

# Ducks Unlimited Canada: *Supporting a Vision for the Next Generation of Agriculture and Agri-Food Policy in Canada*

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DUCKS UNLIMITED CANADA (DUC) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of wetlands and associated habitats that provide multiple benefits to waterfowl, wildlife, and people. DUC was first founded in 1938 by sportsmen concerned with waterfowl populations and now is backed by nearly 8,000 volunteers and more than 162,000 supporters across Canada. DUC works with agricultural producers to deliver conservation programs that provide positive results for the continent's waterfowl as well as environmental benefits, such as clean water and wildlife habitat, to all Canadians.

DUC applauds the efforts under the Agricultural Policy Framework (APF) to recognize the importance of environmental sustainability in the agriculture industry. As the first-ever APF comes to a close and discussions regarding the next generation of agriculture and agri-food policy accelerate, DUC is pleased to see the continued commitment to the environment as a critical component of agricultural policy in Canada.

As the next generation of policy evolves, we urge the government and stakeholders to move the policy discussion from focusing on the environmental risks associated with agriculture and expand it to recognize and include the environmental benefits that land managers provide. Agricultural producers who own and manage lands that provide food and fibre also provide environmental benefits that contribute to the sustainability of rural areas. Good stewardship should be properly recognized in current policies and discussions on the next generation must raise the profile and integration of environmental benefits in terms of overall agricultural sustainability.

DUC encourages Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) to work with stakeholders to develop a Vision Statement that clearly identifies the relationship between agriculture and the environment. Related to this vision is the need for specific environmental objectives and outcomes, and measures to monitor progress towards these objectives. This will ensure that all Canadians understand the role and importance of agricultural producers in managing our natural capital assets.

DUC supports the need for an integrated policy framework for agriculture and we suggest that during the next generation discussions, the policy principles developed by the Federal Provincial Working Group on EG&S be integrated into the discussions<sup>1</sup>.

## **Priorities for the Next Generation of Agricultural Policy**

In order to help ensure a long-term, sustainable and cost effective approach to agri-environmental policy in Canada, DUC proposes:

1. **Recognition of environmental benefits fully entrenched in agricultural policy.** The National Farm Stewardship Program (NFSP) should be enhanced and expanded to provide even greater environmental benefits. This program should include the provision of incentives to conserve and restore natural areas such as wetlands, including rewarding those landowners who have restored and maintain natural areas of their own volition.
  - a. **Fiscal responsibility.** Taxpayers and agricultural producers need to see value for their investments. Incentives must provide measurable environmental benefits in a cost-effective manner. Because environmental benefits accrue over a period of time and to provide some measure of security for the financial investment and resulting environmental benefits, DUC supports a minimum 10-year agreement. This will also ensure that producers have economic certainty in their business planning
  - b. **Economic incentives based on measurable environmental benefits.** Specific environmental objectives and outcomes must be established and evaluated over time. In order to ensure that environmental objectives are addressed in an economically efficient manner, funding should be targeted to those beneficial management practices and geographic areas that provide the greatest environmental benefit per dollar invested. Incentives related to environmental outcomes can be provided through various options such as direct payments, tax credits, tax system adjustments, and conservation easements.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on EG&S policy principles see [http://www.agr.gc.ca/acaaf/egs/egspolicy\\_e.html](http://www.agr.gc.ca/acaaf/egs/egspolicy_e.html)

2. **Enhanced Greencover Canada.** Greencover Canada has provided a broad suite of environmental outcomes including benefits to breeding waterfowl, especially in the Canadian Prairies. An enhanced program would significantly increase overall investment and uptake and thereby provide enhanced environmental benefits for Canadians. Converting environmentally sensitive land to grass cover provides a broad range of benefits such as reduced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, sequestration of atmospheric carbon, improvements in the quantity and quality of habitat available for fish and wildlife, improved water quality and enhanced soil stability.

**Scope.** Given recent estimates of waterfowl needs in Prairie Canada, expanding the Greencover Canada program to two million acres in the Prairies over the next five years would help to address the needs of waterfowl while providing numerous other benefits to society.

3. **Increased Wetland Restoration.** AAFC, along with provincial and territorial governments, should continue to promote wetlands through enhanced or preferential funding of wetland restoration as an eligible activity within the NFSP. Because wetlands provide significant public benefits at often a high private cost to the landowner, wetland restoration should be funded as a priority activity and consideration given to increasing the government proportion of wetland restoration costs.

## Fulfilling the Objectives of the Next Generation of Agricultural Policy

In addition to the priorities above, DUC proposes that the following be considered to help ensure that the next generation of agriculture and agri-food policy meets its objectives. These should be considered as enabling features of the policy.

- **Continuity of programming.** Initiatives under the NFSP such as Environmental Farm Plans (EFPs), and cost-shared beneficial management practices (BMPs) continue to gain momentum and should remain key components of future policy. Continuity of existing programs allows long-term planning by agricultural producers and stakeholder groups like DUC.
- **Flexibility.** Given the diversity of agriculture in Canada, programs that are available nationally need to continue to have the flexibility to address regional/local priorities.
- **The planning process.** The next generation of EFPs should build upon the successes of group planning and enhance the commitment to group plans as a means to address barriers to program uptake. To further increase the effectiveness of this process, group plans should have the ability to address more than one environmental issue (e.g., address issues such as water quality while improving biodiversity) and thereby enable them to have a greater environmental impact.
- **Continued consultation.** The consultation process with stakeholders should be more proactive and allow for ongoing input throughout the term of the framework.
- **Linkages between framework pillars.** Programs should reinforce outcomes across pillars and minimize any mixed messaging and outcomes that contradict the objectives of other areas.
- **Adaptive Management.** Programs should be monitored and evaluated over time and adapted as more research information becomes available. This will help improve the effectiveness and efficiency of programs/activities in meeting environmental objectives in a cost-effective manner. DUC supports science-based decision making and has the expertise and capacity to help partners employ adaptive management.

Since 2001, DUC has recommended that the five federal natural resource ministries<sup>2</sup> work together to develop programs to address the environmental sustainability of the Canadian agricultural landscape. Federal ministries with clear environmental mandates should contribute to the implementation capacity of the next generation of agricultural policy. The investment in agricultural programming and infrastructure could be used to address the objectives of other departments, thereby avoiding duplication of efforts. The combined investment could provide the level of support needed to develop environmentally meaningful national programs while distributing the overall costs across the appropriate federal departments. Increased involvement of provincial and municipal governments would also strengthen the environment component of a future policy framework.

<sup>2</sup> The departments of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Fisheries and Oceans, Health, Environment, and Natural Resources are typically referred to as the 5NR departments.