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**For Immediate Release:**

May 10/2022

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## **Cornell Atkinson 'Innovation Sprint' for Regenerative Agricultural Financing**

First Stakeholder Meeting, Rochester, April 8 – April 9, 2022

What comes to mind when you hear the term 'regenerative agriculture'? What key factors play a role in soil quality improvement? What financial tools can help shift conventional agricultural practices to more sustainable ones? These and other questions were explored during an Innovation Sprint event in April.

Cornell Atkinson Center for Sustainability organized the Innovation Sprint for Financing Regenerative Agriculture, with funding support from the Great Lakes Protection Fund. This event brought together farmers, natural resource protection agents, and financial experts to help shape the design and launch the implementation of innovative financial products that remove the barrier to investment in regenerative practices and catalyze farmers' adoption of more sustainable agricultural practices. The April event was the first of several gatherings planned for this year.

Regenerative agriculture is a farming system that prioritizes the restoration of soil health and the reversal of biodiversity loss to bring land use more in harmony with nature. Through the Transition Finance for Regenerative Agriculture Systems project, Cornell Atkinson aims to co-create innovative financial instruments to incentivize farmers' adoption of regenerative agricultural practices. These practices are an effective way to improve Great Lakes water quality. They can significantly reduce water pollution due to fertilizer runoff, soil erosion, and nutrient loss.

The project's initial focus is on Lake Ontario and upstate NYS, including Monroe County, as a pilot site.

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The project team visited Monroe County farms last summer to understand current soil health practices, how financial instruments are utilized in the agricultural sector, and identify strategies to support the transition to more regenerative farming practices.

Following their initial visit, the team enlisted two new members: The Cornell Cooperative Extension of Monroe County Agriculture Program and the Northwest New York Livestock, Dairy and Field Crop team. Since Fall of 2021, these two team members have extended the team's outreach to establish a network of agriculture and financial stakeholders in our region.

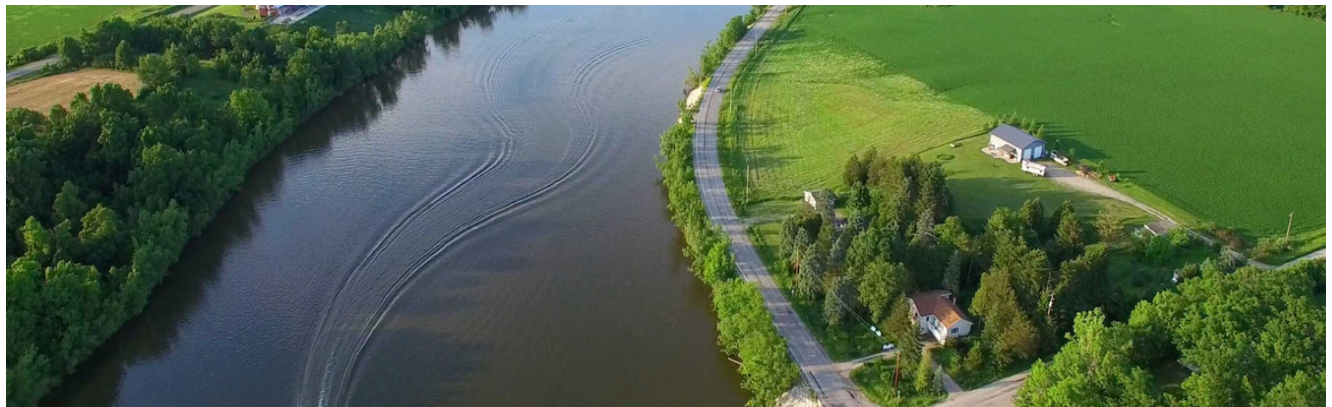
The Innovation Sprint, a two-day event attended by over 40 participants, was the first meeting of the larger stakeholder group.

On the first evening, a reception dinner was held at the Commissary Kitchen. A newly established food accelerator, located inside the Sibley Square Building in downtown Rochester, provided an excellent venue for participants to meet and socialize.

The next day, participants convened at the Century Club – a historic building on East Avenue – for an all-day workshop to brainstorm a wide range of financial tools that could support farmers in their efforts to adopt regenerative agricultural practices. Transition loans, equipment financing, sustainability-linked bonds, carbon markets, pay-for-success models, and crop insurance are examples of viable tools.

The Innovation Sprint provided a firm foundation for the next steps in project planning and implementation.

For more information on the Innovation Sprint and how to get involved, contact Alan Martinez, Senior Manager, Strategic Partnerships for Cornell Atkinson at [amartinez@cornell.edu](mailto:amartinez@cornell.edu). For more information on Transition Finance for Regenerative Agriculture, visit <https://atkinson.cornell.edu/projects/transition-finance-for-regenerative-agriculture-systems/project-team/>



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