

## A Producer's Perspective

### Strategic Planning Process Helps Hone Legacy of Stewardship for Producers

One Alberta forage farmer has identified benefits to the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) that stretch beyond the face value of the document.

Denis Kennedy, a retired agrologist and agricultural educator who farms near Olds, says modern-day farming, like any business, is more and more about managing liabilities and expectation. He says an EFP that is updated and kept current can provide valuable documentation in a society that demands accountability from landowners.

"The EFP assists you in documenting your environmental liabilities because, if you own the land, by law you own the environmental liabilities," says Kennedy, who runs a 400-acre forage farm divided between pasture for rotational grazing and hay production for domestic and export markets. "That's simply the way it is. So you'd better be able to go into court saying, 'I am doing the best I can,' and that's what an EFP does for you and that's why it should be kept up to date."

#### *Winds of Change*

Kennedy, who has been involved in the agricultural industry in Alberta for over four decades, says there have been fundamental changes in the way society views farmers and ranchers.

When he began his professional agricultural career in 1970, producers were seen as good stewards of the natural resources under their care. In return for that good stewardship, governments were willing to offer support to help out with the risks involved with landownership.

That's still the case today, but Kennedy points out that society is demanding more accountability from landowners. To that end, funding programs are often based on proof of strategic plans, such as the EFP.

"Government is going to assist us in being good stewards because that's what society wants us to be," he says. "But you have to have an EFP to get into some of government funding. It's the gateway."

Kennedy, who is currently involved in the sustainability movement in Olds, points out that the EFP provides proof to society that the agricultural industry is building a foundation for a sustainable future.

#### *Strategic Planning Process*

From his many years of experience as an agricultural administrator, Kennedy saw immediate value in the EFP process. He and his wife, who is also his business partner, completed their EFP about a decade ago. He says it helped direct their time and energy to focus on the environmental aspect of their farm.

"I viewed the EFP process as a form of strategic planning and I believe in strategic planning very much," he says. "I believe that we'll never get to a stated target until we figure out what that target is. Then our



actions will state to get in concert with, and in harmony with, that target and eventually we will reach that target.”

What’s more, he feels that producers should be seizing the opportunity to use their Environmental Farm Plans as marketing tools. Especially at the local food level, an EFP drives home the message of good stewardship of the resources, an openness to listen to health concerns over the food supply, as well as an effort to rebuild bridges of trust with consumers.

### *Building a Legacy*



He says having an updated, current EFP can help producers manage the long-term vision for their operations.

“As you go along and you get older, maybe you’re not spending as much time chopping the trees down, you’re spending more time managing the forest and getting an overall view,” Kennedy says. “This legacy part is important.”

“I feel responsible for good stewardship and the EFP process is part of building a legacy,” he adds. “It’s not about dollars, it’s about passing on. I’ve had the privilege of having a turn at being the steward of this. I want to be able to say that I’ve done my best and I think it is at least as good, and hopefully better than when I got it.”