be drawing members away from OSCIA.

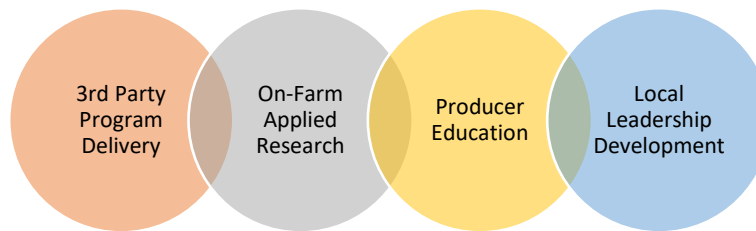
## SWOT SUMMARY & STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

### SWOT Summary

<b>STRENGTHS</b> 1. Our Staff 2. Program Delivery Capabilities & Reputation 3. Province-wide Network of Grassroot Activity	<b>WEAKNESSES</b> 1. Unclear Organizational Structure 2. Inconsistent Grassroots Engagement 3. Brand Image 4. Varying Employee Satisfaction
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b> 1. To Expand Applied Research and Knowledge Transfer 2. To Attract New “Customers” 3. To Scale-up Education Events	<b>THREATS</b> 1. Unpredictable Government Actions 2. Dependency on Few Revenue Streams 3. Other Farm Organizations

Highest priorities for strategic action are determined by reviewing the SWOT analysis in conjunction with OSCIA’s core competencies. The goal is to identify the greatest needs for protection and reinforcement of these drivers of organizational success.

### OSCIA’S Core Competencies



### Strategic Priorities

- 1. Generate Multiple Revenue Streams.** The current dependency on few revenue streams (T), combined with unpredictable government actions (T) presents significant risk to OSCIA’s ability to perform all competencies. Leverage OSCIA’s current reputation for strong program delivery (S), and seek to expand services that will attract new customers and revenue sources (O). Attention should be directed towards reinforcing the brand image among grassroots membership (W) throughout the process.
- 2. Cultivate Grassroots Engagement.** Action is needed to reinforce the existing network of grassroot activity (S) and reinvigorate areas not as active (W). Ensure the optimal structure (W) is in place to support grassroot activity, along with continued provincial support from both field and office staff (S).
- 3. Expand Impact of On-Farm Applied Research Initiatives.** Research projects are a key driver for grassroots engagement (S,W), and differentiates OSCIA from other organizations (T). Strengthen OSCIA’s position as lead coordinator of on-farm applied research by initiating more projects, on a larger scale, featuring new technology, with new partners. Heighten knowledge transfer with increased communication of research results, potentially leading to increased adoption of best practices, attraction of new members/customers (O), and improvement of brand image (W).
- 4. Foster a Culture of Continuous Improvement.** Creating a workplace that focuses on learning and continuous improvement will positively impact the employee experience (W), and overall productivity. It leads to innovative thinking and supports improved implementation of all strategic priorities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES	SUCCESS MEASURES & TACTICS
<p><b>1) Generate Multiple Revenue Streams</b></p> <p><b>Lead Contact:</b> Finance Visioning Committee</p>	<p>Proposed Measures of Success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. A minimum of 3 funding sources at any one time (achieve diversity in investors)</li> <li>ii. Establish 1 new non-government revenue source per fiscal year</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Tactics</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Research and develop new services to attract potentially new “customers” to OSCIA (i.e. non-farm community, municipalities, industry) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Brainstorm opportunities, determine feasibility, create prospect list and proactively seek interest and engagement</li> <li>b. Research and seek other government funding sources and grants</li> <li>c. Continue to develop partnerships to provide 3<sup>rd</sup> party verification services</li> <li>d. Investigate marketing opportunities to sell new management tools such as carbon footprint or soil test manager apps</li> </ul> </li> <li>2) Review membership fee structure; consider associate membership and/or sponsorship category</li> <li>3) Review OSCIA’s brand and value proposition. Identify key messages and develop external communication strategy to maintain and strengthen current reputation.</li> <li>4) Develop plan to reinforce existing government relationships (OMAFRA, AAFC, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Ministry of Environment Conservation and Parks)</li> </ol>
<p><b>2) Cultivate Grassroots Engagement</b></p> <p><b>Lead Contact:</b> Membership Committee</p>	<p>Proposed Measures of Success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Revised regional structure communicated by August 30, 2021</li> <li>ii. Minimum of at least one activity in addition to the AGM, tracking attendance year over year and satisfaction.</li> <li>iii. Completion of skills development in all 11 regions</li> <li>iv. Readership and satisfaction of the newsletter, video views</li> <li>v. # of entries for Don Hill Award, and # of nominations for OSCIA Soil Champion award</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>Tactics</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Optimize Regional structure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Review purpose of current structure</li> <li>b) Assess best practices</li> <li>c) Determine ideal structure to support grassroots activity</li> <li>d) Communicate new structure, roles and responsibilities</li> </ul> </li> <li>2) Identify regional champion for activities, to work alongside the Association Development Advisor. The champion will be responsible for <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Developing best practices for increasing engagement (i.e. guidelines for hosting effective meetings, promoting events, acknowledging or thanking volunteers</li> <li>b) Sharing what other regions are doing</li> <li>c) Publishing post-event summary of key learnings, supporting resources (via the Innovator).</li> </ul> </li> <li>3) Elevate Producer Education Programs. At the Provincial level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Identify topics that will be of greatest interest to members/prospective members (examples: soil health, compaction days, topics that appeal to livestock producers such as manure management, biosecurity.)</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b) Develop partnerships to provide education events (funding and/or expertise, and marketing/communication services).</li> <li>c) Develop templates and best practices for use at regional level, ensuring quality and alignment with OSCIA brand.</li> </ul> <p>4) Local Leadership Development: Continue to provide skills training and supporting resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) In-person &amp; video training</li> <li>b) Availability of technical resources (such as projectors, video equipment and software, etc.)</li> </ul>
<p><b>3) Expand Impact of On-Farm Applied Research Initiatives</b></p> <p><b>Lead Contact:</b> Research Committee</p>	<p>Proposed Measures of Success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Minimum of 1 research projects per region per year (Tier 1 or Tier 2)</li> <li>ii. # of website visits to research information</li> </ul>
	<p>Tactics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Seek. Collaborate with other organizations to brainstorm/determine research ideas/priorities (share with regional champion, 2.2 above) and propose multi-location research projects. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Include younger generation/recent graduates and non-traditional partners in the discussion</li> <li>b) Host a provincial research update with farm organizations and academics to identify research most needed.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2) Test. Develop research best practices (statistical design for research plots and managing trials to enhance credibility and simplify implementation) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Seek partners to develop better working relationship with experts on BMPs for statistically sound research (e.g. Ministry Staff, Ecological Farmers Association of Ontario)</li> </ul> </li> <li>3) Adopt. Enhance knowledge transfer: Develop best practices for timely sharing of research results and how to adopt on the farm <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Leverage the “Innovator” to increase knowledge transfer of our research (consider audio over images)</li> <li>b) Improve online access to research results. Make it easier to find, consider alternate formats such as webinars/podcasts.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>4) Foster a Culture of Continuous Improvement</b></p> <p><b>Lead Contact:</b> Executive Committee</p>	<p>Proposed Measures of Success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Program Rollout milestones (i.e. roles updated, # of meetings)</li> <li>ii. Increase Employee Net Promoter Score (How likely are you to recommend OSCIA as a place of work to your family and friends?)</li> <li>iii. Measure key performance indicators (to be developed and included in action plan)</li> </ul>
	<p>Tactics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Conduct focus groups with full-time and part-time staff to understand strengths and gaps in existing culture</li> <li>2) Define values and corresponding behaviours for the ideal culture</li> <li>3) Develop and implement an action plan. May include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Learn other roles to increase respect, understanding and ability to relate.</li> <li>b. Provide training to managers; leading by example and coaching skills</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



## NEXT STEPS

A. **Lead Contacts** (committees) will meet to review their respective strategic priority and complete the following steps:

1. Confirm measures of success by identifying SMART goals:
  - Specific: State exactly what you wish to achieve with the strategic priority.
  - Measurable: Include quantitative metrics that will provide evidence of progress
  - Attainable: Determine baseline metrics that will give perspective to what's realistic
  - Relevant: Ensure goals are aligned with the strategic priority
  - Timebound: Set short-term milestones to track progress towards March 31, 2023.
2. Review and confirm the tactics that will achieve the goals.
3. Propose implementation timeline from current date to September 30, 2023.

Review progress of strategic priority semi-annually (minimum) with full board.

B. **Staff** will develop detailed action plan on an annual basis to further progress of each strategic priority.