

# Ag-Water Forum - Executive Summary

## April 12 & 13, 2005

### Ottawa, Ontario

#### **Background:**

In addition to the delivery of several Agricultural Policy Framework (APF) programs, Agriculture & Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) is working on several strategies and initiatives related to water and agriculture. Many activities underway in the department require ongoing communications with partners and stakeholders over the next fiscal year and beyond. The Ag-Water Forum, which was held, in Ottawa on April 12 and 13, 2005, provided one venue for AAFC to update provinces and territories on current APF programs and strategies and to initiate discussion and solicit input for future strategic initiatives.

With the **watershed** emerging across Canada as a critical planning *unit* for the protection of the environment and sustainable development, and **Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM)** emerging as the preferred *approach* to managing land and water resources, the theme selected for the forum was "Ag-Water and IWRM". As a major consumer of water, agriculture has a significant presence in watersheds across Canada and must be an active participant in IWRM.

Provinces have the primary responsibility for the management of water resources within their jurisdictions and are supportive of watershed-based, multi-stakeholder approaches to water resource management. As one of the five federal departments with responsibility for water, AAFC can play a major enabling role in ensuring that agriculture is represented in IWRM and ag-water related activities. By bringing together federal and provincial departments with responsibility for agriculture and water at this Ag-Water Forum, AAFC helped to facilitate better collaboration and networking between federal and provincial partners on matters related to ag-water and IWRM.

#### **Objectives of Forum:**

A total of fifty participants representing nine provinces and five federal departments gathered together at the forum to:

1. Share knowledge about AAFC's activities and programs and discuss how they can be used to promote and support IWRM and watershed planning in agricultural areas across Canada.
2. Share progress and improve understanding of provincial activities and responsibilities in ag-water, watershed planning and IWRM.
3. Create networking opportunities between provinces and federal departments involved in ag-water and watershed/IWRM related activities.

#### **Process:**

After federal departments provided updates on various initiatives, representatives of provincial agriculture and environment departments described the provincial situation related to ag-water and IWRM. Specifically, they provided the following information:

1. Visions and goals related to ag-water
2. Ag-water related quality and quantity issues
3. Approaches, barriers and gaps to watershed planning and ag-water related activities.

Following the presentations, three workshop breakout sessions, facilitated by Kim DeKlein and Eric Lawlor (both from Ontario Ministry of Environment), were structured to gather more input from provinces on the following three key areas:

1. Identification of key ag-water related issues and current barriers and challenges to advancing IWRM.
2. Recommendations for AAFC roles and involvement in addressing issues, barriers and challenges related to ag-water.
3. Other general recommendations and short term action items.

### **Results:**

During the workshop sessions, the provinces identified the following areas as primary barriers and obstacles for advancing IWRM and watershed planning activities across Canada:

1. Limited access to credible, science-based data and information (e.g cost and effectiveness of implementing beneficial management practices.)
2. Limited access to mechanisms to support capacity building for watershed groups.
3. Lack of human resources and technical assistance to support IWRM.
4. Lack of clarity of federal and provincial roles in IWRM.
5. Lack of commitment from, and co-ordination of, stakeholders, governments, non-government agencies, industry, and academia in watershed planning activities.
6. National policy frameworks on ag-water and IWRM do not adequately reflect regional needs.
7. Lack of sustainable funding mechanisms to support watershed groups.

The subsequent workshop discussions generated the following seven **general** key areas of work and suggestions for future AAFC involvement to address some of the main barriers identified above:

1. Financial assistance (sustainable, flexible funding mechanisms)
2. Ag-water science (discovery, applied or adaptive research)
3. Technology transfer of results of WEB's (Watershed Evaluation of BMP's)
4. Access to credible, science-based data and information
5. Technical assistance (for provinces and watershed groups, as requested)
6. Facilitation and co-ordination (networking, partnering)
7. Policy (planning and development)

The following **specific** recommendations and short term action items were brought forward in addition to the above:

1. AAFC can help facilitate the formation of a Canada-wide ag-water working group comprised of provincial and federal representatives from departments with responsibility for water in the agricultural context. This group can meet annually, or as required, to share concerns and ideas for water management and watershed planning.
2. AAFC and Environment Canada should work together to promote a common understanding of IWRM across Canada.
3. AAFC can facilitate partnering opportunities for provinces, non-government organizations, academia and other communities of experts in the area of ag-water.
4. Through existing and future program mechanisms, AAFC should support capacity building initiatives for provinces and watershed groups.
5. AAFC should ensure that agricultural water interests are represented at federal level policy discussions on water.
6. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada can play an enabling role in promoting and facilitating the participation and involvement of the agriculture industry in watershed planning and IWRM activities.
7. AAFC should ensure that future national ag-water programming adequately reflects regional needs.
8. AAFC should expand the work of Watershed Based Evaluations (WEB's) to include other Beneficial Management Practices.