

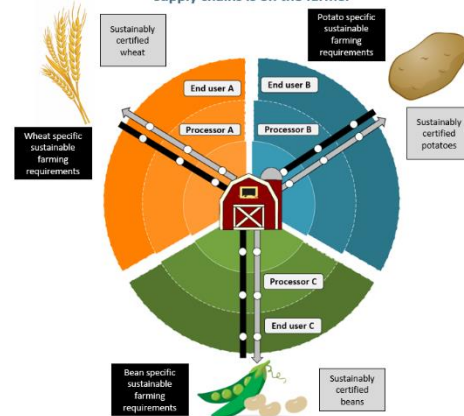
Documenting Irrigation District Water Stewardship

From March 2021 to March 2023, a pilot project centered around the Oldman River Watershed was conducted to explore water stewardship through the agri-foods supply chain in southern Alberta. Three levels of the potato supply chain were involved: St. Mary River Irrigation District (SMRID; the water supplier), a potato producer operation near Taber, and Cavendish Farms Lethbridge site (the processor). Many diverse organizations with expertise in agriculture and water contributed to the project, which was coordinated by WaterSMART Solutions Ltd.

What we learned

- **The SMRID is a water steward:** The project assessed the SMRID operations, management, and current initiatives against the criteria set by the Alliance for Water Stewardship Standard.
- **Managing risks:** Water stewardship planning and documentation can help one understand and manage the risks to one's operation, as well as benefit the watershed and other water users.
- **Benefits of joint planning:** There are more opportunities and benefits possible through joint implementation of water stewardship. Specific benefits include a strong understanding of each other's operations and perspectives, and easier and less time-consuming stakeholder engagement, when done jointly.
- **Documenting sustainability:** Water stewardship in the agri-food supply chain is closely linked with demonstrating overall sustainability. There is increasing scrutiny around responsible use of water resources from retailers, restaurants, consumers, and other parties outside the industry.

Crop rotation means the burden of demonstrating sustainability for multiple supply chains is on the farmer



Results

Key document: The Water Stewardship Plan for the SMRID West, compiles all the relevant information of the SMRID and the local watershed, and supports ongoing work in planning and documenting further water stewardship actions. The Water Stewardship Plan includes the context of the local watershed, the potential risks and opportunities, and the list of water stewardship actions. A public version of the Water Stewardship Plan has been released as a guide for other irrigation districts.



Water stewardship is designed around the principle of continual improvement, and requires considering the area and the resources beyond the operation's fence line. Engaging with other water users in one's area is central to the planning process. Therefore, water stewardship supports ongoing relationships within the watershed and encourages finding solutions to localized challenges.