A new environmental sustainability initiative

Canada's Green Plan

As part of this new environmental sustainability initiative, The Green Plan will enable the Minister of Agriculture, on behalf of the Government of Canada, to enter into cost shared agreements with the provinces to implement preventative and corrective programs to address environmental sustainability issues in the agri-food sector.

The actions to be undertaken through these agreements will reflect the diverse needs and opportunities that exist in the various agroecosystems across Canada. Initiatives that have been identified as priorities to be developed in cooperation with the provinces, farmers and other partners in the agrifood industry, include the following:

Promoting soil conservation

Canadians understand the importance of achieving a secure and well-managed resource base of agricultural land and soil. Actions that will be pursued with the provinces include extension of the existing national Soil Conservation Program, establishment of permanent cover on environmentally sensitive lands, development of shelterbelts, research on soil-conserving production systems, and creation of a new Eastern Canada Soil Conservation Centre.

Providing a clean water supply

A stable supply of high-quality water is essential for agricultural production. At the same time, agricultural activities can contribute to both surface and groundwater quality problems. Improper manure management can pollute lakes and streams; fertilizers and pesticides can contaminate groundwater. In areas susceptible to drought, more stable water supplies and improved irrigation can help conserve water and provide opportunities for both agriculture and other water users.

In co-operation with the provinces, the federal government will pursue initiatives that include water quality research and enhancement to reduce pollution of water resources by pesticides, nutrients from fertilizers and manure, and other wastes. Priority for action will also include extension of activities under the southwestern Ontario Soil and Water Environmental Enhancement Program; development of similar initiatives for other watersheds; financial and technical assistance to address serious pollution problems

involving agricultural operations; assistance to develop more stable water supplies and distribution systems; and improved information for farmers on efficient water use.

Integrating agriculture and wildlife

While agriculture has contributed to the loss of wildlife habitat, it has also suffered losses caused by wildlife. There are opportunities to reduce conflicts between agriculture and wildlife through the management of shared resources in ways that are mutually beneficial and that contribute to environmental sustainability. They include the development and promotion of agricultural production systems that are compatible with the needs of wildlife, reduction of diseases such as rabies in wildlife populations, and greater use of multiple land-use strategies that reflect the natural characteristics and potential of land.

Managing waste and pollution

The agri-food sector is affected by, and contributes to, industrial/urban pollution and waste generation. To achieve a major reduction in the impact of agricultural pollution and waste, priority initiatives that will be pursued include research and technology transfer on composting, recycling, manure management, effluent irrigation systems and other management practices; research into alternative uses of agri-food wastes, and the development, testing and demonstration of alternative packaging technologies; and increased education and awareness of the best management practices for handling agri-food wastes. Research on the effects of air and water pollution on agriculture will also be pursued.

Protecting genetic resources

Our genetic resources risk being diminished by, for example, increased specialization of agriculture involving fewer breeds of plants and animals. The Government will pursue actions to preserve and enhance Canada's genetic resources by acquiring and/or developing, adapting, monitoring, utilizing and/ or releasing plant, animal and other biological genetic resources. Research will also be conducted on integrated pest management, and on biological and alternative pest control programs. Genetic resources will provide the basis for research on advanced technology and breeding procedures to enhance resistance to diseases, insects, and other environmental stresses.

Climate change and agriculture

The Government will pursue actions that, in addition to encouraging sound soil conservation practices, will also limit greenhouse gas emissions. For example, stabilizing and increasing the organic matter content of soil will have a beneficial impact in terms of reducing carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere. In addition, the Government will also consider pursuing research and demonstration initiatives on farm energy conservation.

Dealing with pesticides

Recognizing the wide range of concerns about pesticides and public interest in pesticide regulation, in April 1989 the Government of Canada announced a broad multi-stakeholder review of the federal pesticide regulatory process. In July 1990, the Federal Pesticide Registration Review Team released its preliminary report outlining a proposal for a revised regulatory system. The report was used as the basis for public consultation meetings across Canada. A final report is expected in 1991.

Source: Canada's Green Plan for a Healthy Environment, Minister of Supply and Servos Canada, 1990.