

**2023-2025**

# STEWARDSHIP REPORT



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## ABOUT US

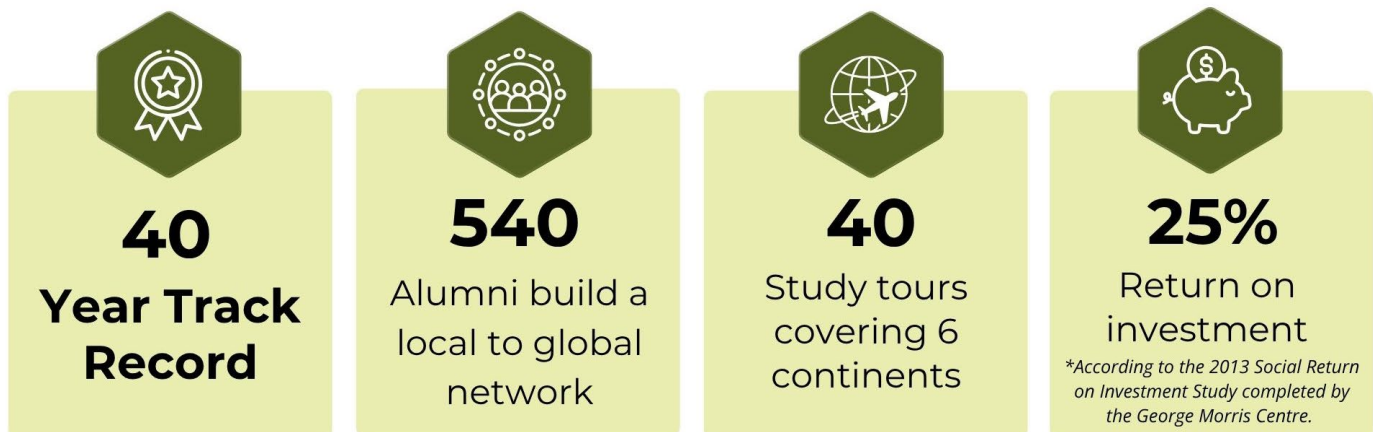
- Develops, Informs and Connects Leaders.
- Initiates dialogue and supports collaboration amongst rural stakeholders.
- Identifies and amplifies key issues and opportunities.
- Builds organizational capacity in rural and northern Ontario.

The [Rural Ontario Institute \(ROI\)](#) is a charitable organization committed to developing leaders, informing decision makers and connecting communities. ROI delivers one of the most comprehensive, leadership development programs in the world – the [Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program \(AALP\)](#), which celebrated its 40th year of operation in 2024.

AALP's objective is to develop top leaders who are better prepared to identify and overcome challenges and to capitalize on emerging opportunities across the agriculture, agri-food and rural sectors.

This Stewardship Report highlights how support from our sponsors and donors assists in the development and connection of strong leaders, strong organizations and vibrant rural communities.

## AALP'S IMPACT





## THE ADVANCED AGRICULTURAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Since 1984, AALP has had a solid track record of developing top ag-sector leaders. Presently, alumni are in top executive roles leading over 133 municipal, provincial and national organizations and agribusiness. Hundreds of alumni are contributing their skills and knowledge to agriculture/rural boards. Still others mobilizing innovation across the depth and breadth of agriculture and food through farms, media, communications, insurance, finance, rural not-for-profits, small business and governments. Alumni credit AALP with preparing and inspiring them to take on increasingly greater leadership roles and often comment that “AALP changed my life!” The most significant indicator of program performance is showcased in the achievements of our alumni and the valuable contributions they continue to make after the program.

AALP is one of a kind because of its experiential approach. Built on the principal that agriculture deserves many leaders with a diversity of experience and style Class participants are chosen for their different backgrounds, offering unique viewpoints and enabling thought-provoking, balanced discussion of critical issues. This is why AALP alumni are requested when policy, trade, economic development and other strategic input to a team is desired. Over 540 individuals have benefited from this executive leadership development program. AALP’s seminars, study tours, self-directed learning and distance education combine hands-on experience, introduction to broad industry knowledge and exposure to contacts and networks that would otherwise take decades to accumulate.

Support from industry leaders is vital to the strength of our program. In fact, without the support of sponsors and funders AALP would not be possible. Financial commitments from the industry are matched by a commitment from the Board and staff of ROI to achieve the program objectives and maintain exceptional quality of leadership development programming.

### ACHIEVING OBJECTIVES AND MAINTAINING EXCELLENCE

We deliver on program objectives by ensuring that seminar and study tours:

- Develop excellence in core leadership skills
- Build robust networks
- Introduce agriculture and food system innovation
- Discover economic, political, social, cultural and physical perspectives in the agriculture sector
- Explore local, national and global issues



## AALP CLASS 20

On September 6, 2023, 8 men and 10 women began their AALP journey. The diversity of participants continues to broaden across the industry's value chain while remaining true to its farm-to-fork roots. Class 20 participants showcased the magnificent tenacity and agility of agriculture leaders; many were both primary producers and had industry/organization roles. Commodities represented in this class were grain, oilseeds, cannabis, chicken, eggs, dairy cattle, pork, cucumbers, sheep. Industries included seed, crop protection, genetics, wool, farm market, finance, grain marketing, crop consulting, quality assurance, soil protection and communications. The participants range in age from 25 to 54.



## AALP CLASS 20's IMPACT



## Milestones - AALP Class 20

### Completion of Seminars 1-7 and Webinars A-F:

Seminar Location	Leadership Skills	Knowledge
Niagara-on-the-Lake	Network feedback, values, vision, mission, goals	Fruit, wine/food innovation, cannabis industry, role of indigenous peoples in the war of 1812.
Sarnia	Conflict Management and Team Synergy	Automation, robotics, precision agriculture, municipal politics, grain elevator
Toronto	Project management, elevator speech, lobbying	Legislative Assembly of Ontario, Ontario Food Terminal, food security, diversity in agriculture, soil health, Capital Markets
Thunder Bay	Leading Teams, problem solving, debating, S.M.A.R.T. goals	Northern Ontario food security and economic development, aquaculture, food market innovation, farm collaboration
London	Communication: values, stories, styles, forms (social media, blogs, interviews)	Issues analysis projects, egg production and grading
Ottawa	Joint seminar with New York LEAD, Canada/USA relations, advocacy, policy positions, competing commitments	US Embassy in Canada, Senate, House of Commons, Question Period, Quebec policy, 4-party panel, Grain production & marketing, mushrooms, Area X.O. research farm, dairy distillery
Kitchener	Commitment to leadership in Agriculture and Rural Ontario, strategic imagination	Artificial intelligence, Hamilton-Oshawa Port Authority, dairy farm open house, cucumber greenhouses

### Completion of North American and International Study Tours:

Location	Highlights
Washington D.C. March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>American Farm Bureau Federation and National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) national representatives to discuss policy work in the agricultural sector</li> <li>Embassy of Canada to the USA, Deputy Ambassador and Minister-Counsellor</li> <li>Public Policy and Government Relations (Corn, Soybean, Milk)</li> <li>Tackling tough topics workshop</li> <li>Visited White House and Holocaust Memorial Museum</li> </ul>
Florida March 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Toured farm and Everglade/Gulf Coast research facilities, focusing on soil health, sustainability, innovation, and challenges across the agri-food sector.</li> <li>Canadian/American relations, trade policies</li> <li>Artificial intelligence, citrus, beef cattle, shellfish, strawberries, lettuce and sugarcane</li> </ul>



### The Baltics February 2025

- Each AALP Class has a unique leadership experience and for AALP Class 20 this was particularly true as a result of the heightened conflict between Ukraine and Russia. A study tour to the Baltic states of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia brought the global fear of war close as our host and other residents shared their history and present-day concerns for their children's future.
- Crop production small scale local food to Europe's largest vertical farm
- Food innovation in vegetable/fruit juices to vertically integrated farm to table convenience foods
- Estonian Women's Business Organization
- Canadian Embassy and Latvian Ministry of Agriculture
- Cultural experiences, farm tours and conversations about economy/war/politics



*AALP Class 20 in Estonia*

### Completion of curriculum events:

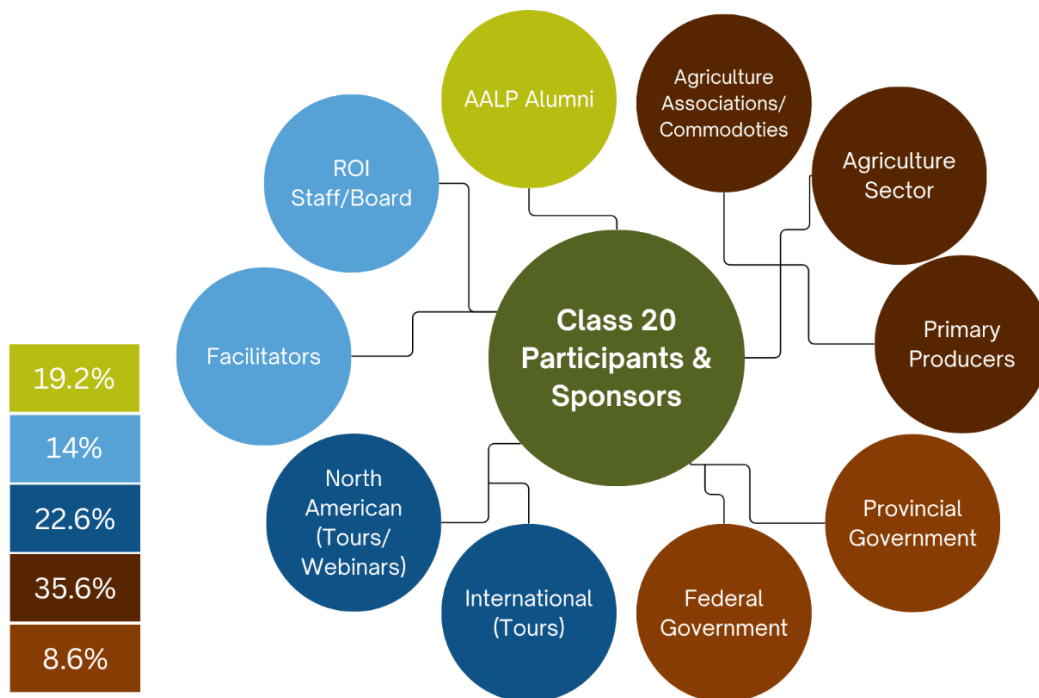
- **Graduation of AALP Class 20.** On March 29, 2025, Class 20 celebrated with friends and family the completion of their AALP leadership journey. Valedictorian: Janelle Cardiff, Lichty award recipient: Tina Beirnes.
- **AALP Dream Gala:** The theme of the April 2024 event, produced by AALP Class 19 and Class 20, transported attendees back in time to "The Roaring Twenties" and featured a semi-formal dinner, silent and live auction. The fundraiser raised \$122,157 for the program.



*2024 AALP Dream Gala Committee*

## Expanding Networks

Between September 2023 and March 2025, a total of 10,070 networking opportunities were created in AALP Class 20. The pie chart below illustrates the diverse range of networking connections established. Each segment represents a key category of individuals – such as industry professionals, government officials, North American and International professionals, and fellow participants – highlighting the breadth of relationships cultivated during the program. This visual snapshot emphasizes the program’s impact in fostering meaningful, cross-sector connections essential for leadership growth in Ontario’s agricultural sector. 100 percent of Class participants said their network was expanded by the program.



## ISSUES ANALYSIS PROJECT

Participants also add to their “toolbox of skills” by completing an Issues Analysis Project (IAP). The IAP is an action-based leadership project based on an issue relevant to the agriculture, food, agribusiness and rural sectors in Ontario.

Participants of Class 20 had the opportunity to prepare and pitch a current issue to their peers during their first seminar. The following seven topics were chosen for IAPs: increasing soil health, bitcoin in agriculture, taking AALP national, environmental farmers, financial literacy, local food in schools, and agriculture in Ontario curriculum. Several key takeaways from the IAPs include: there is a desire for a national AALP program, there is no direct mandate from the Ministry of Education regarding agriculture in the curriculum and there is a financial opportunity for local food to be brought into Ontario’s school food programs.



## LOOKING FORWARD...

ROI remains confident that AALP is valuable to participants and to the agriculture and agri-food sectors and rural and northern communities across Ontario. Additionally, the reach of AALP Alumni influence extends across Canada and around the world as they advance their careers and contribute to development teams.

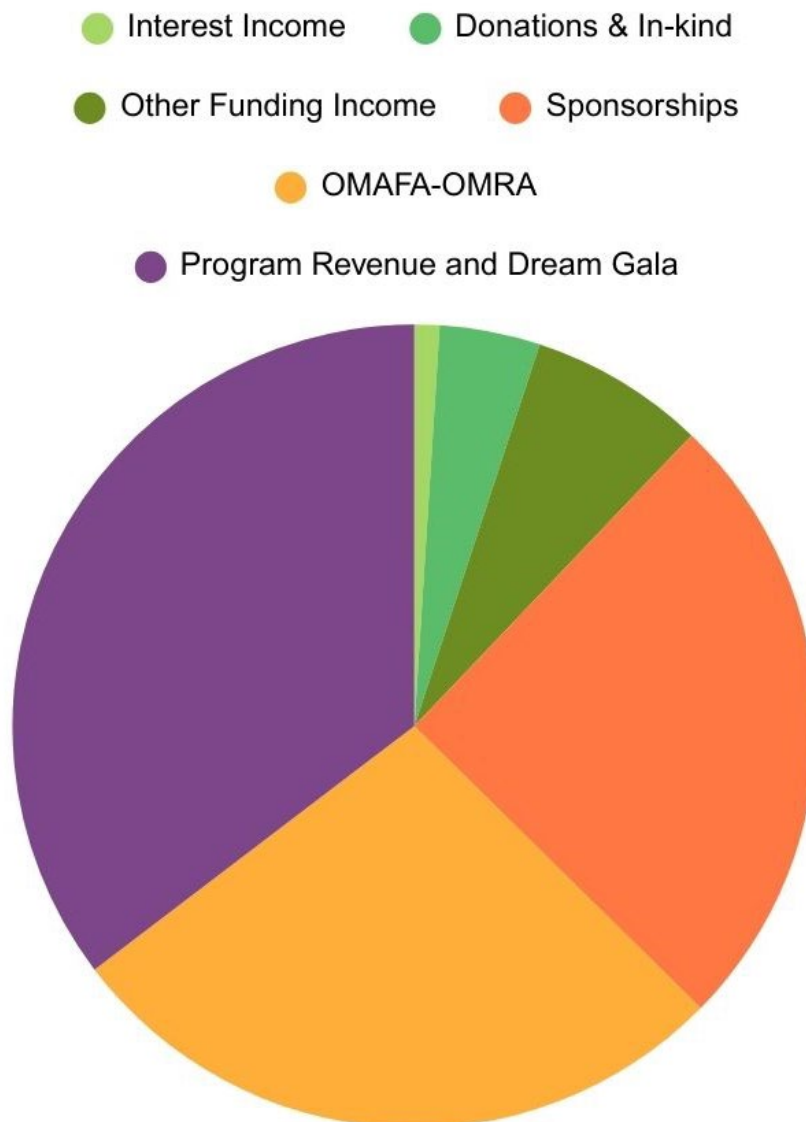
To keep AALP relevant and strong ROI has added a fund development officer to our staff team, boosted activities of the Alumni Association and is expanding our list of sponsoring partners.

Because of the overwhelming affirmation received, the core of the program remains the same going forward: face-to-face seminars, team projects and North American/International Study Tours. Virtual components will accommodate seminar review/reflection, guest speakers and Global Zoom leadership networking events.

Tuition for Class 20 was \$12,500 (\$6,250/yr) which represents approximately 1/3 of the costs required to deliver the program. We are managing increased costs by creating new efficiencies to the way AALP is delivered without compromising our foundational elements. We will continue to bring the latest leadership science together with innovative insight to the agrifood sector and rural community building while managing the program budget effectively.

## HOW YOUR FINANCIAL SUPPORT IS USED

Sponsorship support goes directly toward funding AALP's executive leadership development program. Throughout the long history of AALP costs have increased and so has our commitment to deliver a program of exceptional quality. This requires investment from many stakeholders within the industry. Participants are aware that they are paying about 1/3 of the cost of AALP and that 2/3 is provided through the generosity of the Province, industry/organization sponsors, donors and kind attendees at our fundraising endeavours. Participants commit to contributing to the industry that has supported them.



## RECOGNIZING COMMITMENT TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Program sponsors play a significant leadership role in our industry and provide tremendous support to AALP. We continue to recognize this leadership and showcase sponsor support at every opportunity.

In each class, we acknowledge our sponsors in many formal and informal ways including:

- AALP class participants work in teams to research and present Sponsor Spotlight presentations that are shared at seminars throughout the program. Each presentation focuses on a specific sponsor, exploring their business and activities and highlighting their sponsorship of AALP
- Sponsor logos are included in printed and online communications - newsletters, selected media releases, on our website and in the Rural Ontario Institute Annual Report. Individualized social media posts thank each sponsor
- Signage and printed materials at seminars
- Sponsors receive special thanks (verbally, in printed materials and on signage) at our key events:
  - Welcome Banquet
  - AALP Dream Gala
  - The Leadership Lecture and Reception
  - Class Graduation Banquet
  - AALP Alumni dinners and AALP Hall of Fame legacy luncheons

## WHAT THE AALP PIN REPRESENTS

Upon completing their AALP journey each alumnus receives certificates from ROI, University of Guelph continuing learning, elected officials and more. The smallest item received is the coveted “AALP” pin.

What is the pin worth? Tuition + sponsorship + donations + fundraisers+ social good = \$46,875. Add to that, networks deepened + friendships made + resources to call upon, a future of contributing and this small pin becomes priceless.

The AALP pin represents the strong agriculture and food future we are creating together.



## HEAR FROM AALP CLASS 20

*“The Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (AALP) has been a transformative experience, helping me grow both personally and professionally. It’s expanded my perspective on leadership, deepened my understanding of the agri-food sector, and connected me with a network of passionate, forward-thinking individuals. What I’ve gained from AALP will continue to shape my decisions and leadership for years to come.”*

**- Greg Dietrich**

*“AALP helped remind me that I matter, my skills matter, my business matters and that becoming a stronger leader in my career matters not only for myself but also my customers and my family.”*

**- Tina Beirnes**

*“AALP significantly enhanced my leadership, communication, and teamwork skills, including boosting my public speaking confidence. I deepened my understanding of agricultural systems, collaborative leadership, and both Canadian and international government systems. My biggest takeaway was the power of systems thinking and diverse perspectives. I’ll use these skills to drive positive change, build partnerships, and develop future leaders in agriculture.”*

**- Cory Wozniak**

*“The AALP program greatly enhanced my personal and professional development. It offered more than just information and networking; it provided a transformative experience through self-reflection. Engaging in international tours, seminars, and discussions with a diverse group of peers prompted me to ask questions of myself that reshaped my leadership approach. This experience improved my understanding of team dynamics and collaboration while broadening my industry perspective and expanding my professional network.”*

**- Daniel Vander Hout**

*“My path through AALP has given me the leap I needed to find the leadership style within myself. Surrounded by my wonderful agriculture leading peers, I have gained an incredible amount of knowledge in a short time and will continue my journey towards being better in the pig farming industry. AALP has been the best at pushing, motivating and taking me out of my comfort zone. This is not the end, but an amazing beginning.”*

**- Cassandra Van Engelen**



## WHY SPONSOR AALP?



**Align your organization with top leaders who are needed to move our industry forward – in businesses, in associations and organizations and in communities and on farms.**



**AALP graduates go on to hold many different influential positions within the industry and their communities. Many credit their AALP experience as a cornerstone that helped them get there. You make this possible.**



**Sponsor representatives have many opportunities to interact with each Class and keep a pulse on what is happening in the industry.**



**Agriculture, food and rural issues are high priorities for the province. Together we have an opportunity to shape the future of our sectors and rural communities across Ontario.**

## AALP CLASS 20 IS POSSIBLE BECAUSE OF OUR GENEROUS SPONSORS

### PATRON



### GUARDIANS



Weston Family  
Foundation

### PACESETTERS



ONTARIO  
AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

### CHAMPIONS



GLACIER farmmedia

### ALLIES



Grand River  
Agricultural Society



Chicken  
Farmers  
of Ontario

### LEADERS



### BUILDERS



ONTARIO AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE  
Alumni Foundation

### BOOSTERS





*a program of the*



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