

Environmental Farm Planning Questions and Answers

1. Why does the Agricultural Policy Framework (APF) include an environmental component?

The agricultural sector – from producers to processors and wholesalers to retailers – has long recognized that agriculture must co-exist sustainably with the natural environment to ensure its long-term vitality and profitability.

Agricultural producers have shown they are admirable stewards of Canada's environmental resources. They use many good management practices that increase their profitability and benefit the environment. However, more can be done to conserve the environment. Governments and producers are working together under the APF to reduce agricultural risks and provide benefits to Canada's water resources, soil, air and bio-diversity.

2. What is the role of the Saskatchewan Agri-Environmental Advisory Council?

The Council is composed of experienced and respected agricultural leaders who are guiding the design and delivery of APF environmental programming that is appropriate for Saskatchewan.

The Council advises federal and provincial officials on matters including:

- identifying current environmental challenges facing Saskatchewan producers and trends that will have a future impact on the industry;
- providing a long-term view of the role of environmental programming in encouraging adoption of beneficial management practices and enhancing public confidence in producers' commitment to environmental stewardship;
- providing a producer perspective and input into the design and delivery of an environmental farm plan program for Saskatchewan; and
- promoting producer participation in environmental farm planning and other agri-environmental programs.

3. What is an EFP?

An Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) is a management tool that producers can use to increase their awareness of environmental issues, to examine their current production practices, to identify potential risks, and to develop a practical plan to manage those risks on their farm operation.

4. Are producers required to complete an EFP?

No. The EFP program is strictly voluntary. However, it is hoped that there will be widespread producer participation in the program over the next few years.

5. Why should I do an EFP?

Developing an EFP for your farm shows that you care about environmental protection and want to be a good steward of the resources you are managing. EFPs provide a way to increase your awareness of environmental issues, to improve your environmental management practices, to foster public recognition of your stewardship efforts and to positively position Canadian agricultural products in world markets. Completion of an EFP is also an eligibility requirement if you wish to access cost-shared funding to implement environmentally beneficial management practices (BMPs) on your farm.

6. What is a BMP?

BMP stands for Beneficial Management Practice. BMPs are practical agricultural management practices that either minimize or mitigate possible risks to the environment posed by agricultural production. The national list of BMPs is being reviewed to select those that are appropriate for agricultural conditions in Saskatchewan.

7. What agricultural practices are included on the BMP list?

The national BMP list includes 30 categories dealing with air, water, soil or biodiversity. Within these categories, there are 70 management practices that are eligible for incentive funding. The list of BMPs selected for use in Saskatchewan will be available for the upcoming EFP workshops.

8. Why is there partial funding for BMPs?

Making changes to your farm and implementing BMPs that protect the environment often costs money. The general public, as well as producers, benefit from environmental protection, so it is reasonable to expect that both share the costs.

9. Can producers access funding for BMPs without completing an EFP?

No. Producers must first complete an EFP to identify environmental issues on their operations and to plan appropriate measures to deal with these. Then, if they proceed to have their action plan reviewed and endorsed by an independent third party, they will be eligible for funding for the adoption of BMPs on their farm operation.

10. How do I complete an EFP?

Producers attend two workshops to complete an individual EFP. At the introductory workshop, a facilitator assists those producers attending: 1) to assess the soils on their farms and to examine local environmental issues; 2) to use the EFP workbook to assess their current farming practices; and 3) to complete their Environmental Farm Action Plan (EFAP).

After completing these steps, producers attend a second workshop to consider different solutions to any problems that have been identified. Once the plan is completed, the producer can ask for it to be submitted anonymously to a Peer Review Committee made up of other farmers. The Peer group will note any high risks that have not been identified and may suggest solutions. Once this process is complete, the plan will be endorsed and the producer can proceed to implement the action plan.

11. Are government agencies involved in delivering Saskatchewan's EFP program?

While both the federal and provincial levels of government are involved in the funding of this initiative, actual program delivery will be done by an independent agricultural group.

12. Who will be delivering the EFP program in Saskatchewan?

The Saskatchewan Agri-Environmental Council has endorsed the Provincial Council of Agricultural, Development and Diversification Boards Inc. (PCAB) to be the third-party delivery agent for the program. PCAB was incorporated in 1999 and is also currently delivering the Saskatchewan Fieldworker Policy (rat control program) in cooperation with Rural Municipalities.

13. Why was PCAB selected for delivery of the EFP program?

During 2003, PCAB developed the EFP workbook that will be used at producer workshops. PCAB then expressed interest in program delivery and received support from various groups including Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association, Agricultural Producers of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan Livestock Association and the Canola Development Commission. The newly formed Saskatchewan Agri-Environmental Advisory Council also has supported PCAB as delivery agent for Saskatchewan's EFP program.

14. When will the EFP program be operational in Saskatchewan?

It is expected that the first series of workshops will roll out in early December 2004. Details of times and places will soon be available.

15. Do I have to disclose the contents of my EFP?

Your completed EFP is similar to other business planning documents used in managing your farming operation. The EFP process is confidential. You decide whether to share this information with others.

16. Is there financial assistance to complete an EFP?

No. An EFP is a planning process for your farming operation and as such, there is no financial assistance for its completion. However, EFP program funding will cover the program costs of producing the EFP workbook, arranging the training workshops and for the services of workshop facilitators. As well, producers pay no fee for becoming involved in EFP. A completed, peer-reviewed and endorsed action plan will open the door for producers to access funding to cost-share the adoption of BMPs to address issues identified in the environmental planning process.

17. Is there any type of public or private recognition for completing an EFP?

In other provinces, EFP recognition has been given in various ways. EFP programs may provide gate signs to producers who wish to advise the public that they have completed an EFP. Producers who sell directly to consumers, such as roadside stands for fresh produce, may wish to advertise that they have completed an EFP.

18. Is there an expiry date for a completed EFP? Does a completed EFP have to be renewed and if so how often?

No, EFPs do not have an expiry date. However, conditions and farm operations change, perhaps through adding a new enterprise or taking on the management of additional farmland. Environmental issues also evolve over time. Environmental farm action plans should be updated to reflect these changes, to monitor progress, and to document continuous improvement in environmental management practices. In order to keep EFPs as “living documents” producers should likely review their EFP each year to see if any updating is needed.

19. Does documentation and acknowledgement of environmental risks and liabilities in my completed EFP change my legal liability?

No, an EFP does not affect whether or not a farming operation is complying with regulatory requirements. However, completion of an EFP does constitute some measure of “due diligence,” demonstrating that the producer has taken the time to assess his or her management practices and has identified areas where improvements may be needed.

20. Will regulatory agencies be aware of any contravention of their regulations due to the EFP process?

No. The EFP process is confidential and the EFP is the property of the producer. However, one benefit of doing an EFP is that the producer becomes aware of existing regulations that may impact the farming operation and if desired, can then take action.

21. Financial institutions often require an environmental assessment before approving a loan. Will completion of an EFP replace or supercede this requirement?

No, financial institutions will decide what type of information they require in deciding whether to make a loan. However, if a producer has completed an EFP, this may be seen to be a higher level of environmental management.

22. Do agricultural producers support the introduction of an EFP program in Saskatchewan?

The EFP program is voluntary, so all those producers who complete an individual EFP will do so because they see advantages for their farm operation. Producer groups, including the newly formed Saskatchewan Agri-Environmental Council, have supported initiation of an EFP program. The 15-member producer Council was established to guide environmental programming under the Agricultural Policy Framework. It has endorsed a voluntary, confidential EFP program using the workbook/facilitated workshop approach and peer review process. The Council is encouraging widespread producer participation in the EFP program.

23. How does Saskatchewan's EFP program compare to those in other provinces?

EFP programs are already in operation, or are beginning, in most provinces. Each EFP program has some special characteristics that meet the needs of producers in that jurisdiction. The Saskatchewan program will be very similar to programs in several other provinces. This common national approach has the advantage that an "Environmental Farm Plan" will have a similar meaning across Canada and can thus be used to advantage in marketing Canadian agricultural products.