

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**AALP Class 18 extended four to six months due to COVID**

Guelph, ON, July 9, 2020– The Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (AALP) curriculum is renowned for its interactive participant seminars, study tours and exposure to world-wide networks. To maintain the high standard established over the past 36 years the Rural Ontario Institute (ROI) will be prolonging the duration of AALP Class 18 so we can wait for COVID restrictions to be lifted sufficiently to enable us to deliver the curriculum appropriately and safely. Fall 2020 seminars will be pushed back into winter 2021 and the international study tour postponed until summer 2021. We are communicating this decision now to resolve uncertainty for program participants. Over the last four months the participants have been meeting and discussing options and all in the group are willing to prolong their participation to stay together and complete their leadership journey. We are hopeful that within four to six months the situation will allow ROI to organize our study tour destinations as well as hold our provincial seminar locations safely.

Rather than continue to spend our time repurposing more seminars and continuing to plan the program sessions entirely virtually for the fall seminars we have chosen instead to conserve the resources that so many supporters have contributed and use those resources when the time is right to deliver the full AALP experience. Leadership Programs Director, Gabe Ferguson, says “I am very encouraged by the fact that at this point no Class 18 sponsors have withheld their year two support due to COVID uncertainties. We appreciate this trust and think that this is the best plan to respect their confidence in ROI.”

In the interim ROI will not be idle, we will be working to increase the breadth and accessibility of agriculture and rural leadership training, the information resources we supply for rural leaders, and community and organization development capacity building. “We were already responding to what we had heard loud and clear from our network” says Norm Ragetlie, executive director, “they wanted ongoing learning opportunities with choice around time commitments, price point, formats and topics. Now with COVID the transformation of ROI service offerings is more urgent. This hiatus in AALP will give us some focused time to build on our strength of connecting rural leaders across multiple sectors and we will continue to involve partners in this transformation.”

Keith Currie, OFA president says, “AALP has consistently developed exceptional leaders that have navigated different substantive challenges for the agricultural sector.” He adds that, “Although Class 18 may take longer to complete their journey, they will have the unique opportunity to reflect as a group and draw on the lessons learned from the actions of different leaders throughout COVID-19. OFA is a proud supporter of AALP and we look forward to continuing to follow Class 18 through to their graduation.”

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