

# **Atlantic Farmers Council provides recommendations for achieving environmental sustainability in Atlantic Canada**

In conjunction with their policy position on sustainable agriculture the AFC developed several recommendations:

## **1) Certification guidelines**

A set of sustainable agriculture certification guidelines should be developed. A necessary part of this process would be the development of workable and specific definitions of the various degrees of sustainability. This certification process would establish the level of sustainability at which each producer is operating. This designation could be used as an identification for the benefit of the consumer and to determine the eligibility of producers for assistance in attaining the next level of sustainability.

Marketing expertise would have to be brought to bear on the consumer, to ensure that cosmetic considerations do not deprive the sustainable producer of a niche in the marketplace.

Ideally, all guidelines, designations, and consumer education programs would be consistent on a national level. This would eliminate confusion and uncertainty which would undermine the marketing effort. The producer would have to be assured that his designation in any one of the Atlantic Provinces would be recognized in other provinces.

## **2) Integrated governmental approach**

An integrated governmental approach to the concept and implementation of sustainable agriculture should be developed. Some provinces have attempted the implementation of sustainable agriculture with the creation of a sustainable agriculture policy branch within each provincial department of agriculture. The Council recommends a somewhat different approach which takes into account the pervasive nature of sustainable practices and prevents the isolation of sustainability from

the mainstream of agricultural administration. Specialists in the areas of soil, pests, diseases, marketing and other sectors of the Department of Agriculture would be called upon for their expertise. This base of information would serve as resource for the implementation of programs and policies. A senior member of the Department of Agriculture should be appointed to see that the concept of sustainability receives due consideration as policies are developed.

### **3) Soil laboratory program**

A strengthened soil laboratory program in each province will be needed to cope with the increased demand for testing. Improvement of the soil's organic content will be a primary thrust of the move to sustainable techniques, and it will be very important to the producers that the status of their soil be known and updated on a regular basis. There should be no added expense to producers for this improved service. Turnaround time for samples will have to be as brief as possible.

### **4) Soil conservation centre**

The Federal Government must move quickly to establish the Soil Conservation Centre which has been proposed for Grand Falls, N.B. and ensure that its mandate includes sustainable agriculture promotion. If the producers of the Atlantic provinces are to implement the soil and water conservation techniques which are key to sustainable agriculture, they must have the assistance of professional researchers and technicians. The centre would generate data, evaluate techniques, and stimulate the improvement of present practices.

### **5) Reference libraries**

Development of sustainable agriculture reference libraries should be initiated. The main branch of the library could be located at the research station in each province.

However, producers should have access to the material through the various district offices throughout the province, free of charge. The scope of this library should be very broad, including marketing, packaging, value-added, and technological information as well as technical conservation, and pest and disease control data.

### **6) Assistance program**

Existing assistance programs which promote the move to sustainability should be designated as a sustainable agriculture assistance program. Included in this umbrella would be assistance for land improvements such as shelterbelts and cover crops, drainage programs, organic content and pH programs. Mechanical weed control, manure composting, and crop rotation should also be encouraged through these programs. Designation of these programs will recognize the efforts made by producers often increase their cost of production and serve as a notice to the public, which must encourage sustainable agriculture by supporting it in the marketplace.

Fully functional demonstrations of sustainable production should be funded as both research and promotion tools. Financial and production data, along with soil and water quality data should be accessible to the producer and the public through the sustainable agriculture reference library.