

The Alberta Environmental Farm Plan Company

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REPORT TO INDUSTRY

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The five Ws of AEFP

The inside scoop on
Alberta's Environmental
Farm Plan Company

In media, every story must address what's termed as the five "Ws". That is "who, what, when, where and why."

The fundamentals are simple. Media's job is to represent the interest of the average person, to ask the questions they would most like to ask. It's a formula that has worked well for generations and is the foundation of the cherished democratic principle of freedom of the press.

In reality, many farmers and ranchers have one or more of those questions about the Alberta Environmental Farm Plan Company (AEFP). So, for those producers, here is the inside story on AEFP – what producers and industry really want to know.

Who we are. AEFP is an incorporated, not-for-profit Alberta company. It comprises industry, government and other stakeholders working together to develop the Environmental Farm Plan program.

When we started. AEFP was set up in 2002 and began operations immediately.


What we do. AEFP provides a voluntary, free and confidential self-assessment process for producers to evaluate environmental risks and strengths on their operations. The process involves working directly with producers to complete an Environmental Farm Plan (EFP), which producers will use, according to their own timetables, to address the environmental risks and strengths on their farm.



Why we exist and why are we set up as a private company?

We're an education company, pure and simple. We do not set rules and regulations, develop legislation, lobby anyone, build or enforce policies. Our sole purpose is to provide education and awareness about environmental risks and best management practices to Alberta producers that contribute to a sustainable agricultural industry.

Why a company? AEFP is, in essence, an education delivery agency. It is not a government regulatory program or enforcement agency and the board of directors felt one of the clearest ways to make that statement to producers was to set the unit up as an independent not-for-profit company. AEFP is developed and directed by producers who identified the need for delivery of an environmental farm plan program to be arm's length from government.

Where we do business. By name, AEFP clearly operates in the province of Alberta. The EFP program is also delivered across Canada and customized for the needs of each province. 



The most common questions AEFP gets from producers

Be your own investigative reporter. Ask AEFP whatever you would like.

AEFP welcomes questions on anything to do with EFPs or the functions of the Company. We believe that having a transparent business process will continue to build producers' confidence that AEFP is in place for the benefit of producers and their operations.

Here are answers to some of the most common questions we get.

Why should I consider an EFP?

Any producer wanting to operate over the long term will be managing risks such as market risks, production risks, and succession plans. Managing environmental risk is the next step in moving towards sustainability.

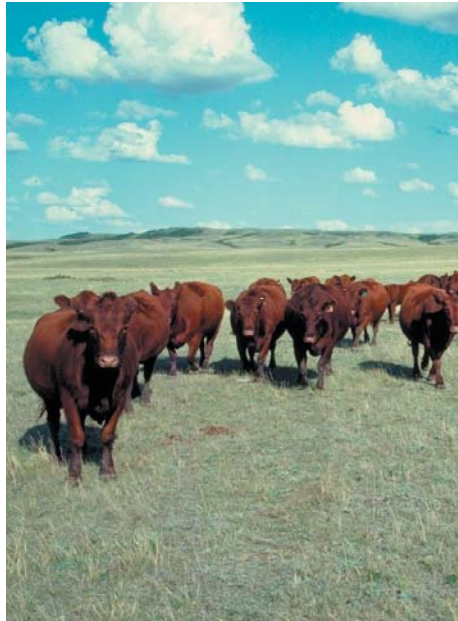
In developing an Environmental Farm Plan, producers will be:

- Adopting best management practices that can help improve farm productivity, and contribute toward healthy and safe food products
- Maintaining water, soil and habitat quality
- Building acceptance of the operation among neighbours and the general public
- Improving marketability of farm products
- Sustaining the land's productivity for the next generation
- Reducing agricultural inputs
- Adding value to the farm property

How much does it cost?

Developing an Environmental Farm Plan is available to producers free of charge. All workshops, materials and coaching are provided at no cost to producers. Those participating in the workshops will also enjoy a full lunch at no charge.

The only costs associated with the EFP process are the producer's time to complete their EFP and the

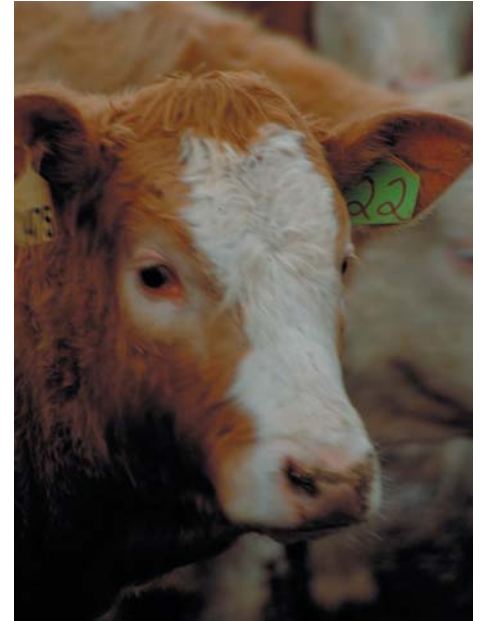


implementation of any management or production changes identified in the plan. For many of these improvements, producers may qualify for up to \$30,000 per farm in cost-shared assistance available through the federal Canada-Alberta Farm Stewardship Program.

Will my personal and farm privacy be protected?

AEFP is committed to protecting the privacy of every program participant. In fact, we recognize that privacy is a major priority and a condition of EFP participation for many Alberta farmers and ranchers.

The EFP program is completely confidential. Program records use confidential identification numbers rather than farm names or locations. The ID number is the only identification information on the program records and AEFP does not have access to information linking the ID numbers to individual farm units.



Where does the money come from to run the Company?

Basically, AEFP operates with both public and private funds.

Today AEFP operates with substantial support from several core public sources including:

- Government of Canada
- Government of Alberta
- Over 150 local municipalities, businesses and agricultural organizations

In the future, the Company is designed to be self-sustaining. A significant amount of support will come from private industry and organizations. AEFP is drawing strong interest from many companies, producer organizations and others. This interest only makes sense. The future of all related agriculture and food companies, organizations and others depends on a sustainable agriculture and food system.

AEFP has designed a partnership initiative to ensure this support maintains the integrity of the EFP program.

What exactly is the EFP process?

The planning process involves producers attending two half-day local workshops led by an experienced EFP facilitator who is usually a producer as well. The first workshop introduces producers to the EFP planning process, explains the procedure, reviews the contents of the EFP binder, and provides them with the tools to complete the actual plan on their own time at home.

Once producers have completed the first draft of their respective plans, they attend a second workshop, to review the process, ask any specific questions and share ideas on how to address identified risks.

The EFP program has gone to great lengths to ensure it is a completely confidential process. Producers are provided with their own confidential codes. The code, known only to the producer, is the only identifying reference on the completed plans.

Once plans are completed, producers are encouraged to submit plans to a review committee for comment and recommendation. The review committee is comprised of local producers hired by AEFP.

The review committee identifies any high-risk environmental practices not adequately addressed in the plan and suggests additional options for addressing specific risks.

After the plan has been reviewed and returned, the producer receives a farm gate sign and certificate, acknowledging their participation and interest in making agriculture more environmentally sustainable.

Producers can voluntarily implement any of the identified management changes on their own schedule.

The EFP process is voluntary now, but will it become mandatory some day?

The EFP is an awareness and education program, not a regulatory program. As such, AEFP is committed to maintaining a completely voluntary EFP process. Producers choose to enter the program and may leave it at any time, for any reason. The program is also confidential; the producer decides who will see his/her plan.

AEFP believes a voluntary, confidential process will be the most successful approach for the program in Alberta. Albertans have a longstanding tradition of preferring voluntary approaches over regulations. Furthermore, many jurisdictions in North America have found that a voluntary approach results in more proactive plans because the participating farmers are preparing their plans out of a personal commitment to strive for excellence in their farm operations.

Some banks and insurance companies want to know what plans a farm has in place, like a business plan, a marketing plan, an environmental plan, and a food safety plan, because developing such plans is one way of showing that the farm is strongly interested in ensuring a sustainable operation.

Any requests from these institutions, however, has nothing to do with the EFP program mandate itself. Rather, these institutions recognize the effectiveness of the EFP program. The same thinking is behind the decision of federal and provincial governments to use EFPs as a basis for access to aid programs aimed at improving sustainability in the industry. Under the new Agricultural Policy Framework, most environmentally based incentive funding will only be available to farmers who participate in the EFP program.

Does AEFP collect data and why?

AEFP does collect data from EFP participants, stakeholders, volunteers, contractors and staff.

Users of the EFP program have invaluable first-hand knowledge about the challenges and opportunities in environmental stewardship in agriculture. The information from the Feedback Forms is vital to finding more effective ways to help the industry enhance agricultural sustainability.

AEFP uses the collected information:

- to determine the major environmental issues facing agriculture in Alberta;
- to evaluate the EFP program's effectiveness and to find ways to increase the program's ability to serve the needs of Alberta farmers and ranchers;
- to identify gaps in resources or skill sets that could be barriers to farmers and ranchers taking action to enhance the sustainability of their operations; and
- to develop training and/or resources to address these gaps.

AEFP does **not** use the collected data to identify or evaluate individual farms.

What types of data are collected by AEFP?

The information collected includes: municipalities in which participating farms are located; types of farm enterprises involved (such as beef, poultry, cereals, etc.); how long it takes participants to complete the steps in the plan development process (from attending the first workshop to having the plan reviewed by a review committee); comments and concerns about program delivery and the workbook; the main environmental challenges that participants face; and the barriers that participants face in implementing their plans.>>



Continued...

How does AEFP protect personal/farm privacy during and after data collection?

AEFP is committed to protecting the privacy of every program participant.

To maintain participant privacy, all program records use confidential identification numbers rather than farm unit names or locations. The ID number is the only identification information on the Feedback Forms, and it is the only identification information on the program records maintained by AEFP. The head office does not have access to information linking the ID numbers to individual farm units.


AEFP reports the collected information in aggregate. This means that the data from many farm units is combined together, with the municipality being the smallest classification level, so it is not possible to identify the information from individual farm units. Any information that could potentially be used to identify a specific farm unit will not be included in the reported statistics (e.g. if the farm unit is one of only three Saskatoon berry farmers in the municipality). Before any of the collected information is released, it will be reviewed for accuracy as well as social, political and legislative

implications. AEFP will do everything in its power to ensure that all published information is easy to understand, provided in its proper context, and responsibly used.

AEFP staff, facilitators, volunteers and contractors have professional and ethical standards and procedures including procedures for maintaining the complete privacy of program participants. For more information, please read AEFP's privacy policy on the Web site.

What is the relationship between the EFP program and other environmental programs in Alberta?

The EFP program is a general program on environmental considerations related to all aspects of farming. Some other programs focus on specific topics in much more detail. The two approaches are complementary.

The EFP process provides information on these other programs, and producers who have participated in the EFP process sometimes take part in one or more of these other programs. These programs may also refer producers to the EFP program. 



Annual Report available

The complete business overview on the Alberta Environmental Farm Plan Company is available in the 2004 AEFP *Annual Report*. A limited number of print copies are available for industry partners, but the full report is available to anyone online at the AEFP Web site www.albertaEFP.com.

Reminder: New funding available

Producers who have completed an Environmental Farm Plan can qualify for up to \$30,000 per farm in new funding under the Canada-Alberta Farm Stewardship Program.

Call toll-free to 1-800-667-8587.

Or check the AEFP Web site at www.albertaEFP.com for links to the program.

For more information

If you would like more information on any aspect of the Alberta Environmental Farm Plan Company, check the AEFP Web site at www.albertaEFP.com or contact the AEFP office. We welcome your comments, questions and suggestions.

Articles included in this *Report to Industry* newsletter may be reproduced. Acknowledgement of the source is appreciated.

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The Alberta Environmental Farm Plan Company

The Agricultural Policy Framework (APF) • A FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL-TERRITORIAL INITIATIVE