



August 30, 2006

Honourable Chuck Strahl
Minister of Agriculture & Agri-Food
Government of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

The Honourable Doug Horner
Minister of Agriculture, Food & Rural Development
Government of Alberta
229 Legislature Building, 10800 97 Ave
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Ministers Strahl and Horner:

Re: National Farm Stewardship Program

We are writing to you in support of the Alberta Environmental Farm Plan Company (AEFP) regarding the urgent need for clarification on the extension of the National Farm Stewardship Program for Alberta farmers and ranchers. AEFP's corporate membership is comprised of twenty-two farmer and conservation organizations in Alberta of which the Alberta Barley Commission is one.

The Canada-Alberta Farm Stewardship Program (CAFSP), the operational program of the environmental sub-chapter of the Agricultural Policy Framework (APF) in this province, has been a key driver of environmental progress on the farm in the short time since it was introduced in Alberta in February 2005. On behalf of 17,500 Alberta barley producers we appreciate the efforts of the organization and the positive outcomes for agriculture and the environment in Alberta.

We must however urgently request an extension of CAFSP and its impact on this valuable program. The current APF expires on March 31, 2008 and while the federal and provincial government signatories have each initiated an internal process to prepare a new policy to support agriculture it may arrive to late for this program. Producers need to receive assurances soon regarding the extension of the CAFSP funding process beyond March 31, 2008 because there is a real possibility that they will not continue participating in the Environmental Farm Plan process into 2007. Given the time involved in CAFSP application, approval and implementation they will not see potential in the program beyond 2007, thus there is only a one "crop year window" remaining in which producers can implement many of the improvements.

In Alberta we have chosen to focus our environmental farm planning efforts on awareness building and education leading to long-term practice change. That practice change is beginning to occur, however it could be impacted by uncertainty around public funding for

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on-farm practice change. We feel it is wiser to ingrain stewardship principles and awareness, rather than rush to spend the program monies in a three-year time frame.

Our surveys show finances as the number one barrier to Beneficial Management Practices (BMP) implementation, so program uncertainty will impact practice change. Participants would be discouraged from participating in the EFP program because of the inconsistency of support. We have also seen studies that indicate the use of EFP, while improving environmental benefits for all Canadians, is not rewarded in the marketplace in the form of higher prices. The studies have shown that while the environmental benefits are appreciated they are not rewarded at the consumer purchase level.

We ask your consideration of these key points:

- Since its inception, CAFSP has been a major driver for participation in the EFP program. As you are aware, in order to qualify for CAFSP funding support, producers must complete an Environmental Farm Plan (EFP). To date in Alberta, more than 3,817 Alberta farmers have completed a reviewed EFP and are thereby eligible to apply for CAFSP funding support.
- In terms of financial commitment, this participation level translates into major implementation of beneficial management practices. Thanks to CAFSP, Alberta producers submitted 1,824 applications requesting \$8.4 million to date. This represents nearly \$20 million spent by producers on the beneficial management practices covered by the CAFSP cost-sharing initiative.
- There is still a large amount of money to be used, \$21.6 million as of July 2006. There is a real danger that this will not be accessed if producers feel they can not get applications processed or accessed prior to the program ending.

The Alberta Barley Commission urges this issue be dealt with as soon as possible. We recognize that this process takes place in the context of larger discussions. However, we would not wish to see this important program slowed or hampered by the broader, more complex discussions.

Thank you for your consideration. We would welcome an opportunity to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely,

Mike Leslie
General Manager