

Summary of the Federal-Provincial Committee on Environmental Sustainability

The Federal-Provincial Agriculture Committee on Environmental Sustainability was set up under the Agri Food Policy Review in November 1989. Their task was to develop an action plan to address natural resource base and environmental quality issues facing Canada's agrifood sector; and to report to federal and provincial Ministers of Agriculture.

Conclusions:

1. An agro-ecosystems approach to managing the sector is the key to conserving or enhancing the natural resources that agriculture uses or shares.
2. The same agro-ecosystems approach that leads to conservation or enhancement of the agricultural resource base, will also effectively address the off-farm environmental quality concerns which are so closely linked to management practices, inputs and technology used on the farm.
3. The adoption of effective resource management and environmentally sustainable practices is directly related to the economic feasibility and viability of the practices.
4. Environmental sustainability is an important key to long-term sustainability and competitiveness in the agri-food sector.
5. The assessment of agri-food sector performance and its contribution to national income must take into account both the impact on soil, water and other natural resource capital, and the public cost of environmental damage resulting from activities in the sector.
6. Producers, extension personnel and the general public must be the target for education and awareness activities that have been strengthened and refocused towards environmentally sustainable agricultural systems.
7. Current efforts to make the agrifood sector more environmentally sustainable are encouraging, but a more consistently holistic approach must be pursued in all areas, particularly education and research, to ensure significant, long-term improvement.
8. The proposed action plan to address environmental sustainability in the agri-food sector should be considered as a sub-set of the whole sustainable agriculture effort. It will

have its fullest impact if the other elements encompassed in a broad sustainable agriculture strategy are implemented.

9. Actions which enhance environmental sustainability will also lead to greater market responsiveness, self-reliance and regional diversity that reflects the strengths and needs of each region in the Canadian agrifood sector.

Recommendations:

1. Adopt the comprehensive policy framework comprising the issues and future actions, and framework for action identified in this report, and apply in a regionally sensitive way the actions outlined, to ensure environmental, economic and social integration.
2. The federal and provincial governments should review respective and joint programs and activities related to environmental sustainability issues, so that long-term support is both adequate and responsive to regional conditions and
3. Accelerate reform of policies and programs that contribute to resource base and environmental degradation, and reallocate resources to support environmental sustainability.
4. Improve federal-provincial-industry cooperation and coordination by building on the existing Federal Provincial Soil and Water Accords: a) to confirm the Accords as the formal mechanism through which long-term environmental sustainability will be brought about;

b) to broaden the scope of agricultural resource base and environmental issues that can be addressed under the Accords, in order to provide for a more holistic approach; and

c) to involve farmers, agri-food industry representatives and others, such as local governments where appropriate, with the work of the Accord Management Committees.
5. Institute a national advisory council to ministers on resource base and environmental quality issues involving the agri-food sector, drawing membership from the Accord Management Committees, national organizations and educational institutions with an interest in the environmental sustainability of the agri-food sector.
6. Under the advice of the Accord Management Committees, develop and implement long-term, cost-shared environmental sustainability agreements to provide additional resources for measures such as technical and financial assistance, monitoring, research, education and awareness activities, to encourage adoption of sound resource management practices.
7. Governments to provide leadership through legislative and regulatory measures for protecting agricultural resources and the environment.

8. Governments, educational institutions and industry to take immediate steps to strengthen and reorient research and education programs and awareness activities towards a more holistic, environmentally sound management of natural resources.

9. Ail governments to adopt consistent criteria for assessing the environmental sustainability of agricultural policies and programs.

10. Immediately initiate a detailed examination of the feasibility and acceptability of implementing suitable cross-compliance measures in federal and provincial agricultural programs.

11. Develop indicators to monitor and assess the state of natural resources and environmental quality in relation to agriculture.

Source: Agri-Food Policy Review Update, July 1990, Communications Branch, Agriculture Canada

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