

Adapting to climate change: How farmers reduce floods in cities

*Making communities more resilient is part of our purpose. One way we do that is by helping Canadians adapt to climate change by partnering with charities that are implementing practical solutions to help protect people from extreme weather. This is the third in a series about how our **Intact Adaptation Action Grant partners** are helping people. Did you miss the second story? [Read it here](#).*

When a group of 45 visited local farms east of Ottawa on a sunny October day, spring flooding was the last thing on their minds. But that quickly changed once they started talking with farmers near Vankleek Hill, Ont.

“Around here, everything was tile-drained (a network of drainage pipes below the surface that drains excess water to a nearby ditch) about 60 years ago, so when there is heavy rain or quick snowmelt, all that water gets pumped into the ditches at the same time. There’s an instant rise in the streams and rivers, and there’s a snowball effect as you get further downstream and you see that dramatic spring flooding,” said Kurt MacSweyn, who grows corn, hops and soy on his farm near the Rigaud River.

Climate change has led to an increase in spring floods. Many of the group visiting Kurt’s farm live around Ottawa and saw the effects firsthand when heavy rains and snowmelt led to major flooding in Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick last spring, costing close to [\\$208 million in insured damage](#).

Buffers help reduce flooding

To help reduce flooding downstream, Kurt has planted trees, shrubs and flowering plants on 30 acres of his land along the river. This creates a buffer zone, reducing water flow from his farmland into the river. It also filters the water, ensuring cleaner water ends up in the river.

Kurt’s part of an ALUS Canada program that pays farmers and ranchers to use parts of their land in alternative ways — such as by planting trees, restoring wetlands and building water retention ponds — to reduce flooding in downstream communities. Intact has partnered with ALUS Canada to fund projects around Ottawa, Calgary and Brandon, Man.

These projects are on land with low agricultural value. In addition to reducing flooding, they help farmers retain water on their lands to combat summer droughts and increase biodiversity. Mike MacGillivray, who has planted more than 5,000 native trees and shrubs, has already noticed an increase in wildlife activity on his farm.

“We used to see just a few birds in the fields, following the cattle around, but now we see flocks of swallows, lots of garter snakes and spiders too,” he said.

Do you work for a charity that's helping protect Canadians from extreme weather? Our charity granting program is officially open and we're looking for partners who want to work with us to build a more climate-resilient Canada. [Visit our website to learn more about how to apply](#).

Additional assets available online:  [Photos \(1\)](#)

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