

## Alberta Crops Sustainability Pilot Project

Submitted by Erin K. Gowriluk

More and more we are hearing from multi-national companies like McDonalds, Unilever, Kellogg's, General Mills, Anheuser-Busch and a host of others, that their customers are demanding products that contain sustainably sourced ingredients. In response to these demands, these companies have developed key performance indicators or sustainability metrics that will be applied to the entire supply chain, starting at the farm.

So what does sustainability look like at the farm level? How will these sustainability metrics be applied to on-farm practices? How do we know what, if anything, about the way we farm needs to change in order to maintain access to key markets? The answer is, we don't, but we'd like to find out.

In March 2015, representatives from Alberta's four crop commissions: Alberta Barley, Alberta Canola Producers' Commission, Alberta Pulse Growers and the Alberta Wheat Commission underwent on-farm assessments in three major, internationally recognized sustainability certification programs.

These programs include: the **International Sustainability and Carbon Certification PLUS (ISCC PLUS)**. Why? Because the ISCC Plus standard is currently recognized by the global market and used by farm groups across North America. The standard seeks to demonstrate farmer compliance to global sustainable agriculture requirements and is certifiable by independent certification bodies and is recognized by the global market and employed by farm groups across North America. The European Commission recognizes ISCC as one of the first certification schemes to demonstrate compliance with the European Union's Renewable Energy Directives (RED) requirements.

The second program is the **Sustainable Agriculture Initiative (SAI) Farmer Self-Assessment 2.0**. This platform is the main food and beverage industry initiative supporting the development of sustainable agriculture initiatives worldwide. SAI strives to develop sustainable agriculture through a continuous improvement process that allows for a more flexible adoption by farmers. Relevant members include: Anheuser-Busch, Heineken, Kelloggs, General Mills, McDonalds, among many others.

The third and final program that was included in the on-farm assessments is **Unilever's Sustainable Agriculture Code (ULSAC)**. This scheme was developed in 2010 as part of Unilever's continuous improvement efforts. It was created and tested by a network of practical agronomists, farmers, consultants and sustainability advisors and is applied to agricultural raw materials sourced by Unilever.

The purpose of this project is threefold: our farmer members want to better understand consumer expectations around agriculture and sustainability, and we believe that these consumer-driven programs are the most efficient and effective means to collect that information. Farmers also want to contribute to this important conversation, and this project will prepare them to address consumer expectations in relation to the on-farm practices employed in modern agriculture today. And finally, we want to assess grower readiness. As noted above, these sustainability programs are not about satisfying a niche market. A grower's ability to satisfy these requirements will determine whether or not they can access major markets in the future. Project results will identify any gaps or areas where farmers could consider making some changes. But going into this, we are very confident that Alberta farmers are poised and ready to meet the challenge and that will be demonstrated in the many improvements that have already been made on farms across the province over the years.

Project video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kp5o2dF-n8k>  
For more information, email [egowriluk@albertawheatbarley.com](mailto:egowriluk@albertawheatbarley.com)