

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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Alberta Farm Sustainability Extension Working Group (AFSE)

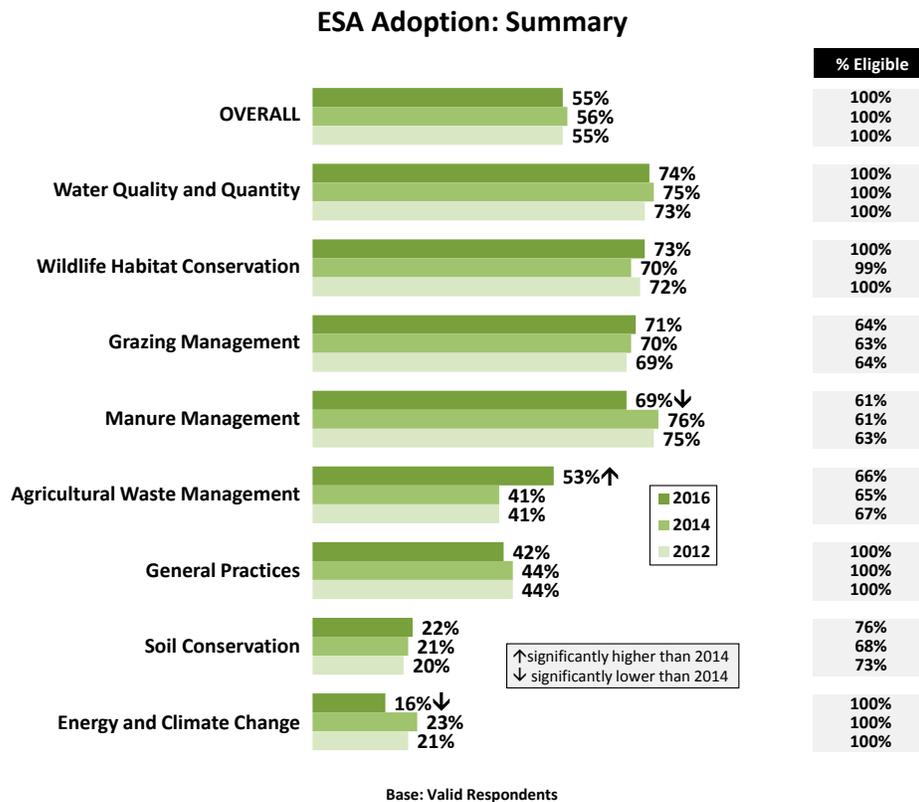
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2016 Alberta Environmentally Sustainable Tracking Survey

Submitted by Alberta Agriculture and Forestry

The Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture Tracking Survey (ESATS)¹, completed by Ipsos Reid for Alberta Agriculture and Forestry (AF), measures 500 Alberta producers' awareness and adoption of environmentally sustainable agriculture (ESA) practices. This particular survey has been part of the Ministry reporting system since 2012 and three survey waves have been conducted during this timeframe. The following graph highlights the key environmental issue areas examined and a comparison of the aggregate results from 2012, 2014, and 2016:



In the 2012 and 2014 survey, there were 41 ESA practices; however, in 2016 this changed to 40. This change, due to a programming adjustment, resulting in a high performing practice with high eligibility (extending the grazing season) being removed and caused the significant decrease that we see in the Manure Management area. However, when removing this question from the 2012 and 2014 surveys there is no significant decrease between 2014 and 2016. The eligibility of a practice depends upon the

¹ Ipsos Reid conducted a telephone survey with a random and representative sample of 500 Alberta agricultural producers between January 11th and 22th, 2016. The final data were weighted to ensure the overall sample's regional and gross farm sales composition reflects that of the actual distribution of farms in Alberta based on the 2011 Census of Agriculture. With a sample of 500, results are considered accurate to within ±4.4 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire population of Alberta farms been surveyed.

producer's operation. Therefore, producers are not asked questions that would not apply to their farm, if a producer does not have livestock then they will not be asked livestock related questions.

There are no significant differences in the overall adoption score over the 6 years which indicates that producers are committed to maintaining the ESA practices that they are using on their farms.

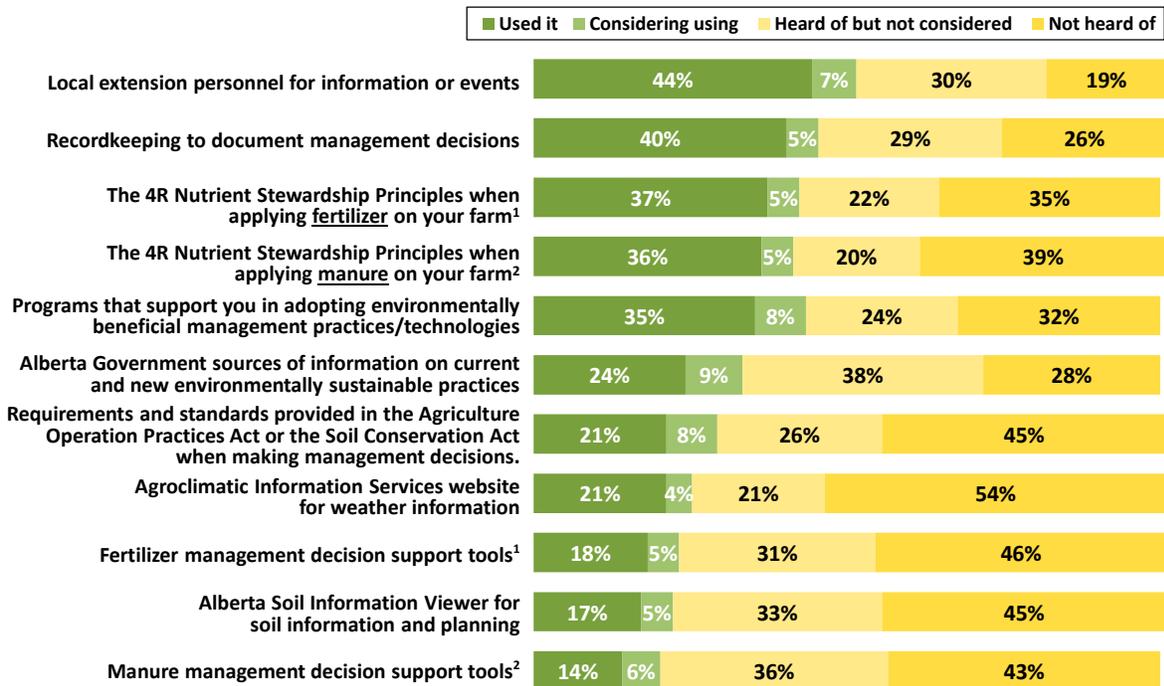
KEY POINT: In general, adoption tends to be higher on larger operations (i.e. with gross farms sales of \$250,000 or more) at 60% overall adoption of eligible practices. It is worth noting that, while operations in the \$250,000+ gross farm sales category account for only 20% of total farms in Alberta, these operations manage the vast majority of livestock and land in the province. In the lower performing areas, adoption of practices is higher in this demographic: soil conservation (33%), and energy and climate change (23%). This is positive moving forward, as this could indicate that there is momentum to see an increase in adoption within these areas.

The ESA Tracking Survey also explores two key extension areas:

1. Awareness and use of various decision making support resources and tools,
2. Preferred channels for accessing information on environmental farm stewardship.

These areas are not part of the Ministry's annual reporting system; however, they are of particular interest because they are useful in providing direct feedback to some of the programs and services that AF staff deliver; as well as, how producers like to hear about new information. This provides AF with an idea of what tools and resources producers are using and how they would like to receive more information about them.

Decision Making Support Resources and Tools



Base: All respondents (n=500) / ¹Applied commercial fertilizer (n=400) / ²Applied manure (n=250)

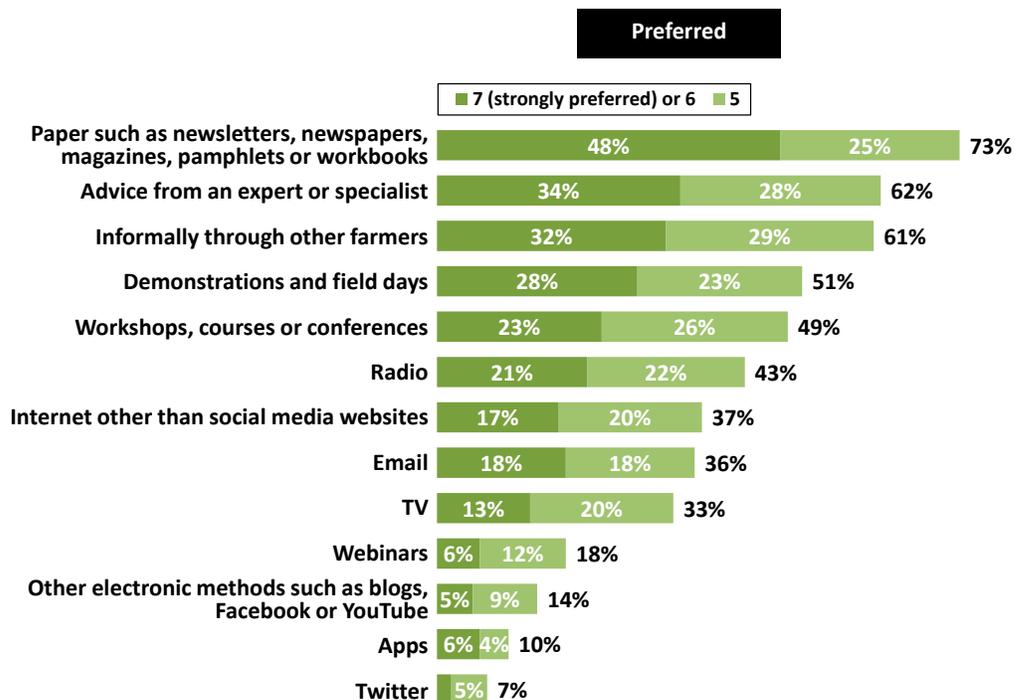
Q12. NEW. For each of the following, please tell me which statement best describes how familiar you are with it or if you've used it to help you make management decisions. Would you say, you have not heard of it, you have heard of it but haven't considered using it, you are considering using it, or you have used it?

Agriculture is a complex business and it is important to continue providing resources and tools that can help producers make decisions on their farms. This table provides AF with a good view of success and challenges or opportunities moving forward. Those areas with higher “not heard of” results could benefit from an extension effort that will increase awareness of the resource or tool. Areas that have a higher “heard of but not considered” would benefit from providing more in-depth messaging and extension on how the tool could support producer’s decision making processes.

KEY POINT: The ESATS shows that there is a strong relationship between producer respondent participation in extension and training activities, and higher adoption of eligible ESA practices (62%). Additionally, there is also a relationship between producer respondent use of AF programs and higher adoption of eligible ESA practice (60%).

The following table provides ideas on how to get these messages to producers:

Preferred Channels for Getting Information on Environmental Stewardship



Base: All respondents (n=500)

Q68. On a scale of 1 to 7, where '1' means not at all preferred and '7' means strongly preferred, please indicate your preference for each of the following methods for getting information on environmental farm stewardship.

It is notable, however, that larger operations (\$250K+ gross farm sales) – the ones that manage the vast majority of land and livestock – show a much stronger preference for Internet other than social media sites (55%) and email (52%).

The full report is now available on Ropin the Web for download:

[http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/aesa15117](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/aesa15117).

If you have any questions or would like to further discuss the report, please contact Laura Ung at (toll-free 310-0000) 780-980-4200 or by email laura.ung@gov.ab.ca.



Partner Profile: Alberta Cattle Feeders' Association

Submitted by ACFA

The Alberta Cattle Feeders' Association (ACFA) has been the voice of cattle feeders in the province of Alberta since 1973. We address feedlot, market, trade, and competitive issues and provide a forum for policy development. Through an open and transparent process, the ACFA welcomes the bridging of partnerships to move the industry forward.

Cattle Feeding in Alberta

The feedlot is the most intensive component of the beef production chain, where a significant portion of value is added. Alberta's feedlots operate with leading-edge management systems designed to capture the benefits of the beef production chain and the genetic base.

Alberta is Canada's largest beef producing province.

- 180 feedlots (of 1,000 head or more)
- 1.74 million head annual output
- 70.5% of Canada's fed cattle production

Alberta's feedlots are located in close proximity to the country's largest meat packers and processors. Two-thirds of Canada's cattle slaughter capacity is located in south-central Alberta. This direct link captures value through the market chain. Cattle feeders' knowledge and expertise make them leaders on a broad range of issues critical to industry competitiveness.

Alberta cattle feeders excel in their profession through the following industry management practices:

- Feeding cattle with a focus on animal health, nutrition, and well being
- Being flexible and feeding for specific markets
- Procuring a variety of weights and classes of cattle and thereby supporting the entire cow calf and yearling industries
- Buying feed grain and co-product from a variety of sources, enabling these industries to enjoy alternate markets for product

Our Mission

To aggressively pursue innovative and collaborative solutions for a thriving Alberta beef industry on behalf of Alberta Cattle Feeders' Association members.

Our Strategic Priorities

- Working with partners to access and develop markets that maximize value for our members
- Enhancing competitiveness by reducing regulatory burdens
- Identifying and advocating for research priorities that support our vision and mission
- Working to improve industry relations, governance, and funding
- Building our membership by delivering value

Our 4 Pillars

- Animal Care
- Animal Health and Production
- People and Communities
- Environment

Cattle feeders enhance environmental stewardship:

- ACFA led the drive for a Feedlot Emergency Preparedness Plan to protect animals, the environment, and human health in case of a disease outbreak or natural disaster
- Participating in environmental impact studies such as Alberta Agriculture and Resource Development's Livestock Impact on Groundwater Quality in Alberta
- Regular interaction with the Natural Resource Conservation Board on environmental initiatives
- Active members of the Intensive Livestock Working Group and Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta

For more information, go to <http://www.cattlefeeders.ca> or call (403) 250-2509.