

On Common Ground: Messages from the Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta

Crop Sector Working Group: Backgrounder

Submitted by the Crop Sector Working Group

The Crop Sector Working Group (CSWG) is an inclusive partnership of Alberta crop industry organizations that have come together to address environmental issues as they affect the crop sector. Our member organizations include:

- Alberta Wheat Commission
- Alberta Canola Producers Commission
- Alberta Pulse Growers Commission
- Alberta Barley Commission
- Alberta Oat, Rye and Triticale Association
- Alberta Potato Growers
- Alberta Sugar Beet Growers
- Alberta Oat Growers Commission

In response to increasing numbers of requests to provide input and representation on environmental initiatives in the province, the CSWG was formed in 2008 with funding from the Alberta Crop Industry Development Fund (ACIDF) and the canola, pulse and barley commissions. The three year contract with ACIDF was renewed in 2012 for a further three years with the new Alberta Wheat Commission contributing funds as well.

The vision of the CSWG is: *The Alberta Crop Sector will produce safe, high quality food, fuel and fibre ingredients competitively in an environmentally sustainable manner.*

The mission of the CSWG is: *To build a forum for discussion of common areas of environmental policy and to develop specific key messages on behalf of the crop sector to be delivered to specific target audiences.*

The CSWG meets twice a year to review objectives, strategies and progress on issues and to identify evolving issues. The groups also remain in contact via e-mail and phone calls as needed. Key issues for focus in 2013 are:

- Ecosystem Services
- Land-use Framework
- Sustainable Agriculture (Environmental Footprinting)
- Disposal of grain bags / agricultural plastics
- Growing Forward 2

We are actively engaged in policy discussions in Alberta working with other farm groups, governments, industry, and non-government organizations on these and other issues of concern to the crop sector. The CSWG, while not a partner of the Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta (AEPA) works closely with AEPA staff and partners on various committees and on the Land-use Framework and Water Advisory Teams.

The CSWG is a member of the Alberta Water Council (AWC) and is part of two project teams – Non-point Source Pollution (NPSP) and Riparian Land Conservation and Management. The NPSP team finalized its

report earlier this year with five recommendations; the report will be released soon. The Riparian Project draft report is nearing completion and will be sent out for stakeholder engagement this summer.

We are an active participant on the Bow River Phosphorus Management Plan Steering Committee and the Rural non-point source team looking at actions to manage and reduce phosphorus in the Bow River. Phosphorus pollution from the cropping activities is not a major risk, however, Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, which is leading the plan development, expects all contributing sectors to carry out actions to reduce phosphorus risk.

For the crop sector, pesticide residue in water is a bigger issue and the CSWG is looking at ways to address it, potentially through Growing Forward 2. Agricultural plastics are being used increasingly and disposal of the plastic is a problem with few recycling facilities and burning and burying in landfills an environmental concern. The CSWG is working with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development on cost effective solutions.

The identification of issues of concern to the crop sector, providing a common information base and bringing the crop sector voice to policy discussions are central to the CSWG and enable us to participate fully in agri-environmental policy development in Alberta.

Sharon McKinnon
Policy Program Coordinator
Crop Sector Working Group
E-mail: sharon.cswg@gmail.com