

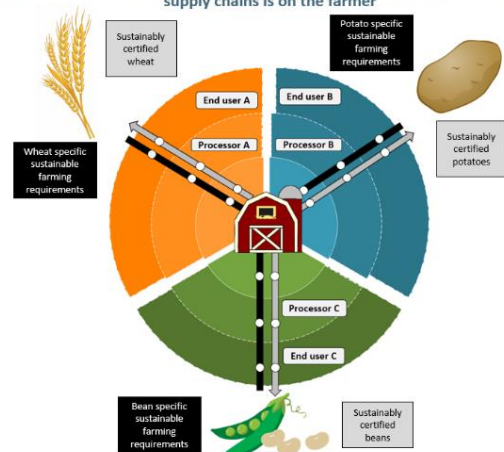
Sustainable Sourcing Pressures Converge on Producers

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 (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

- **Commitment to stewardship:** Producers are committed to the principles of stewardship.
- **Lack of recognition for pre-existing sustainability work:** Producers feel the effort and investment they have already made in sustainable practices are not being recognized, and there is no cost-recovery and compensation being offered.
- **Documentation burden:** A large volume of annual paperwork would be a barrier for producers to document water stewardship. Administrative burdens related to certification or sustainability reporting can affect business viability for producers.
- **Sustainable sourcing documentation:** Many different supply chains (retailers/key buyers) for agricultural products are starting to look for some form of measurable and verifiable way to demonstrate sustainable sourcing. In many cases, buyers have not yet defined sustainable sourcing for their business, or what they require to demonstrate it. The risk is there will be a lack of alignment around reporting requirements among buyers, which would complicate the reporting process for producers.
- **Pressure on the producer:** Crop rotation means producers have the burden of demonstrating sustainability for multiple supply chains.

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



Results

The Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) is a viable tool: In Alberta, the EFP is an online self-assessment tool that supports the understanding and management of environmental risks for the whole farm. The EFP is now benchmarked with an internationally recognized agriculture sustainability standard. Therefore, there is an option for the EFP to be a verifiable means of demonstrating farm sustainability to all buyers in an operation through a single documentation effort.

Opportunities for compensation: There is interest, and some established precedent, for cost-recovery/compensation going through the supply chain for verified sustainable practice. The EFP is shown to be able to support this.