



PLAN Policy Network - Meeting Summary

Date: October 30, 2024

Key Information:

The Policy Network meeting on Land Use, Agriculture, and Nature, brought together diverse stakeholders to address pressing challenges in the Canadian agriculture sector. The Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (CRSB), a not-for-profit representing various stakeholders in the beef value chain, presented key findings from their National Beef Sustainability Assessment.

The discussion revealed the significant role of beef production in Canadian agriculture, utilizing 40% of agricultural land, with 84% being pasture (primarily native and tame grasslands). This land stores approximately 1.9 billion tons of carbon, accounting for nearly 40% of the total soil organic carbon stock on Canadian agricultural land. Only 9% of land used for beef production is cropland for cattle feed.

Despite the overall decrease in wildlife habitat due to land conversion, beef producers have increased their proportion of maintained habitat. Land used for beef production contributes 74% of critical habitat for wildlife reproduction and 55% of land used for wildlife feeding, considering all of Canada's crop and pasture land.

The Canadian beef sector has set ambitious sustainability goals, focusing on maintaining native grass and healthy, functioning ecosystems. Strategic actions include exploring payment for ecosystem services, facilitating collaboration, building awareness, and promoting rangeland health assessments. However, several challenges persist, including ongoing conversion of native grasslands to cropland or urban development, questions about grasslands' carbon sequestration potential, and the need to balance economic pressures with conservation goals.

Research priorities and data gaps were identified, emphasizing the need to quantify economic, agronomic, and biodiversity benefits of different production systems, improve

land use data quality, identify and quantify best management practices, and update and refine the Wildlife Habitat Capacity Index. Addressing these gaps is crucial for developing evidence-based policies and practices that support both agricultural productivity and biodiversity conservation.

The meeting highlighted the importance of a collaborative, holistic approach to land use and biodiversity issues in Canadian agriculture. Stakeholders recognized the need for innovative incentive structures, such as payment for ecosystem services, data-driven decision-making, and long-term planning to effectively manage the complex interplay between agricultural production and environmental stewardship.

Questions were raised about the discrepancies in data regarding land use for animal feed and the potential for higher-level analysis of trade-offs between different agricultural sectors. The complexity of balancing economic viability with conservation goals was acknowledged, highlighting the need for nuanced solutions that consider various production systems and business models.

By fostering continued collaboration among researchers, industry stakeholders, and policymakers, Canada can work towards creating a sustainable future for its agricultural sector that balances economic viability with environmental conservation. This includes addressing the challenges of land conversion, improving data quality, and developing strategies that recognize the public good provided by grasslands and other agricultural landscapes.

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