

Alberta Forage Industry Network (AFIN) Position on Climate Change

“Climate change is one of the greatest challenges to ever face our planet, our society and our economy...Shannon Phillips, Alberta Minister of Environment and Parks August 2015”

The effects of Climate Change are being observed around the world; extreme weather events, temperature changes, our carbon foot print, increases in the amount of CO₂ in the environment due in part to the “Industrial Age” to name a few. Many of the hottest years on record have been documented in the past two decades (United Nations). These issues and the prediction of 9 billion people on our planet by 2043 (United Nations data) are increasing demands on the earth’s resources.

Forages and Grasslands are recognized for their ability to mitigate the effects of climate change. These perennial systems are truly environmentally beneficial providing “Ecological Goods and Services” that promote the health, social, cultural and economic needs of our society. The Alberta Forage Industry Network (AFIN) represents the stakeholders that have the ability to address Climate Change in a sustainable manner.

The roles that forages and grasslands can play include:

1. Decreasing erosion, areas of permanent cover prevent large scale erosion events
2. Enhancing carbon sequestration of perennial stands, grasslands act as carbon sinks
3. Reducing reliance on chemical fertilizer products especially using legumes to add nitrogen
4. Well-managed forage systems improving the diets for ruminants increasing productivity and lowering Green House Gas (GHG) generated/pound of protein (i.e. meat & milk)
5. Use of forage cover crops and integrating livestock in annual crop rotation for soil carbon capture improvements

Encouraging the conversion of annual cropping to perennials will take a paradigm shift, especially in areas deemed marginal. Policy will need to be established to entice long-term commitments to perennial crops. All aspects should be considered from land ownership and economic perspectives, so that favourable management and environmental benefits will not be economically detrimental to those engaged producers. For example, Tax concessions on acreage seeded to perennial forages in a rotation or green cover crops that encourage biodiversity.

Consideration of Risk Management policies (i.e. pasture and forage crop insurance) that put forage production on an equal footing with cash crop production would encourage forage production, particularly in areas less suited to annual cash crops (wheat and canola).

Increasing the arbitrary value of carbon and recognize the contribution from well managed perennial tame and native forages to store carbon thereby reducing GHG’s.

More than reducing emissions, reducing the flooding impact in urban centres, by using efficient watersheds, which include forages and grasslands to control and filter runoff.

Alberta is a global leader in its efforts to develop sustainable solutions to mitigate climate change.

Working together AFIN and other vested stakeholders will be part of the solution to help mitigate Climate Change!

This position document will be reviewed at least every 3 years.

May 1, 2016