



# REPORT TO INDUSTRY

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## AEPA and Alberta's changing agri-environmental landscape

*Two developments producers with EFPs will be interested in following*

Producers who have invested in an Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) have taken an important step in assessing and managing environmental risk on their farms and ranches. As the environment, and sustainability in general, continues to take on more importance in the Alberta business and policy landscape, those producers with EFPs will be interested in new developments.

One organization that will have a direct impact on this evolving landscape is the Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta (AEPA). One other development is the new Land Use Framework currently in the introduction stage.

AEPA will have a direct and immediate impact on agricultural producers. This organization has as its vision, an agricultural industry in Alberta that is profitable, thriving, accountable and recognized for its proactive, responsible environmental stewardship. Its mission is to facilitate a robust dialogue to reach a consensus on policy decisions that are balanced and fair and will impact both agriculture and the environment.

AEPA is an agricultural industry driven organization with many of the same stakeholders that have led the Alberta Environmental Farm Plan Company's (AEFP) on the ground efforts.

### AEPA background

AEPA, says the AEPA website, grew out of a need identified by many agricultural organizations for a transparent partnership between government and the agricultural industry, and for a collaborative approach to resolving agri-environmental issues.

Today the 15 member AEPA board provides direct links to 24 agricultural organizations, as well as government agencies, agri-forestry and others. AEPA is jointly chaired by Alberta's agricultural industry and the provincial government.

Kim Schmitt, who represents the conservation based organization Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) on the AEFP Board, also sits as a DUC representative on the AEPA board. That has given him a unique position to watch the evolution of both organizations as a new environmental

policy and industry development effort takes shape in the province.

AEPA is focused on policy input, while AEFP has piloted a different critical role, that being the engagement of producers and the nuts and bolts of program implementation and education.

While the future framework of the agri-environmental effort has yet to be written, Schmitt sees a strong need for both efforts to serve the future needs of Alberta producers including the more than 14,000 Alberta farmers and ranchers who have made the effort to complete an EFP and are working toward enhancing their on-farm environmental management.

"The common direction for both organizations is that farmers and ranchers have the opportunity to position their operations as premium stewards of land, water and biodiversity," says Schmitt.

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The common message is that a high level of stewardship makes good sense for now and in the future in all aspects of agricultural production and marketing. The AEPA efforts have brought forward important input on the whole area of ecosystem services. As well, that dialogue has taken the issue of stewardship closer to the marketplace and discussion of how producers can better capture value for their sustainability efforts.

AEFP Chairman Glenn Logan adds that the “The EFP delivery process has shifted to Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, but the education effort of industry and the need to engage the large group of people who have already made a commitment to stewardship, continues.

“The fact that the province is continuing to use the EFP as a prerequisite for accessing new funding support under the new Growing Forward effort sends a positive message for the many Alberta farmers and ranchers who have completed EFPs and for those considering their own farm plan in the future.”


The efforts of AEPA to work toward building an effective policy framework by which Alberta producers can become premium stewards of the environment, is generating good input, he adds, which is good news for both the agricultural industry and Alberta in general.

More information on AEPA is available on its website [www.agpartners.ca](http://www.agpartners.ca).

### Land use changes

Another emerging area of importance on the sustainability horizon in Alberta is the new Land Use Framework currently being implemented in the province.

AEFP’s Glenn Logan says many aspects of this legislation will be of direct interest to agricultural producers, including those who have demonstrated their commitment to stewardship by systematically assessing and managing their on-farm environment via the EFP process.

More information on the Land Use Framework is available at [www.landuse.alberta.ca](http://www.landuse.alberta.ca). 



## Perry Sawchuk takes an “aerial view” of the EFP program

*Veteran TA says the best assessment of the program’s success is at the big picture level*

Through dozens of producer workshops and even more on-farm visits, Westlock’s Perry Sawchuk has first-hand experience with many environmental improvements in Alberta’s rural areas. As a Technical Assistant (TA) with the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) Program, he can quickly recount specific examples of many of those improvements.

However, the best measure of success of the EFP effort, and no doubt the greatest source of pride for this staff member of the Agri-Environment Services Branch, is the collective network of producers and technical assistants that have resulted from it. (The Branch was formerly Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration or PFRA.)

In many ways the most powerful examples of the EFP program’s impact to date and perhaps into the future, says Sawchuk, is the fact that producers who have worked alongside other producers are quick to connect with their peers and the technical

assistant network to find answers as they manage their environmental efforts.

### The aerial example

One of the best tools Sawchuk found would help producers is aerial maps of the producer’s property. It’s a simple tool with big results, in many ways like the EFP itself.

Whenever possible, Sawchuk would work to provide producers completing their EFPs with aerial shots from the PFRA land database. For many it was the first time they had used this perspective of their farming and ranching operations to make management decisions.

“Producers usually knew their high risk areas,” he says, “but having that big picture view of their farm often got them started thinking about the potential for environmental improvements, and ultimately learning about what the EFP program was all about.”

### Second set of eyes

The other major activity for TAs is the follow-up visit, says Sawchuk. Producers have decided they want to make improvements, but want a second set of eyes to look at their plans.

“We are able to do that and to connect them with the appropriate technical knowledge. The experience of the past several years has resulted in a strong network of TAs from various government departments and industry organizations,” he says. “We can usually give producers a simple checklist of what they need to know and where to go to get the information they need.”

### Producer focus

The new delivery of the EFP will place more emphasis on producers taking the initiative, says Sawchuk. The same type of technical assistance is available, but producers will be more in charge of accessing it to get answers.

# New producer funding support details available under Growing Forward

## *What producers will want to know*

Alberta farmers and ranchers applying for financial support to make on-farm environmental improvements can access new funding and program information released on the Growing Forward programs.

The Growing Forward Stewardship Plan programs are being updated on a continual basis, says the Growing Forward website [www.growingforward.alberta.ca](http://www.growingforward.alberta.ca). Producers are asked to contact the Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) Ag Info Centre at 310-FARM (3276) for the most current program information.

Here's a quick recap of key details.

There are 12 separate program areas under the Growing Forward framework. They include: Bio-Security,

Business Management Skills and Tools, Energy Efficiency, Entrepreneur Development, Food Safety, Leadership, Lead Manufacturing and Automation, Livestock Welfare, Product and Market Development, Stewardship Plans, Traceability, and Water Management.

EFPs are required under the Stewardship Plans, designed to help producers manage natural resources and strengthen their competitive position by demonstrating environmental responsibility and plan for operational improvements that will reduce their environmental impact.

Stewardship Plans are targeted at Alberta taxpayers who make at least \$10,000 of gross income from farming. Individuals must have completed an Environmental Farm Plan (EFP). Assistance will be funded on a 50/50 cost share basis.

Producers will be required to complete an EFP and a risk report based on their EFP which will direct them to one of three management plans that best suit their operation. Opportunities to complete an EFP will be available through ARD.

## **EFP delivery changes**

It's important to note that the EFP program delivery has changed in Alberta. Delivery and technical assistance for the delivery of EFPs will be provided by local Alberta Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture (AESA) representatives, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) staff, or certain commodity groups. The Alberta Environmental Farm Plan Company (AEFP) has worked with AESA during the transition to the new phase of the program, but AEFP will not be involved in EFP delivery in the future.

## **Funding support**


Producers will likely be most interested in financial support. Completed work plans and project grant applications are submitted by producers to ARD.

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“From my experience, producers want to make improvements, but they realize improvements come at a cost,” he says. “One observation from the producer experience at workshops is that the best results are attained when producers come with a real focus for improvement. If they have that, they will get the most from the effort.”

Sometimes producers will feel like “we don't need a binder to tell us we have things to improve.” But when those improvements are put in perspective, most producers realize it is to their benefit to complete the EFP.

“One producer said after completing his EFP, ‘How can you go wrong when you're making improvements for yourself, your farm and your community.’”

The best farm plans are dynamic, he adds. “No operation is in a position where it does not have improvements that can be made. The true leaders are always making improvements. They will never stop.” 



Perry Sawchuk says producers appreciate a “second set of eyes” to look at their farm plans.

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Here are the key areas of support.

**Grazing and winter feeding management plan.** The grazing and winter feeding management plan is designed to help producers develop a work plan that maximizes use of their grassland resources and minimizes the impact on the environment.

## New on the AEFP website

The AEFP website at [www.AlbertaEFP.com](http://www.AlbertaEFP.com) is being updated with new information, all of which is available to AEFP partners and others for use.

**Growing Forward information.** The website also contains a direct link from the Home page to the Growing Forward website. This is the best place to get information and contact links on program information.

**New Annual Report.** The 2008-2009 AEFP Annual Report link is available on the website Home page.



**Newsletters.** *Report to Industry* newsletters provide important details of how the new generation of the EFP program will be managed.

**Editorial and technical resources.** The articles and other resources materials produced over the past several years of the program continue to be available.

Grant funding cost share of 50 percent of eligible expenses to complete the project are set at a maximum \$15,000 under this area.

**Integrated crop management plan.** The integrated crop management plan is designed to help producers develop a work plan that maximizes use of their crop inputs and minimizes the impact on the environment.

Grant funding to a maximum of \$20,000 is available on cost share of 50 percent of eligible expenses to complete the project.

**Manure management plan.** The manure management plan is designed to help producers develop a work plan that maximizes the use of their manure resource and minimizes the impact on the environment.

Funding under manure management is the highest of the three Stewardship Plan areas, set at a maximum of \$50,000 for 50 percent of eligible expenses.

## More information

More information is available through the Ag Info Centre at 310-FARM (3276), including details on specific categories available for funding support, additional information available outlining what is meant by specific Beneficial Management Practice (BMP), eligible and non-eligible costs and general information such as how the application process works.

**Note:** *The original launch date for Growing Forward – Stewardship Plans was September 1, 2009. To mitigate the delay in program launch, retroactive funding will be available to successful applicants for eligible expenses incurred back to September 1, 2009 to complete an approved project. If proceeding with a project prior to approval, an individual needs to be aware that they carry the risk of not receiving funding if their application is rejected. The period for retroactive funding for approved projects terminates March 1, 2010.*

## Rural Emergency Plan continues to be available

### *How producers can connect with the program*

Rural landowners who have faced a hazardous material spill or a fire know that the key to keeping control is the ability to respond effectively. The ability to act quickly, think clearly and follow a plan is critical.

That's exactly what the Rural Emergency Plan (REP) is designed to do. It's a simple tool created by farmers and those on the front lines of emergency response. Basically, it is a personalized, easy-to-use way for producers and rural landowners

to prepare for personal and environmental safety emergencies. It's also a way for emergency responders to know critically important information about rural properties so that they can respond to emergencies quickly, effectively and safely.

The best place to get information on the REP is on the website [www.ruralemergencyplan.com](http://www.ruralemergencyplan.com). Producers will find a do-it-yourself REP kit, background information on the REP program and information on program partners.

### Partners in Progressive Stewardship:



The Alberta Environmental Farm Plan Company  
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