



**Agri-Environmental
Partnership of Alberta**
2011 Annual Review





PHOTO CREDIT: Bob Thomson

ABOUT THE AGRI-ENVIRONMENTAL PARTNERSHIP OF ALBERTA

The Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta (AEPA) is an inclusive partnership of agriculture industry, government and environmental stakeholders working together to proactively address agri-environmental issues from a policy perspective. This diverse group provides a forum for developing balanced policies that encourage a vibrant, profitable agriculture industry and a healthy, sustainable environment.

The AEPA grew out of a need identified by many agricultural organizations for a transparent partnership between government and the agriculture industry and for a collaborative approach to resolving agri-environmental issues. The AEPA was formed near the end of 2007, and its Board of Directors was established in January 2008.

The AEPA provides a unified voice on agri-environmental issues in Alberta. The members of its Board and their alternates provide direct communication links to numerous organizations including: crop and livestock groups; federal, provincial and municipal governments; and an environmental non-government organization. The Board has two co-chairs, one from Alberta's agriculture industry and the other from the Government of Alberta. The AEPA Secretariat carries out administrative functions for the AEPA.

Using a consensus-based approach, the AEPA identifies its agri-environmental priorities, sets broad policy directions and coordinates resources to address priority issues. It takes a strategic, proactive approach to achieving its desired outcomes, which are:

- Healthy agricultural landscapes that sustain both agricultural productivity and ecological integrity.
 - A safe and secure water supply for agricultural production.
 - Agricultural practices are managed to optimize productivity while minimizing risks to air, land and water.
- Alberta's agricultural producers are recognized as responsible environmental stewards.

By working together, the AEPA aims to ensure that agriculture and the environment both thrive in Alberta.

This report reviews the AEPA's accomplishments in 2011 and looks ahead to 2012.

VISION

Alberta's agriculture industry is profitable, accountable and recognized for its proactive, responsible environmental stewardship.

MISSION

The AEPA is an inclusive multi-stakeholder partnership of government, industry and public stakeholders working together to proactively address agri-environmental issues from a policy perspective.

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JACK SWAINSON

*Crop producer and Alberta Winter Wheat Producers
Commission Director*

Looking back over 2011, I'm very pleased with the many achievements of the Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta (AEPA).

Most importantly, we continued to provide balanced input on crucial agri-environmental issues. Our remarkably broad-based partnership – with representatives from the livestock and cropping sectors, a conservation agency, and municipal, provincial and federal governments – means we have many differing opinions around the Board table on each issue. And we aim at consensus, which gives added strength to our decisions.

As you'll see in the articles in this *Annual Review*, this past year was a year of dealing with land-use planning and water policy issues. Both topics are very complex, and it has been challenging to bring all the facts together and reach consensus so we can provide input on behalf of the whole partnership.

Through the work of our Land-Use Framework Advisory Team, we were able to provide our perspectives on the two regional land-use planning processes currently underway as part of Alberta's Land-Use Framework. In particular, we advocated for continued agricultural industry development opportunities and for voluntary approaches to encourage land stewardship that recognize agricultural landowner property interests.

Our new Water Advisory Team got started in 2011. I'm looking forward to hearing their views on vital issues like water allocation, watershed management plans, and wetland policy.

Another achievement in 2011 was the completion of the AEPA's strategic plan for 2012-15 and from this, development towards the 2012-13 business plan. Our plans for 2012 include continuing our work on land-use and water issues to make sure agriculture's voice is heard as policy is being developed.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development for its continued support of the AEPA Secretariat. And I thank Janet Dietrich, our General Manager, for her work; her organizational skills are a great asset. I would also like to welcome our new partner: Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, which is a major player in land management in Alberta.

And finally, I commend all the Board members and their alternates for their hard work and commitment throughout 2011, and especially for their open exchange of insights and viewpoints that is essential to the AEPA's success.

BRENDA BRINDLE

*Executive Director, Environmental Stewardship Division
Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development*

A key aspect of the AEPA's efforts in 2011 involved evaluating where we've been and deciding where to go from here. I believe we can be proud of what we've accomplished and confident in our ability to move forward.

Early in 2011, the AEPA Board examined the results of a survey of the AEPA partner organizations to assess the value being provided by the AEPA to those organizations. The survey results, which are highlighted in this *Annual Review*, showed the partners' commitment to the AEPA and its continuation.

Those results are indicative of why Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) continues to be involved in the partnership. For us, the AEPA provides an important forum for dialogue and consensus-building on issues such as land-use planning and agri-environmental priorities. Also, the AEPA's strategic priorities and future direction are in alignment with ARD's goals for a sustainable future for agriculture in this province.

The survey results, ARD's own positive experience with the AEPA, and the value that the AEPA provides to ARD were all factors in ARD's decision in 2011 to continue to provide in-kind support for the AEPA Secretariat. That support enables the Secretariat to carry out administrative activities for the AEPA and will also allow the AEPA to apply for project-based funding from various agencies.

Just as ARD's support for the Secretariat is part of our contribution to the partnership, the other partner organizations are contributing too. For instance, Alberta Milk has been the AEPA's grant holder from the beginning, and all the partners cover the expenses of their own AEPA representatives. This type of ongoing support underlines the value the partners see in the AEPA's work.

With the AEPA's strategic plan for the next three years now in place, it will be exciting to watch how the AEPA progresses in the years ahead. Agri-environmental issues are becoming increasingly complex and interconnected. More than ever before, Alberta's agricultural community needs the different perspectives around the AEPA table to explore diverse options and find effective solutions. I know the dedication of everyone involved will ensure the AEPA continues to be an effective voice on agri-environmental issues.

Progress on the AEPA's Strategic Priorities

In 2011, the AEPA continued to work on its three strategic priorities for 2010 to 2012. As well, the Board developed a strategic plan for 2012 to 2015.

PRIORITY 1: THE AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY IS A CREDIBLE PARTNER AND ENGAGED IN LAND-USE DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES, AND IS ABLE TO BE RESPONSIVE TO CRITICAL SHORT-TERM POLICY PRIORITIES.

This priority was a major focus in 2011, with two AEPA teams – the Land-use Framework (LUF) Advisory Team and the Water Advisory Team – involved in the challenging agri-environmental issues around land-use in the province.

INPUT ON REGIONAL LAND-USE PLANNING ISSUES

Alberta's agriculture industry manages about one-third of the private land in Alberta so the industry has a vital interest in land-use decision-making. The Government of Alberta's Land-use Framework (LUF), released in 2008, provides a comprehensive approach to planning and management of private and public lands in Alberta. To ensure that agriculture's voice is reflected in LUF processes, the AEPA created its LUF Advisory Team in 2009.

In 2011, this team focused on the regional land-use planning processes now underway as part of LUF. Based on the team's work, the AEPA provided: consensus feedback on the draft Lower Athabasca Regional Plan; consensus key messages concerning the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council's advice on the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan; and a letter to the Government of Alberta noting the AEPA's support for land-use planning and emphasizing important considerations for agriculture.



PHOTO CREDIT: Alberta Agriculture



PHOTO CREDIT: Darwin Chambers

Some of the AEPA's key viewpoints on LUF-related issues are:

- The AEPA supports effective land-use planning as a tool to address agri-environmental issues, guided by clear Government of Alberta policies that integrate water resource management, the efficient use of land, land stewardship, biodiversity and conservation management.
- The AEPA supports continued agricultural industry development opportunities and voluntary approaches to encouraging land stewardship that recognize landowner property interests.
- The AEPA emphasizes the need for continued early engagement with the agriculture sector in the development of land-use planning policies. This engagement is necessary to prevent unintended consequences to agriculture and to ensure agriculture is able to continue to operate in an economically, environmentally and socially sustainable manner.

EVALUATING WATER ISSUES

Water issues have always been a high priority for the AEPA. In 2010, the LUF Advisory Team identified water as a growing concern, especially with respect to water allocation and Alberta's draft wetland policy. So in 2011, the Board created the Water Advisory Team.

This team's purpose is to proactively inform and engage agriculture stakeholders in order for them to participate effectively in provincial water quality and supply initiatives, and the development of water policies related to agriculture.

Since becoming established, the team has developed its engagement strategy and work plan. Because of the large number of water initiatives that could potentially affect agriculture and the limited time and resources available, the team has developed a process to guide its work. This process begins with the team identifying priority water issues relevant to the agricultural sector. This issue list is a 'living document' that will evolve as new issues and priorities emerge.

So far, the team identified and has been developing key messages on three priority water issues: water allocation, water/watershed management plans/frameworks, and wetland policy.

PRIORITY 2: PROVIDE INPUT TO A POLICY ENVIRONMENT THAT WILL HELP THE AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY ACHIEVE ENVIRONMENTAL OUTCOMES THROUGH INNOVATION AND NEW BUSINESS MODELS.

As part of its efforts on this priority, the AEPA has been providing input and insights to Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) to help inform the development of Growing Forward 2, the successor to the Growing Forward agricultural policy framework which expires on March 31, 2013. In 2011, the AEPA provided its perspectives to ARD on the key issues related to the framework and the types of tools that would be effective in agri-environmental programming. The AEPA's discussions with ARD will continue in 2012 as the development of Growing Forward 2 moves ahead.

PRIORITY 3: THE AEPA WILL ENGAGE AND BUILD CAPACITY WITH ITS INDUSTRY PARTNERS SO THAT THE AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY IS A CREDIBLE PARTNER IN AGRI-ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY DECISIONS.

The AEPA addressed Priority 3 in a number of ways in 2011, including a water-focused AgForum, a survey of the partner organizations' views of the AEPA, and development of the AEPA's 2012-15 strategic plan.

ANNUAL AGFORUM

One of the ways the AEPA builds understanding of agri-environmental policy issues within the industry partners is through its Agri-Environmental Forums, or 'AgForums.' The third annual AgForum was held in March 2011 in Leduc.

The 2011 AgForum's theme was 'Building and Sustaining Relationships with Alberta's Water Policy Influencers.' A key component of the event was a session in which representatives from the Alberta Water Council (AWC) and several Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils (WPACs) shared their perspectives on water and water policy. These

organizations have input into Alberta's water policy scene – the AWC is a provincial multi-stakeholder council which advises on the implementation of Alberta's *Water for Life* strategy, and the WPACs are regional multi-stakeholder organizations that participate in creating, implementing and assessing watershed management plans for Alberta's major river basins.

PARTNER SURVEY

In early 2011, the Board reviewed the results of a survey of its member organizations. The AEPA had commissioned this survey in 2010 to evaluate the current functioning of the partnership and the partners' perceptions of the AEPA's effectiveness and value.

Some highlights of the survey results include:

- The vast majority (98%) of respondents agreed with the AEPA's role to address and align environmental priorities through strategic and coordinated actions to ensure that agriculture and the environment will flourish in Alberta.
- Most respondents (91%) felt the AEPA has been moderately to very effective in fulfilling its intended role.
- Most respondents (91%) had high levels of agreement with the relevance of the AEPA's three strategic priorities.
- Over three-quarters (76%) of respondents felt that AEPA Board members speak with a unified voice on the consensus decisions made by the Board.
- The majority of respondents (89%) were satisfied to very satisfied with the level of engagement provided to their organization in the AEPA.

PLANNING FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS

The positive results from the partner survey and ARD's decision in 2011 to continue its in-kind support for the AEPA Secretariat helped to set the stage for the AEPA to finalize its 2012-15 strategic plan.

The plan includes updates to the AEPA's vision, mission and mandate statements, and desired outcomes. The updated strategic priorities for 2012-15 will be:

1. To engage in land-use, water and agri-environmental policy development processes.
2. To provide policy input on innovations and business models that will help the agriculture industry achieve AEPA-desired outcomes.
3. To engage and build understanding with members and industry partners to enable the agriculture industry to be a credible partner in agri-environmental policy development.

In support of its strategic plan and its annual business plans, the AEPA also initiated a review of its communication activities to ensure better alignment with the AEPA's key objectives and future direction.



PHOTO CREDIT: Rick Tailleu

AEPA Board Members in 2011

The members of the AEPA's Board of Directors and their alternates are committed to two-way communication between the organizations they represent and the Board, to enable the AEPA to develop a unified voice on priority agri-environmental issues. The AEPA thanks the representatives who departed the Board in 2011 and welcomes the new members who joined the Board during this past year.

Board Member/Alternate	Organizations Represented
Jack Swainson	Industry Co-Chair
LIVESTOCK INDUSTRY GROUPS	
Herman Bulten/Diana O'Hara	Alberta's 8 diversified livestock organizations (Alberta Elk Commission, Alberta Goat Breeders Association, Alberta Lamb Producers, Alberta Reindeer Association, Alberta Whitetail and Mule Deer Association, Bison Producers of Alberta, Horse Industry Association of Alberta, Ostrich Association of Alberta)
Lorrie Jespersen/Allan Child	Alberta Milk
Will Kingma	Alberta Pork
Martin Van Diemen/David Hyink	Alberta's 4 poultry organizations (Alberta Chicken Producers, Alberta Egg Producers, Alberta Hatching Egg Producers, Alberta Turkey Producers)
Rich Smith/Bryan Walton	Alberta Beef Producers, Alberta Cattle Feeders' Association
CROP INDUSTRY GROUPS	
Terry Young/Ward Toma	Alberta Canola Producers Commission
Neil Boyd/Leanne Fischbuch	Alberta Pulse Growers Commission
Wayne Tuck/Rick Istead	Alberta Winter Wheat Producers Commission
Bernie Klammer/John Wozniak	Alberta Barley Commission
Tom Jackson	Alberta Oat, Rye and Triticale Association
ENVIRONMENTAL NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION	
Morgan Stromsmoe/Tracy Scott	Ducks Unlimited Canada
GOVERNMENTS	
Soren Odegard/Pat Gordeyko	Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties
Ernie Hui/Rick Ostertag	Alberta Environment and Water
Colin Jeffares/Brenda Brindle	Government Co-Chair, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development
Dan Wilkinson/Kate Lindsay	Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
LIAISON	
Rodney Dlugos/Fiona Briody	Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

The AEPA acknowledges the in-kind support of its member organizations and of the Crop Sector Working Group and Intensive Livestock Working Group. The AEPA also thanks the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency for its financial support.

Contact the AEPA

For more information about the Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta, please contact the AEPA Secretariat:

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Or visit the AEPA's website, www.agpartners.ca



PHOTO CREDIT: Mike Popowicz (top) and Mike Hittinger (bottom)