



Final Report

June 14 Consultation Event
on Growing Forward 2

Growing Forward 2 (GF2) is a five-year (2013-2018) policy framework developed in consultation with Canada's agriculture and agri-food sector. With the GF2 agreement expiring on March 31, 2018, plans are underway to develop the next policy framework (NPF). The NPF will build upon the evolution of federal/provincial/territorial agriculture agreements since the Agriculture Policy Framework (APF) was introduced in 2003. Saskatchewan is undertaking a series of stakeholder consultations over the next two years to ensure the new framework meets the needs and expectations of the sector.

On June 14, 2016, the Ministry of Agriculture held the first round of consultations with industry groups to identify key priorities for the NPF. A session was held in the morning with representatives from the crop sector, and a second session was held in the afternoon with the livestock sector. Participants were grouped into tables of four to six and were mixed to ensure several perspectives were represented in each discussion. Both sessions discussed key developments in the sector over the last three years and recommendations for future programming. This feedback informed Agriculture Minister Lyle Stewart's participation at the Annual Conference of Federal/Provincial/Territorial Agriculture Ministers on July 20-22, 2016.

Federal/provincial/territorial officials have begun preliminary discussions to explore areas of emphasis for the NPF. During the June 14 consultations, six priority areas were presented and discussed with the Saskatchewan stakeholders, including: markets and trade, science and innovation, risk management, environmental sustainability and climate change, value-added and food processing, and public trust.

The following is a summary of the discussion reported at the event. The results of the consultation session have been categorized into three areas:

1. Priority areas for strategic initiatives,
2. Business Risk Management (BRM) considerations, and
3. Operational principles.

1. Priority Areas for Strategic Initiatives

Generally, participants were supportive of the six priorities that were presented. In particular, market access/development and research were the most strongly emphasized priorities identified by participants. Discussions on markets and trade included concerns about transportation as this is a significant issue for producers. Participants were also interested in entering into new markets, developing existing markets and supporting domestic out-of-province trade opportunities.

Many aspects of science and innovation were identified as important. In many cases they overlapped with the other priorities such as environmental sustainability, disease management for plants and animals, and improvements to food processing. Participants would also like to see increased investment in research infrastructure like facilities and equipment, as well as continued support for strategic research chairs.

Public trust was valued and supported as a priority as well. Participants shared many personal stories about interactions with the public that indicated a low level of understanding about the agriculture industry. Educating children at school was most commonly indicated as a key action in this area.

Value-added and food processing is another area that was broadly accepted as a priority for agriculture, especially in the livestock sector. Participants would like to see more opportunities for value-added businesses to grow, and also to gain better access in both domestic and international markets.

Participants had many ideas about what should constitute risk management under the next policy framework. This includes continued or increased emphasis on existing initiatives like traceability, biosecurity and pest control. Participants from the crops sector highlighted a need for increased efforts in plant disease management. It was pointed out that other areas like research, irrigation and local processing facilities can contribute to risk management in the industry.

The only contentious priority area was environmental sustainability and climate change, because participants are concerned with how climate change will be addressed in the NPF. Participants saw a strong need to promote the existing sustainability efforts of the agriculture industry, as an agriculture awareness issue. There was also some uncertainty about whether Environmental Farm Plans, currently the backbone of environment programming in Saskatchewan, are being used effectively to encourage environmentally sustainable practices on farms. A number of participants noted that improved waste management would be one useful area of focus for the environment.

Two issues that were viewed as missing from Growing Forward 2 were labour and transportation. These may fall somewhere under the existing framework, but participants recommended that these be integrated into the NPF.

Overall, there was near consensus that funding to strategic initiatives should be either maintained or increased if possible. Participants found it difficult to indicate where dollars could be saved, due to a lack of understanding of the funding structure and program outcomes.

2. BRM Considerations

There was a significant amount of discussion on issues with BRM programs, and many different viewpoints on how to address these concerns. The overall theme is that BRM programming is necessary for the industry and must continue in some form in the NPF.

Most of the BRM discussions focused on concerns with AgriStability. There was a range of opinions voiced on AgriStability's capacity to meet the needs of producers in Saskatchewan. Many different suggestions were brought forward for changes, generally based on the program being more responsive, well-defined and transparent. Some participants suggested that if the program could not be "fixed," it might as well be eliminated altogether – preferably to be replaced with something else.

Participants were more consistent with their feedback on AgriInvest and Crop Insurance, and while a few minor adjustments were suggested, these programs were considered to be important to maintain in the next framework. The Western Livestock Price Insurance Pilot Program was also looked at very favourably, and livestock groups expressed that they want this program to become permanent.

While almost all participants agreed on the importance of maintaining BRM programming in the NPF, there was no consensus on the portion of funding which should be devoted to this activity in the new agreement. Some participants stated that they would prefer funding to be shifted towards strategic initiatives, while others thought the existing balance should be maintained.

3. Operational Principles

Some of the recommendations participants deemed most important did not address any program in particular, but rather dealt with the principles by which programs are designed and administered. When the new framework is developed, participants would like to see as much continuity in the frameworks as possible, as this makes the transition much more efficient and less complicated. At the same time, it is important to maintain flexibility so that programs are relevant to a variety of clients, and are adaptable throughout the course of the agreement to respond to new or emerging issues.

A frequent remark relevant to the current agreement is that participants feel there is not enough communication on the range of non-BRM programs available to the industry. Small and new organizations particularly felt unfamiliar with some of the programs presented at the consultation event. Additionally, participants suggested improving communication to assist with the application process. Simplifying the application process where possible would reduce paperwork and save time for both clients and program administrators.

Finally, responsiveness was highlighted as a key principle for the next agreement, particularly for BRM programs. Participants noted the lag between a poor crop year and the time AgriStability payments arrive is often too lengthy to help producers manage difficult financial situations. Ensuring that programs are responsive to short-term challenges is considered to be important for the NPF.

Conclusion

The consultation event was well-received by participants; all who responded to a follow-up survey indicated that they had an opportunity to voice their opinion, and that their views were represented when the tables presented to the Minister. Minister Stewart also indicated his satisfaction with the outcomes of the event, and valued the opportunity to hear first-hand feedback on Growing Forward 2 and industry priorities for the next policy framework.

Appendix: Attendance at June 14 Consultation Event

Crops session		
	Name	Organization
1	Terry Youzwa	SaskCanola
2	Doyle Wiebe	SaskCanola
3	Daryl Fransoo	Western Canadian Wheat Growers
4	Levi Wood	Western Canadian Wheat Growers
5	Blair Goldade	Saskatchewan Wheat Development Commission
6	Jason Skotheim	SaskBarley
7	Brent Johnson	SaskBarley
8	Shawna Mathieson	Prairie Oat Growers Association
9	Alan Butuk	Saskatchewan Oat Development Commission
10	Carl Potts	Saskatchewan Pulse Growers
11	Trent Richards	Saskatchewan Pulse Growers
12	Nancy Johns	SaskFlax
13	Greg Sundquist	SaskFlax
14	Sandra Bathgate	Saskatchewan Irrigation Projects Association
15	Aaron Grey	Saskatchewan Irrigation Projects Association
16	Marla Carlson	SaskOrganics
17	Will Oddie	SaskOrganics
18	Cherylynn Walters	Saskatchewan Greenhouse Growers Association
19	Mark Hodgson	Saskatchewan Fruit Growers Association
20	Don Payak	Saskatchewan Leafcutters Association
21	Jake Berg	Saskatchewan Beekeepers Association
22	Norm Hall	Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan
23	Todd Lewis	Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan
24	Larry Grant	Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities
25	Ben Chursinoff	Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities

Livestock session		
	Name	Organization
1	Ryder Lee	Saskatchewan Cattlemen's Association
2	Ryan Beierbach	Saskatchewan Cattlemen's Association
3	Harold Martens	Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association
4	Leanne Thompson	Saskatchewan Cattle Feeders Association
5	Mark Ferguson	Sask Pork
6	Keith Flaman	SaskMilk
7	Joy Smith	SaskMilk
8	Les Kroeger	Saskatchewan Bison Association
9	Krissy Fiddler	Saskatchewan Horse Federation
10	Averil Parsons	Saskatchewan Horse Federation
11	Leanna Rousell	Saskatchewan Forage Council
12	Kelly Ediger	Saskatchewan Inspected Meat Plants
13	Doris Oram	Saskatchewan Inspected Meat Plants
14	Terry Anthony	Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan
15	Donavon Block	Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan
16	Ben Chursinoff	Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities