

Ministerial Pre-Federal, Provincial and Territorial Meeting Industry Engagement

Project Overview

This engagement supported preparations for the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers of Agriculture Meeting on July 15, 2021. Industry discussed topics related to the proposed Next Policy Framework.

Engagement Overview

In respect of ongoing COVID-19 public health orders, this engagement activity was hosted virtually on June 24, 2021, through the Microsoft Teams platform. The department invited Manitoba industry associations and organizations, academia, Indigenous organizations and national commodity groups located in Manitoba to the event. A total of 43 invitees attended the session.

Attendees participated in three breakout room sessions to explore questions presented by the Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development. The discussion topics included sustainability benchmarking, maximizing the benefits from innovation and building sector diversity and inclusivity.

What We Heard

Breakroom #1 Question:

Consumers in Canada and in other markets are increasingly concerned about the sustainability and environmental impacts of the goods and services they buy. This is resulting in calls for the establishment of verifiable sustainability benchmarks and standards. Having the right standards in place can support progress in areas of environmental improvement, public trust in agriculture, innovation and economic growth, and trade and market access.

What steps should Manitoba take to provide leadership in establishing sustainability standards and supporting the adoption of processes aligned with these standards? How can we use the Next Policy Framework to achieve this?

Key themes:

Establishing sustainability standards and supporting adoption:

- Prior to setting sustainability benchmarks, the term sustainability, as it applies to the agriculture sector, requires definition. But who is going to define sustainability, the seller or the buyer?
 - Standards depend on who the buyer is, on a specific market, on foreign markets and on trade agreements that influence sustainability standards.
 - The consumer has a role to play in setting standards so that industry and government definitions of standards align with the consumer's views.
 - The definition must represent the entire sector:
- Recognize and give credit for the ongoing work led by commodity associations and producers towards increasing the adoption of sustainability practices.
- Align existing sustainable initiatives to export market demands.
- Demonstrate economic reasons to pursue a sustainable plan for the province.

Opportunities under the Next Policy Framework:

- This framework requires collaboration between federal, provincial and territorial agriculture ministries to establish targeted funding to support the development of minimum national sustainable standards and benchmarks that all regions can align with.
- The framework must create a centralized voice to tell the entire sector story and improve public communication and awareness of sustainability actions and practices to the public.
- More applied research is needed to quantify sustainability.
- Support for a centralized voice, which tells a multi-commodity story, representing the full plate of the sector is required. Consumers think in plates of food, not commodities.
- Funding opportunities include support for:
 - Adoption and adaptation of green technologies on farms
 - Individual producers in adopting existing industry programs, for example offsetting the cost of adopting the Verified Beef Production Plus program
 - Establishing metrics through science-based research
- Establishing benchmarks with demonstrated value prior to developing NPF policy and programming is key to ensuring that the right programs are in place. Funding needs to target all producer models and support informed practice changes that align with climate change-related risk mitigation and adaptation.

Breakroom #2 Question:

Innovation and technology have the potential to support the sector in meeting sustainability and economic goals. The application of big data and machine learning to agriculture has the potential to change the way we produce, process, transport and market food and by-products. Industry has told us Manitoba's agriculture sector needs to drive the data conversation.

What role can government play in empowering Manitoba's agriculture and agri-food sector to maximize the benefits from innovation? How can we use the Next Policy Framework to achieve this?

Maximizing the benefits from innovation:

- Consider Innovation from a value chain approach. Collaboration and cross sectoral partnerships will enhance the value of innovation to date and accelerate our ability to capture future opportunities and address common goals.

- Increasing coordination and knowledge sharing between all levels of government and commodity areas will increase value and reduce duplication of effort.
- Farmers need to be included early in research and innovation development to increase the likelihood of adoption and realize tangible results on farms.

Digital agriculture:

- Data already exists, but industry is only now learning how to interpret and benefit from the data. As digital agriculture continues to advance, we need to build the sector's capacity in data analytics to ensure that interpretive analysis provides valuable information.
- Industry must embrace the digital conversation and develop relationships with companies such as Microsoft and Telus to make technologies affordable and attractive for the next generation to use this data.
- Data ownership is an ongoing dialogue and there is a recognized need for government policy.
- Proprietary data is limiting the potential to maximize innovation and drive efficiency. The potential of multiple platforms that are available and those currently under development are limited to the platform users' data sets.
- Broadband accessibility has become a basic necessity.
- The application of data in the grain sector has driven the development and adoption of precision agriculture. Data has the potential to enable precision feed programs and improve biosecurity and disease prevention in the livestock sector.
- We need capacity, education, mentorship and training in data analytics. That is key in translating the information into intelligence that drives innovation.

Opportunities under the Next Policy Framework:

- Enable collaboration and partnerships between ag-tech companies to enhance data sharing across all platforms and maximize benefit and efficiency.
- Invest in crop development to support climate change resiliency and adaptation.
- Build value-added processing in Manitoba.
- Enable demoing of alternative technologies from out of province or out of country, while addressing the regulatory process that limits the adoption of technology.
- Enhance relationships and research between academic institutions, colleges and universities, to increase coordination and maximize investment dollars.
- Enhance research programs and funding models to reflect the needs of entrepreneurs, small businesses, and producers with low risk tolerance but high interest in innovative technologies, processes or infrastructure.

Breakroom #3 Question:

Industry has told us that new and young entrants are innovation leaders in alternative production practices such as regenerative agriculture and applying social innovation platforms. They bring diversity into production models that builds greater sector resilience.

How can government and industry empower new and young entrants to enable and grow sector inclusivity and diversity (of people and production models)? How can we use the Next Policy Framework to achieve this?

Growing sector diversity:

- Barriers to participation may be different for each sector entrant and are influenced not only by background but also by their goals. How do we look at those barriers objectively and understand which ones we need to remove?
 - Young entrants may require incentives, creative programming, mentorships, risk reduction and capital supports.
 - Diverse producers have a number of unique market entry points, however they may also face unique barriers to progress and expanding their markets.
 - Engagement with a diversity of groups, including those that are not utilizing programs or have encountered barriers, will define barriers and solutions.
 - Engage directly with Indigenous communities to broaden this dialogue.

Barriers:

- access to and availability of child care
- high capital investment costs, including land costs
- lack of agriculture education and awareness in the school system
- tax penalties for producers who rely on dual income sources (off farm work)
- language barriers
- program navigation barriers

Opportunities under the Next Policy Framework:

- Target programs and incentives for youth, indigenous and new entrants to address existing barriers to participation and make allowances for higher risks in start-ups, succession planning and diversification efforts.
 - collaboration between government, industry and universities to engage with these groups and develop programming
- Increase youth interest by showcasing sector opportunities beyond on the farm roles, including the application of technologies.
- Create a mentorship program that supplies broad sector experience, including leadership training, to enable connections and build relationships.
- Develop a buddy system founded on a tax advantage for a farmer with no dependants to transition their business to a new entrant and reduce road blocks.
- Develop and offer grant and proposal writing training and workshops to youth and new comers.
- Risk Management Tools:
 - Develop business risk management programming that targets the unique challenges faced by new entrants, supports youth in dealing with risks, and is reflective of the fact that these groups are highly leveraged.
 - Expand the types of crops insured to lower risk and support production, but many crops important to cultures outside of North America are not insurable. These present unique market opportunities.
 - Educate new and young entrants to enhance the use of risk management tools.
 - Maintain and strengthen the existing MASC young farmer programs.

Next Steps

Manitoba Agriculture and Resource Development is committed to continued engagement throughout the development of the Next Policy Framework. The June 24 event is a continuation of our dialogue and provides a foundation for future discussions.

In August, Minister Eichler will be hosting a second virtual engagement with participation from industry associations. At this event, the minister will present the Next Policy Framework policy statement and priority areas to industry and seek support for Manitoba to sign the Guelph statement.

Following the September ministers' meeting, the department will begin program design and development. We look forward to continuing to work with our stakeholders through this process. Your participation will inform program and policy development.

Questions?

Industry participants are welcome to provide written submissions by sending questions to agrpolicy@gov.mb.ca.