



REPORT TO INDUSTRY

Volume 3, Issue 6

Regional meetings provide direct feedback on AEFP operations

Meetings structured as forums for new ideas, input and business review

Recently, the Alberta Environmental Farm Plan Company (AEFP) held a series of regional meetings across the province. These meetings — one for each of the five AEFP regions in Alberta — are important for AEFP stakeholders. They bring together AEFP management, staff, regional representatives, partners and others to review business operations, provide and receive feedback, and take action on items of concern.

“AEFP’s regional meetings serve a number of purposes,” says Mike Slomp, AEFP executive director. “First and foremost, they’re a matter of good business process, offering our on-the-ground team an overview of the operations of the past year. Another is that they offer an opportunity for valuable one-on-one time to discuss socially the challenges and opportunities the team faces.”

“But perhaps the key driver of these meetings is the opportunity for feedback. Our delivery team brings direct input from producers to the table. These meetings provide a good forum for team members to offer feedback on how the EFP program can continue to serve producers’ needs.”

A key message from the field this year is the fact that producers are completing EFPs because they truly care about environmental stewardship on their farms and ranches, says Slomp. “Although funding still plays a major role, many producers are developing EFPs because the process has gained their trust as an effective management tool. To us, that’s a positive sign for the next generation of the EFP program.”

Two-day format

Each of the five meetings — held in Lethbridge, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, Camrose and Westlock — followed the same

two-day format, says Slomp. “We’ve found the two-day format to be the one that works best for meetings such as this. The break in the evening offers participants the ability to talk person to person in a casual atmosphere about issues which affect them, coming back the next day with a fresh look at the day’s activities.”

The opportunities of networking should not be underestimated, he says. “It often drives discussion of issues we may not have thought of otherwise, such as working with producers with literacy challenges or those who might be struggling with English as a second language. The EFP program is home to a network of well trained people and, given the opportunity, they will frequently come to good conclusions on their own.”

Business review

Each meeting was hosted by the Regional Team Leader (RTL) and begins with a business overview by Slomp, who outlined the business operations of the previous year. This overview included reports on participation numbers, program marketing, staff activity, workshops and administrative changes.

This year’s business discussion included an update on the status of the Agricultural Policy Framework (APF) review and its efforts to define the next generation of ag policy in Canada. There were also reports from AEFP’s key partners, Alberta Agriculture and Food (AF) and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada – Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (AAFC – PFRA).

“It’s basically a *Reader’s Digest* version of everything we’ve done over the previous year,” he says. “However, at the same time it’s much more than that. Although the primary



Regional Team Leaders, such as East-Central region’s Perry Phillips, hosted the two-day sessions.

objective of the business review is to inform, we hope the information presented will help spur discussion and feedback.”

Key to the business review are the various milestones achieved by the EFP program over the previous year. “We review the number of workshops held, the number of participants that attended workshops and the number of EFPs deemed appropriate by regional review committees, both over the year and to date,” says Slomp.

“This past year we reached the 6,200 mark in terms of deemed-appropriate EFPs, with 10,500 Alberta producers attending an EFP workshop since the program began. This is



New on the AEEP Web. The AEEP Web site at www.AlbertaEFP.com is home to the latest information on many environmental subjects, virtually all of which are available to stakeholders for use in their publications. Some recently posted examples of feature articles under the *AEEP Journal* Web magazine are:

Plugging unused wells: leave it to the pros. Hiring a professional the safest way to decommission inactive water wells.

Tech Talk: Air-seeder opener options. New study helps producers identify the best opener for minimal soil disturbance.

EFP has good fit with ranch plans. Improved water quality and manure management just makes good business sense.



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a goal everyone involved in the program has worked hard to achieve and we feel it's one that deserves special recognition."

Input and action

After Slomp's address, meeting participants were broken into focus groups. Following a round-table discussion format, these focus groups provided opportunities for participants to identify potential program improvements and capture workable solutions for the future.

says Slomp. "Some topics involve discussion between participants with a variety of roles in the EFP program. In other cases, groups of facilitators, technical assistants, review committee members and others with specific roles are put together to focus on topics of mutual interest. This allows us to receive both specific and across-the-board sets of input from a broad cross-section of EFP players."


Moving forward

Regional meetings offer a chance to put a wide range of industry players together in one place to exchange ideas, says Slomp. "This is especially important to do early in the fiscal year so management can make the most effective use of those ideas over the coming year."

"Facilitators like Vermilion-area farmer Glen Smith participated in round table discussions."

"The focus group process is specifically designed to capture a broad range of opinion,"

However, regional meetings do not represent the only opportunity to offer feedback. "The lines of communication are always open," he says. "Participants can always provide input by calling a local workshop facilitator or by calling the AEEP head office directly."

Contact information for facilitators is available on the AEEP Web site at www.AlbertaEFP.com. The AEEP head office can be contacted by calling its toll-free number at 1-866-844-2337. 

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you would like information on any aspect of the Alberta Environmental Farm Plan Company, check the AEEP Web site at www.AlbertaEFP.com or contact the AEEP office. We welcome your comments, questions and suggestions. Articles in this *Report To Industry* newsletter may be reproduced. Acknowledgement of the source is appreciated.

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