

# Chapter 1: Introduction



*The agricultural region of Western Canada is a landscape full of opportunities. With an expanding world population and economy, global demand for agricultural products will continue to increase. Much of Canada's primary and value-added production needed to meet future demands for agriculture and agri-food products is expected to come from the Prairies. Livestock production is projected to increase significantly, while crop production will diversify and intensify. More processing of agricultural products will occur in the Prairie region as it capitalizes on emerging opportunities in an expanding global market.*

Comprising more than 80% of Canada's agricultural land, the Prairies have the natural resource base needed to produce abundant food and fibre. Increasing production and processing of agricultural goods in the Prairie region provides many opportunities for farmers and ranchers, while also posing many challenges for the sustainable management of the resource base. The productive

capacity of the land base required to meet future demands will come from practices such as improved crop and range management, intensified crop rotations, increased use of crop inputs, reduced summerfallow and improved management of environmentally sensitive lands. These opportunities and challenges for the agriculture and agri-food industry must be examined from economical,

sociological and environmental perspectives.

In 1935, in the midst of the Dirty Thirties, the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA) was created to help Prairie people develop and promote systems of farm practice and land utilization that would provide greater economic security. Today, the Prairie Agricultural Landscapes (PAL)



*Across Western Canada, crop production is diversifying and intensifying as more producers capitalize on new market opportunities.*

project will assist PFRA as it prepares for a significant expansion and adjustment of the Prairie agriculture and agri-food sector. As such, the PAL project marks another stage in PFRA's ongoing commitment to help Prairie people take advantage of new opportunities to manage land resources in a productive and sustainable manner.

The importance of the Prairie Agricultural Landscapes project increased when the Canadian Agri-Food Marketing Council (CAMC) announced its target for Canadian exports of 4% of global agriculture and agri-food trade by 2005. This goal was endorsed by the federal and provincial agriculture Ministers. The expectation of significant growth implies that agricultural output must increase through intensification and improved land management practices.

The results of the Prairie Agricultural Landscapes project will provide the basis for strategic decisions within PFRA's priority activity area *Better Land Quality in the Rural Prairies* established in its Strategic Framework. Furthermore, the PAL project addresses a recommendation of the Auditor General's report (Chapter 24, December 1997) which stated: "*The Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration should define and*

*prioritize current and emerging land and water management issues on the Prairies ... to develop strategic objectives with measurable outcomes*".

As PFRA examines how landscape quality and resource management contribute to a

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robust, growing and diversified Prairie economy, it is important to recognize that management and stewardship of private land rests in the hands of thousands of individuals. The knowledge, creativity, skill and commitment to conservation and resource management of each landowner/operator determines the vitality of our agricultural landscapes. From PFRA's perspective, it was therefore essential to involve an advisory group - a Blue Ribbon Panel - comprised of leading producers, academics and researchers, to guide the PAL study and to help PFRA define strategies that meet the needs of landowners.

The PAL project renews PFRA's commitment to work with Prairie people in the management and stewardship of agricultural land. The project began in the spring of 1998 and has been implemented in two distinct phases. Phase one, the technical information review, involved contri-

butions from more than 20 PFRA staff as well as input from representatives of other branches of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, provincial governments, universities and other individuals and agencies. Their analysis is contained in this report - *Prairie Agricultural Landscapes: A Land Resource Review*. The report provides a summary of the current state of land resource management in the Prairie region of Canada. It incorporates a literature review and analysis of land management systems and adds a unique regional perspective, based on landscape units, to the array of resource assessments published over the past two decades.



*The individual land steward's knowledge, creativity, skill and commitment to conservation and resource management, determines the viability of Prairie agricultural landscapes.*



The second phase of PAL will culminate in a companion report, *Prairie Agricultural Landscapes: Foundations for Growth*. This report will identify the potential for agricultural change and expansion, the projected spatial distribution of agricultural change and the associated challenges for responsible management of land and water resources.

These are exciting times for agriculture. It's an industry with great potential; an industry benefiting from new technology and innovation; and an industry that contributes in a very significant way to the economic health of Canada. Following in the spirit of L.B. Thomson, a pioneer of resource management in the Prairies, PFRA must work in co-operation with farmers and

ranchers to be successful. PFRA must take on the challenges to help the agriculture industry capture the many opportunities and to identify the solutions for resource management. Governments and producers need to work together to make Prairie landscapes more productive today, and into the future. ■