



“Chronicles from B.C. Producers”

Volume 2

**Canada – British Columbia
Environmental Farm Plan Program**



**This publication contains a series of success stories from the
Canada – British Columbia Environmental Farm Plan Program**



Environmental farm planning is a voluntary process in which producers can participate to identify environmental strengths and any potential risks on their farms. As appropriate, it includes a prioritized action plan to reduce those risks.

The program applies to all types and sizes of farm operations throughout the province. As participants in this program, producers will be able to identify their farm's environmental strengths, prioritize any potential risks to the environment, and take advantage of tools and techniques available to manage those risks. Producers who develop and have an approved EFP may be eligible to apply for cost-shared incentives through the *Growing Forward* Agreement on-farm action Beneficial Management Practices Program to implement actions identified in their plan.

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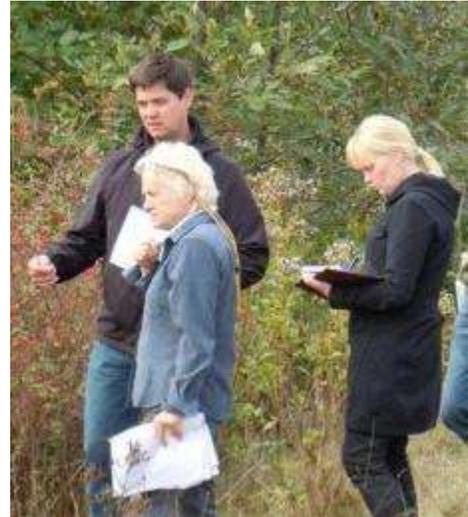
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Planning Advisors: The Heart of the Environmental Farm Plan Program Team

Some provinces in Canada deliver the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) Program through their provincial government while others have third-party delivery agents to whom a producer can send information for review. In British Columbia, trained consultants are independently contracted to provide one-on-one assistance that is available to each and every producer in the province. The EFP Program is delivered through the British Columbia Agricultural Research & Development Corporation (ARDCorp).

The Planning Advisor's role is a uniquely critical one – they are the essential link between the producer and the Program, ensuring each EFP reflects the farming operation it is based on while maintaining the level of confidentiality B.C. producers have come to know and expect.

There are currently 21 trained Planning Advisors (PAs) throughout the province. The Program is continuing to add to the roster in order to provide assistance to producers where needed. Each PA brings professionalism and knowledge to each EFP, benefitting the producer and furthering the program's environmental objectives.



“The EFP Planning Advisors are key to the success of the program,” says Greg Norton, ARDCorp director. “They give you confidence that you have done your due diligence in becoming informed of your environmental impacts.”

For more information on the EFP Program, or to find a Planning Advisor in your area, please go to the program's website www.bcefp.ca.



Leaders Within

When you ask any director on the British Columbia Agriculture Council (BCAC) if they fully support the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) Program, you can be sure the answer is a resounding “Yes!”

The EFP Program has been in existence since 2004. As of December 2011, over 3,500 EFPs have been completed in British Columbia. It is delivered by the B.C. Agricultural Research & Development Corporation (ARDCorp), which is overseen by its board of directors and the BCAC. BCAC Directors are seen as industry leaders as they represent various farm operations and regional issues. Currently, every director on the BCAC and ARDCorp boards, as well as every member of the EFP Industry Advisory Committee, has a current EFP completed on their farms.

“I am proud to have participated in the EFP program,” says Garnet Etsell, BCAC Chair. “The exercise has brought all facets of my farm practices to light and given me the tools to minimize environmental risks.”

In addition to completing their EFP, some of the directors have gone on to renew their plans, thereby keeping up with current government regulations and opening the door to new incentive funding opportunities.

“When we realized our EFP was older than five years, we promptly called the ARDCorp office to engage a Planning Advisor to renew it,” said Rhonda Driediger of Driediger Farms. “The EFP Program helps us make important improvements to our operation. We want to be sure that we continue in that direction.”

One of the important benefits of participating in the EFP process is producers’ ability to make real changes to address energy generation and usage.

“Once we completed our EFP, we went on to get funding from the BMP Program to help us switch from fossil fuel heaters to more energy efficient ones,” said Stan Vander Waal of Rosedale Greenhouses.

These farm leaders took the time to work through the EFP workbook and to answer questions which resulted in a complete environmental action plan for their farms. They now have a resource that provides them with an understanding of current government regulations and suggestions for practices that could enhance the environmental values on their farm.

With a completed EFP, B.C. producers are eligible to access the Beneficial Management Practices (BMP) Program for funds to offset their costs of implementing the environmental improvements identified in the EFP. For more information, please visit the program’s website www.bcefp.ca.

Dark Horse Ranch Bridging the Gap

Dark Horse Ranch is nestled in a picturesque valley near Westwold, B.C. and is bisected by the Salmon River. The 33-hectare property was a horse breeding operation in the past and is now in transition to pasture purchased calves over the summer months.

Previous owners had logged the steep hillside on the south side of the river and had built and used a traditional log stringer bridge to bring the loaded log trucks to the road. For the present owner, Cheryl Rose Murray, this all-wood bridge served as access for livestock and machinery to a pasture across the river from the main ranch operation. The bridge would not have met today's stricter building codes and standards – it had insufficient clearance between the bottom of the structure and the Salmon River's high water mark of today. Over time, the main support logs rotted which caused the bridge to sag further.



During high water in the spring of 2011, the Salmon River rose, came in contact with the bridge, and began moving it sideways downstream. Cheryl's quick action prevented the debris from escaping. The logs were pulled from the river and placed on high ground. This action likely saved the integrity of the bank and original abutments.

Without a bridge, Cheryl's livestock and machinery could not access pasture land. Fording the dangerous high waters was out of the question. Cheryl's neighbours informed her of how the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) Program had helped them in a similar situation.

Cheryl contacted Pete Spencer, the regional EFP Planning Advisor, and with his help she was able to complete an EFP and proceed with the sometimes daunting task of securing applicable permits to replace the bridge. Within a reasonable period of time the permits arrived and, with Pete's assistance, she applied for funding to install a replacement steel stringer bridge in the same place of the original bridge.

Cheryl found a replacement bridge which was installed by an experienced local contractor to modern standards in the fall of 2011. With safe passage restored, Cheryl went further to protect the environment by installing fencing and gates to prevent livestock access to the river and bridge approaches, except for a small restricted access site for watering her animals. She also

moved her fuel tanks to reduce fire risk, closed off access to the watercourse from a confined livestock area, and completed a contingency plan for the operation.

“When I had to pull that bridge this last spring, I was devastated, having worried every high flood season for the last number of years, and my concern was the mess it would make somewhere downriver, when it did let go, and, of course, no more use of my land on the other side,” said Cheryl. “The day I made that phone call to Pete, I had really no idea how to proceed, though there were many with their own ideas as to how they could help me. I was overwhelmed.

“Now I have a great sense of accomplishment, not to mention a bridge that will outlast me and is an enormous asset to this property and for all who may live here in the future. It is all the people that I have dealt with who have made this a success. Pete, of course, and also ladies at the Front Counter in Kamloops, the Fish & Wildlife Biologist, ARDCorp, Armstrong Crane, the local bridge and fencing contractors. Everyone was so helpful and the best part was I learned that I am not the only one concerned about the issues around the river. I learned so much from the *EFP Planning Work Book* and the *EFP Reference Guide* and read every page. This is all about helping people to do the right thing and you all are congratulated for any part you play in keeping our natural environment safe. Thank you.”



Daybreak Farm Completes Environmental Renovations

Daybreak Farm of Terrace, B.C., completed its environmental renovations in the fall of 2011. It is the culmination of five years of determination of owner, Ian Christianson, and his team of Ron Floritto, Peter Versteegen, staff members, High & Dry Contracting, and McElhanney Consulting Services. The impressive results of this project are testimony to the efforts of everyone involved.

Daybreak Farms is a family company, owned and operated by Ian and Jeannie Christison — who've been egg producers in British Columbia for four decades. Ian is a second-generation egg farmer who bought his first farm in 1970. Jeannie became a partner in the business in 1974 when the two were married. They have worked together, happily running the farm ever since. As Daybreak's President, Ian oversees all financial and management aspects, but, he's never afraid to get his hands dirty with day-to-day tasks either. Ian and Jeannie have raised three children — Brianna, Geordie and Kieran — who have all helped out in the operations at various times. Ron Floritto, a second-generation egg producer himself, joined the Daybreak management team in 1991.



Ian and Jeannie bought a dilapidated operation from the previous owners and have since upgraded the egg laying farm, egg grading station, and a local marketing operation, as well as implementing environmentally responsible improvements to the operation.

Daybreak developed and implemented numerous new programs such as a new Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Program and a new Manure Management Program. The new IPM Program includes regular consultation with neighbours to ensure there has been minimal impact on the neighbourhood.

In 2007, Daybreak installed a modern manure storage pit under one of the chicken houses. McElhanney Consulting Services supervised the construction of the manure pit while High & Dry Contracting lifted the chicken house, removed the cedar pole substructure, and installed concrete footings and a ring wall. All of the buildings now have been back-filled with drain rock up to grade to ensure that all surface water is directed into the drainage tile installed to drain ground water away from the buildings.

In 2011, Daybreak Farm continued to benefit from the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) Program. By engaging in the EFP Renewal process, Daybreak updated its EFP to take into account any new legislative requirements and to become eligible for funding from an updated suite of Beneficial Management Practices (BMP) fundable projects. With a renewed EFP and subsequent BMP funding, Daybreak installed a double-walled fuel tank to minimize any potential risk of contamination from fuel leaks or spills.



Manure Treatment Project Benefits Multiple Farms

Manure is a valuable by-product of livestock operations. To realize its potential value and avoid pollution problems, well-planned manure handling systems, such as solid-liquid separation, are essential.

Solid-liquid separation of manure works by removing the liquid portion, which holds less of the nutrients, from the solid portion. The liquid component can be used as fertilizer more liberally due to its lower nutrient content. The solid fraction can be used as a soil amendment for crops or used as bedding for the operation's livestock.

Three farming operations in the Fraser Valley made the decision to work together on a joint "pooled" project of a solid-liquid separation system to benefit all of their operations at the same time as mitigating a potential environmental risk. Dicklands Farms (dairy), Willowcreek Farms (poultry) and Aron Dick (poultry) decided to combine their efforts and resources to address their common issue of needing to improve their manure handling systems. By applying for funding as a "pooled project", they were able to more effective use of the cost share funding available through the EFP Program.

"We had been looking at our manure handling and application system, and wanted to find a way to maximize the nutrients and reduce any potential environmental impacts." said George Dick, Dicklands Farms. "We realized if we put in the solid-liquid separator system and remove solids from the manure, we will be in a better position to apply the diluted liquid manure fraction on our grassland during the hot summer growing season while at the same time decreasing the risk of damage by crusting on the grass."

The producers had completed their Environmental Farm Plans (EFPs) through the EFP Program delivered by the B.C. Agricultural Research & Development Corporation (ARDCorp) on behalf of the federal and provincial governments. By completing their EFP's, they had identified possible opportunities to improve upon their farms' environmental impacts. They then applied for cost-shared funds under the Beneficial Management Practices (BMP) Program to complete their project, resulting in a more efficient manure handling system for all three farms.



"The better control a producer has over the nutrients from their livestock operation, the less opportunity there is for build up of excess nutrients impacting the environment." said Dave Melnychuk, Planning Advisor for the EFP Program. "I'm glad we had the opportunity to work with these producers on this innovative manure handling system."

This project is scheduled to be completed in early 2012. For more information on the Environmental Farm Plan Program, or the option of applying as a Pooled Project, please visit the website www.bcefp.ca.

Thistledown Farm Keep Sheep ‘High and Dry’

Laurie Gourlay and Jackie Moad, owners of Thistledown Farm in Nanaimo, B.C., were in the process of restoring sensitive indigenous riparian habitat on a lower field adjacent to a creek and pond. Slope erosion and run-off affecting sensitive riparian habitat were exacerbated by a flock of sheep grazing on the lower field, particularly during the winter and wet seasons. Gourlay and Moad decided to keep their sheep ‘high and dry’ by relocating the flock to an upper field.

Before the sheep could be relocated, the new grazing site had to be cleared of overgrown brush, large rocks, and scattered logs. One corner of the upper field represented another potential site of slope erosion and run-off, thus, Gourlay and Moad chose to fence it off to prevent deer and livestock from accessing that area. New shelters and feeding infrastructures were installed with fine gravel to permit sure footing for the sheep during the winter and wet seasons. A watering system took advantage of an existing well located beside the entrance to the upper field.

Gourlay and Moad have taken full advantage of the EFP and BMP programs since 2008 to fulfil their long-term vision of enhancing wildlife habitat through projects intended to prevent damage to sensitive habitats, to bolster erosion control in riparian zones, and to improve waste management.

“We’re very impressed and pleased with how the Environmental Farm Plan and Beneficial Management Practices Programs have allowed us to protect and enhance sensitive riparian habitat on our farm – that matters to us,” says Laurie. “The process also allowed us to learn even more about our farm.”

Tree Fruit Industry Reduces B.C.’s Greenhouse Gas Emissions

British Columbia is home to a large variety of agricultural operations, ranging from cow-calf ranching to greenhouse production to hatching egg operations to blueberries. For some sectors, there are sometimes specific environmental concerns relating more to them than to others. For example, in the tree fruit sector, the management of pruning waste is a concern not only with respect to odour and noise issues, but also from an air quality and a greenhouse gas emission standpoint.



One management practice that is used, but is not recommended, is to burn waste prunings. This is not recommended because of the many harmful air emissions that open burning produces. Smoke from the open burning of vegetation and wood introduces a range of contaminants into the air, including particulate matter, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and hydrocarbon compounds. Fly ash, a term for the larger particulates in burning emissions, can create aesthetic concerns and nuisance complaints.

Over the course of the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) Program, cost-shared funding has been given to approximately 140 farms in British Columbia for successfully improving their on-farm handling of agriculture waste by switching from burning to the use of mulching mowers.

“By helping producers make the switch from burning to using a mulching mower, the entire community benefits,” says Joe Lariviere, Planning Advisor with the EFP Program. “I have personally heard from producers that they are happy they made the switch.”

Huge Benefit Times Three!

When Rick Thiessen decided to get involved in the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) Program, he didn't take just one step – he took three!

Rick is the owner/operator of three farms in Abbotsford – Bacon & Eggs Farms, Jolena Holdings, and Windy Acre Farms. Combined, these farms produce 2.25 million kg of chicken and 25,000 hogs annually and cover approximately 50 hectares. Rick and his family have been farming for 23 years.

“We got involved with the EFP Program back in 2005,” says Rick. “We saw huge potential in completing the planning exercise for all our farms. Then, securing funding for some projects took my farms to the next level.”

Through the cost-sharing Beneficial Management Practices (BMP) Program, Rick accessed funds to address key environmental concerns that were identified via the EFP process.

All three of Thiessen's farms were classified as “Implemented” under the EFP Program. This means that all of the environmental issues that were identified in the EFP Planning Workbook were addressed and the issues were resolved. By having all of his farms implemented, Rick received an EFP Program farm sign and certificate.

“Having experienced the EFP and BMP processes, and experiencing how easy it is, I don't see why anyone would wait to participate in the programs,” Rick claims.





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