

Alberta Farm Sustainability Extension Working Group

Submitted by AFSE

More and more we are hearing from multi-national companies like McDonalds, Unilever, Kellogg's, General Mills, Anheuser-Busch and a host of others, that their customers are demanding products that contain sustainably sourced ingredients. In response to these demands, companies have developed key performance indicators or sustainability metrics that will be applied to the entire supply chain, starting with farms.

What does sustainability look like at the farm level? How will these sustainability metrics be applied to on-farm practices? How do we know what, if anything, about how the way we farm needs to change in order to maintain access to key markets? The answer is: we don't know, but we need to find out.

In March 2015, the Alberta Crops Sustainability Pilot Project was conducted with a group of 32 growers from across the province who underwent on-farm assessments in three major, internationally recognized sustainability certification programs.

These programs were:

- International Sustainability and Carbon Certification PLUS (ISCC PLUS)
 - o Utilized by farm groups across North America and is one of the first certification schemes to demonstrate compliance with the European Union's Renewable Energy Directives (RED) requirements
- Sustainable Agriculture Initiative (SAI) Farmer Self-Assessment 2.0
 - o The main food and beverage industry initiative supporting the development of sustainable agriculture initiatives worldwide and is utilized by companies such as McDonalds, Kelloggs, Heineken, General Mills and Anheuser-Busch.
- Unilever's Sustainable Agriculture Code (ULSAC).
 - o Created and tested by a network of practical agronomists, farmers, consultants and sustainability advisors and is applied to agricultural raw materials sourced by Unilever.

The responses from the pilot project initiated the development of the Alberta Farm Sustainability Extension (AFSE) Working Group which is comprised of Alberta Barley, Alberta Canola, the Alberta Pulse Growers and the Alberta Wheat Commission. AFSE conducted a province wide phone survey on international sustainability certification programs similar to the pilot project's on-farm assessments with the addition of the Sustainability Consortium's Key Performance Indicators for Grains and Oilseeds. The information gathered in the survey will be aggregated in a report and provide direction for AFSE's on-farm sustainability extension and education efforts.

The purpose of the AFSE working group is threefold.

- 1) Our farmer members want to better understand consumer expectations around agriculture and sustainability, and we believe that these consumer-driven programs are the most efficient and effective means to collect that information.
- 2) Farmers also want to contribute to this important conversation, and this project will prepare them to address consumer expectations in relation to the on-farm practices employed in modern agriculture today.

- 3) We want to assess grower readiness to meeting the requirements of various sustainability programs. As noted above, these sustainability programs are not about satisfying a niche market, but significant markets globally. A grower's ability to satisfy these requirements will determine whether or not they can access major markets in the future. Survey results will identify any areas of opportunity for improvement where farmers could consider making some changes. Currently, we are very confident that Alberta farmers are poised and ready to meet these requirements, as many are already compliant in practice and need only to make few changes or improve documentation. We trust this will be demonstrated in the many improvements that have already been made on farms across the province over the years.

Pilot Project video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kp5o2dF-n8k>

For more information contact

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