AEPA Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta

Overarching AEPA Land-Use Planning Key Message

Continued engagement between policy makers and agricultural stakeholders is critical to ensure agricultural interests are reflected in Alberta's land-use planning. It is important to fully understand the impacts of topics such as cumulative effects management, water quality and quantity, and ecosystem services on the agriculture industry. Land-use planning helps the agriculture industry expand and operate in an environmentally, economically and socially sustainable manner.

Expected Land-Use Planning Outcomes

AEPA has identified outcomes for Alberta's agriculture industry that need to be considered in land-use planning. Land-use planning needs to continue to recognize agriculture as an important renewable resource generating future food[i] and economic activity. The agriculture industry understands land and water policy issues are linked; these should be addressed together.

Continued engagement between policy makers and agricultural stakeholders is critical ensuring that agricultural interests are reflected in land-use planning. The agriculture industry needs to be fully engaged setting objectives for air, land, water, and biodiversity established under management frameworks.

AEPA Key Messages:

- The agriculture industry supports good stewardship practices (land, water, air, and biodiversity) reducing agriculture's impacts on the environment.
- The agriculture industry should be able to expand and operate in an environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable manner.
- Land-use plans and management frameworks[ii] that encourage or require agriculture practice change should not create a cost burden for agriculture producers.
- Achieving management framework objectives[iii] requires realistic implementation timelines by the agriculture industry.
- Education, awareness and incentives should be considered critical strategic tools helping the agriculture industry achieve suitable environmental outcomes.
- Emerging agricultural opportunities should be recognized and encouraged by the Government of Alberta, and supported through research, education, and policy implementation.

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[i] Food is one of several ecosystem services (benefits received from healthy, functioning ecosystems) provided by agriculture land. Other examples include water quality, nutrient cycling, and bioproducts such as fibre.

[ii] Management Frameworks: Identify desired regional objectives, as well as approaches and actions to achieve objectives.

[iii] Objectives: Provide clear boundaries and establish the direction for environmental management in a given place.

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Cumulative Effects Management

AEPA recognizes cumulative effects management[i] could benefit the agriculture industry through increased transparency of land-use decisions, management of growth pressures, streamlining of regulations and approvals, and reduction of land-use conflicts. Continued engagement between policy makers and agricultural stakeholders is critical ensuring agricultural interests are reflected in the development of management frameworks[ii] and fully understanding the impacts of cumulative effects management.

AEPA Key Messages:

- Management frameworks should be thoroughly assessed for unintended consequences to agriculture such as potential loss of industry competitiveness.
- Management frameworks need to be clearly developed and implemented for the agriculture industry.
- To remain economically viable, the agriculture industry will require time developing the capacity to effectively respond to management framework objectives. Improvements need to be incremental and measureable over the longer term.
- Education, awareness, and incentives encouraging adoption of cumulative effects management practices are more effective than a regulatory approach.
- Management frameworks for air and water must differentiate between how "point" and "non-point" source pollution impacts are managed.

[i] Cumulative Effects Management: Government of Alberta's approach to land-use planning involves developing regional management frameworks for air, water, land, and biodiversity.

[ii] Management Frameworks: Identify desired regional objectives, as well as approaches and actions to achieve objectives.

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Water Quality and Quantity

The agriculture industry is a key stakeholder in developing watershed management policies related to water quality and quantity (both surface and groundwater). Continued engagement between policymakers and agricultural stakeholders is critical ensuring agricultural interests are reflected in water policy development.

AEPA Key Messages:

- Continued access to safe and reliable water supplies is essential for the agriculture industry sustaining future growth and development.
- Water and land-use policies should take into account future food production needs and opportunities responding to world population growth and emerging economies.
- To remain economically viable, the agriculture industry will require time developing the capacity to effectively respond to place-based water quality objectives. Improvements need to be incremental with measureable change occurring over the longer term.
- System objectives[i] need to recognize water quality variances related to the size and origin of rivers and tributaries.
- A flexible water allocation decision-making system is necessary to meet agriculture industry needs and manage the risk of climate variability. To ensure flexibility, water supply management should consider all options including storage, drainage, and distribution.
- Continued efforts by the agriculture industry to increase water conservation[ii], efficiency[iii] and productivity[iv] should be supported to achieve environmental, economic, and social outcomes.
- Decision-makers need timely and accurate information and tools to make informed choices such as continued development of a comprehensive and accurate groundwater mapping database.

[i] Objectives: Provide clear boundaries and establish the direction for environmental management in a given place.

[ii] Water Conservation: Any beneficial reduction in water use, loss or waste.

[iii] Water Efficiency: Accomplishment of a function, task, process, or result with the minimal amount of water feasible.

[iv] Water Productivity: Amount of water that is required to produce a unit of any good, service, or societal value.

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Ecosystem Services

Market-based[i] approaches encouraging the agriculture industry to provide ecosystem services[ii] (ES) have the potential to benefit producers, the environment, and society. Continued engagement between policymakers and agricultural stakeholders is critical to ensure agriculture interests reflect developing market-based approaches.

AEPA Key Messages:

- Market-based approaches should be voluntary, respect property interests, and provide business opportunities with net financial advantages for agricultural producers.
- Market-based approaches providing ES should:
  - Establish clearly defined procedures for market participants;
  - Establish fair, science-based, effective, and equitable processes for the valuation and trading of ES;
  - Recognize and address if needed, any potential for unintended consequences for the agriculture industry; and
  - Be reviewed at least every five years, ensuring the process is reaching its full potential.
- Agricultural producers need access to timely and accurate information, resources and on-farm support to understand how the ES market works, and to identify potential opportunities and risks to make informed decisions for their businesses.

[i] Market-based: Provide economic incentives encouraging people to provide certain ecosystem services to society.

[ii] Ecosystem Services: Benefits received from healthy, functioning ecosystem; also known as "ecological services", "environmental goods and services", and "ecological goods and services".