



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ROI Announces Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program Class 21 Participants

GUELPH, ON, July 30, 2025 – The Rural Ontario Institute (ROI) is excited to announce the eighteen current and emerging leaders from across Ontario selected to be a part of Class 21 of the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (AALP). Participants will start their AALP leadership journey in August 2025.

“Congratulations to the selected Class 21 participants,” says Gabrielle Ferguson, ROI Leadership Programs Director. “You are about to embark on a transformative leadership journey—one that will challenge you to reflect deeply and grow into the leader you are meant to be. In today’s complex global environment, strong leadership is more important than ever to ensure the continued success and resilience of Ontario’s agri-food sector.”

Over the course of the program, Class 21 participants will come together for a series of in-person seminars, webinars, study tours – North American and international – and small group issues analysis projects for agriculture, food and rural community clients. AALP focuses on building foundational skills and providing context for practicing them in a safe but challenging environment. The curriculum adapts with relevant topics for each class to promote new multi-stakeholder approaches while developing critical self-analysis.

“Our government appreciates the input of Ontario’s world-class agricultural leaders as we continue to create the right conditions for the growth of our \$51 billion agri-food industry,” said Trevor Jones, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness. “We are proud to support opportunities in experiential education and leadership development like those provided by the prestigious Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program. I commend the participants of Class 21 for their commitment to agriculture leadership excellence and wish them well in their careers.”

“For decades, AALP has empowered emerging leaders in the agri-food and rural sectors – many of whom are OAC alumni – to drive positive change in their communities and industries,” says John Cranfield, Dean of the Ontario Agricultural College, University of Guelph. “We are especially proud of the powerful outcomes that stem from this unique leadership journey.”

“Strong leadership is vital to the future of Ontario’s agriculture sector and rural communities. As the landscape of farming continues to shift, equipping the next generation of leaders with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to navigate these changes is more important than ever,” says Drew Spoelstra, President of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) and AALP Class 13 Alumni. “Since its launch in 1984, with the OFA as one of its founding partners, AALP has provided executive-level training tailored to the needs of Ontario’s agri-food and rural sectors. Many of the OFA’s current and past board members, staff, and grassroots representatives are program graduates.”

Each AALP Class is created with attention to the diversity of participants, so that peer-to-peer mentorship, interrelationships and a broad network are developed. Class 21 participants represent livestock, media, horticulture, grain, and/or involved in agri-business and agri-food, financial sectors, government, non-government and commodity associations and small business. Offering unique viewpoints and enabling thought-provoking, balanced discussion of critical issues. The Class ranges in age from 29 to 60.

AALP, supported and funded in part by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness, the Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs, and ag-sector organizations/industry, is delivered by the Rural Ontario Institute, a charitable organization committed to developing leaders and facilitating collaboration on issues and opportunities facing rural and northern Ontario communities. Established in 1984, AALP has graduated over 540 leaders who are making a positive difference across Ontario and beyond.

AALP Class 21 Participants:

- Mike Barun, Georgetown, Egg Farmers of Ontario – Director of Finance
- Alicia Becker, Clifford, Farm & Food Care Ontario – Community Engagement Manager
- Sunit Chandan, London, Farm Credit Canada – Manager Business Development
- Julie Danen, Shakespeare, Danzel Holsteins – Owner
- Greg de Vos, Guelph, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness – Manager, Strategic Coordination & Initiatives, Agriculture Development Branch
- Lindsay Dykeman, Kincardine, Ontario Dairy Goat Co-operative Inc. – General Manager
- Paige Handsor, Wallaceburg, Match Realty Inc. – Farm Realtor and Co-Owner
- Mel Karpenko, Grand Valley, Grand River Farm – Co-Owner
- Kaitlin Lake, Elora, Maple Lodge Farms - Director, Grower Services
- Aodin MacDonell, Williamstown, Greenfield Global Inc. – Grain Sustainability Lead
- Andrew Munro, Oshawa, Caldwell Securities – Community & Client Development
- Katie Normet, Arthur, River's Edge Goat Dairy – Owner and Farmer
- Kristy Nudds, Tillsonburg, Glacier FarmMedia's publication Farmtario – Editor
- Kelsey Randhawa, Angus, Rural Ontario Institute – Leadership Programs Coordinator
- Mackenna Roth, Strathroy, Rural Policy Advocate and Cut Flower Farmer
- Liam van Steekelenburg, CosMic Plants Inc. – Maintenance Manager
- Angela Zilke, Embro, Zilke Enterprises Inc. – Secretary/Treasurer
- Melinda Zurbrigg, St. Marys, Libro Credit Union – Relationship Manager

ABOUT

The Rural Ontario Institute (ROI) is a non-profit organization committed to developing leaders, informing decision makers and connecting communities. ROI delivers the renowned Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (AALP) which celebrated its 40th year of operation in 2024, and the Rural Change Maker program, a youth leadership initiative for young rural, emerging leaders to address local priorities. We provide data research and analysis on rural trends and demographics. Information is disseminated in our Rural Ontario Facts products - factsheets and accompanying dashboards. Currently, ROI is engaged in a rural housing initiative that will help communities to address the housing and homelessness crisis being faced by thousands of Canadians.

ASSOCIATED LINKS

- [RURAL ONTARIO INSTITUTE](#)
- [ADVANCED AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM](#)

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