

June 2022

Achieving Balance:

The Future of the Environmental Farm Plan Program in Canada

Policy Brief prepared for CAPI by Dr. Bronwynne Wilton,
Dr. Andrea Gal, Krista Kapitan, and Mya Kidson



The Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute
960 Carling Avenue, CEF Building 60
Ottawa, ON K1A 0C6
www.capi-icpa.ca



This report was authored by Wilton Consulting Group:
Dr. Bronwynne Wilton, Principal and Lead Consultant; Dr. Andrea Gal, Consultant; Krista Kapitan, Consultant; Mya Kidson, Knowledge Mobilization Intern



Foundation

This project is sponsored in part by the RBC Foundation and part of CAPI's larger environmental initiative, **Spearheading Solutions: Helping Farmers Operate Better, Smarter and Environmentally Sustainably**. This initiative aims to leverage public and private policies to aid in the rapid adoption of beneficial management practices, increase the implementation of new tools and technologies to maximize environmental and social outcomes.

Producers use Environmental Farm Plans (EFPs) to assess environmental risks on their farms. The voluntary, educational EFP programs facilitate knowledge sharing about regulatory requirements and beneficial management practices (BMPs) to promote continuous environmental improvements at the farm level.

Background of the EFP program:

- Programming is available in all ten provinces, plus the Yukon; the Northwest Territories are developing an EFP program.
- The EFP program varies by province and territory.
- Federal, provincial, and territorial (FPT) governments often fund the programs. Currently, the Canadian Agricultural Partnership funds EFP programs until 2023, and consultations are underway on the Next Agricultural Policy Framework (NPF), which will span 2023–28.
- EFP program uptake differs across regions for various reasons, including differences in provincial/territorial (PT) cost-share funding program structures, PT environmental priorities, farm type, and size.
- There is considerable uptake by producers in the dairy, poultry, and pork sectors. Several reasons account for this, including different environmental risks they face, differences in motivations to participate in cost-share funding based on farm size, and different industry requirements. For example, all Canadian dairy farmers require an up-to-date EFP as part of the proAction program.

This policy paper provides agricultural stakeholders with insights for future EFP programming, to inform consultations for the Next Agricultural Policy Framework (NPF) and for understanding how the EFP program can be leveraged to provide market assurance of sustainability at the farm level.

The Process for Developing Individual Environmental Farm Plans

As each province and territory has developed its own approach to EFP programming, the process a farmer goes through to develop an EFP varies depending on the province that they farm in. Requirements for EFP renewals also vary by province depending how long it has been since a farmer last completed an EFP. Generally, however, the process will involve some combination of the steps below. Once a farmer completes their EFP, they can then apply for cost-shared funding to implement BMPs recommended through their action plans.



Summary of Engagement

Through a half-day workshop with EFP program practitioners and 33 interviews with EFP program stakeholders across Canada, four key findings emerged.

- The program is Canada's flagship agricultural extension program for **environmental education**.
- The program is in a **state of evolution** in three main ways:
 - **Delivery Methods:** Program delivery is flexible to change based on provincial/territorial needs.
 - **Content and Focus:** There is an opportunity to evolve and diversify EFP content, so the program is applicable across different farm types and sizes.
 - **Staff and Resources:** As staff change, institutional knowledge on the history of the EFP program must be handed down more effectively to ensure program continuity.
- EFP Programming must be flexible enough to focus on the environmental risks associated with the production of key commodities produced in each province and territory. It **must remain regionally specific** and nimble enough to help farmers mitigate and adapt to the environmental risks resulting from climate change.
- Three distinct pathways forward are possible for the EFP in Canada, including **maintaining the status quo, reorientation, and revitalization**.

"A long-term trust exists between farmers in the province and the [delivery agent]. In general, farmers trust us to keep their information confidential, so they feel freer to be honest with their challenges on farm and environmental risks."

— EFP Delivery Organization representative



Recommendations:

Five key recommendations can help ensure the EFP program continues to meet industry needs as knowledge of agri-environmental BMPs continues to evolve.

1. Formalize the National Environmental Farm Plan Group through the creation of a National Environmental Farm Plan (NEFP) Alliance

- o Formalizing the group would increase EFP program visibility, strengthen “best practices” for delivery and surveillance and encourage further discussions between sustainably conscious agri-food sector stakeholders.

2. Core fund the EFP program

- o Traditional “stop-start” patterns of programming that run alongside fiscally based funding agreements impede the EFP from reaching its full potential.

3. Integrate other environmental sustainability program and standards content into the EFP program

- o Buyers increasingly seek evidence of environmentally sustainable production practices, and an array of sustainability programs and standards exist. Building some alignment between these standards and EFP program criteria could improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the program for farmers.

4. Develop a national framework to harmonize EFP programming and collection of key data

- o Regional specificity is crucial, but developing a national framework also helps strengthens the program.

5. Incorporate a climate change mitigation and adaptation lens into EFP programming

- o The agricultural industry plays a role in mitigating greenhouse gas emissions but is also vulnerable to climate change effects, so requires adaptation.

“(There) shouldn’t be question if there will be an EFP program under the [Next Agricultural Policy Framework]. The EFP is fundamental to the work we do across Canada. It is absolutely a foundation piece. ... If we didn’t have an EFP program, we wouldn’t have supports for farmers for agri-environmental issues on the farm.”

— Provincial Agriculture Ministry representative

