

RCEN Agriculture Caucus Annual Report 2009-2010

April 2010

Caucus Chair:

Rick Morell, Saskatchewan Environmental Society, SK (from April 2009-August 2009)

Josh Brandon, Resource Conservation Manitoba, MB (from September 2009-March 2010)

Steering Committee Members:

Barbara Amos, Sierra Club, NB

Graeme Bousada, Eco-Action Mount Allison University, NB

John Burcombe, Mouvement Au Courant, QCL

Ngaio Hotte, Pembina Institute, AB

Ruth Pryzner, Mixedwood Forest Society, MB

Maureen Reilly, Beyond Factory Farming, ON

Clara Whyte, Gaia Vision, QC

The [Agriculture Caucus](#) Steering Committee held teleconferences on May 22, July 23, September 30, November 19, 2009 and on January 22, 2010. Approximately 9 Caucus members were able to attend the RCEN AGA in June 2009. At this national caucus meeting, the members reviewed and discussed some of the key working issues for this fiscal year. Steering Committee elections were held in April-May 2009 and another 2 new members were added in November 2009.

Working Issues:

In addition to work on consultations with government, the members of the Agriculture Caucus were actively involved in the following working issues.

1. Agricultural impacts to water

Members of the Agriculture Caucus work independently on issues related to agriculture and water (e.g. algae blooms). Within the Caucus, members worked to form a collaborative partnership to synthesize information, improve organizational knowledge base and citizen understanding to help change behavior and influence policy and decision-making around this issue. This work includes the production and sign on (over 30 organizations) to the *Prairie Water Directive*, which has been sent to municipal and provincial governments and other decision makers.

2. Trade negotiations and agriculture

Members of the Caucus Steering Committee followed trade negotiations (at the North American and international level, for the agriculture sector on issues related to the environment) to see how agriculture debates are evolving. This monitoring was done in order to allow Caucus members to take positions on the issues that arise.

3. Renewable energies in remote/rural areas (and policies to implement them, etc)

Due to growing interest worldwide for renewable energy sources (especially getting energy into rural areas), the Steering Committee members compiled and examined rural energy projects currently underway in Canada. There is ongoing interest within the SC to look more closely at renewable energy projects in rural areas and to seek out opportunities to put forth proposals to encourage renewable energy development.

4. Genetically modified foods

Members of the Caucus celebrated a victory in continuing a ban on genetically engineered (GE) wheat in Canada last year. However, Monsanto, a major producer of GE crops announced last year that it would be accelerating its GE wheat research program in the United States, producer organizations have been surveying their members (as to whether there is interest in GE wheat) and looking into doing research, therefore the SC has not entirely laid this issue to rest. Steering committee members were involved in several other campaigns

related to GE this year, including distributing letters of support for a bill to mandate economic assessments of new GE crops. As well the agricultural caucus has been involved in continued organizing against GE alfalfa.

5. Ecological goods and services

Members of the Caucus have been trying to get farmers interested in environmental issues through the concept of ecological goods and services as a money-making initiative. There was some movement on writing a paper to look at best practices and provide a backgrounder on policy related to ecological goods and services in Canada. Currently there is a lot of work in Europe on this subject but minimal achievements in Canada. Members of the SC circulated the Quebec report on Agricultural Environmental Goods and Services.

6. Biofuels (Bill C33)

Members of the caucus worked on issues tied to biofuels and Bill C33 through regional consultation and advocacy work. Although there has been no federal perspective updates, there have been ethanol regulations passed in several provinces.

7. International Agriculture Assessment on Science, Technology and Development

The report, "International Agriculture Assessment on Science, Technology and Development" was released and contained a number of very useful recommendations. Members of the Caucus circulated this report and have been trying to encourage the federal government to adopt the recommendations of the report.

8. Eco-certification for agriculture

The Caucus Steering Committee Chair (Rick Morell) was spearheading work towards a certification body that goes beyond organic, based on the principle of transparency. His work aimed to create a national certification body able to verify a farm in regards to criteria further than organic (e.g. family farm, location, environmental goods and services, humane practices for animals, and fair trade) in order to enable consumers to feel empowered in their decision-making around food. However, Rick Morell had to step down from the Caucus SC in August and the project has not moved since his departure.

On a related note, other Caucus SC members are working on federal guidelines on green-washing and federal regulations on green-washing with the Canadian Consumer Association in their provinces.

9. Prison Farms

With the announcement that prisons would be shutting down their farm program, members of the Caucus Steering Committee drafted a call for support to continue the program. The members felt that the program supports good eating, jobs, independence, financial security etc of the prisoners working on the farms.

10. Local food security

Work has been growing in a number of cities to create food policy committees to address various issues around food security (including organic gardening, community gardens, zoning for groceries, etc). Members of the Caucus shared knowledge of regional initiatives for sustainable development related to food security. Several SC members worked on projects through the People's Food Policy Project, a multi-pronged policy on issues related to food with grass-roots groups working on their own version of these policies.

11. The Next Generation of Agriculture and Agri-Food Policy

The document, *Next Generation of Agriculture and Agri-Food Policy* was circulated through the Caucus SC along with a summary of the new Agriculture Canada plan. Within the new plan, the members of the SC were not comfortable with the change in focus for environment within the plan. Members of the SC wrote a draft proposal and met with Agriculture Canada to discuss the preparation of an Agriculture Caucus position on the Plan.

12. Sewage Sludge and Biosolids

Changes in federal policy have now allowed the sludge industry to call their product organic fertilizer, even though organic farmers can lose their organic status if they use them. Due to the controversy of this issue, one of the SC members has spearheaded the writing and circulation of a position paper on biosolids and sewage sludge.

Agriculture Consultations:

Caucus members participated in the following consultations. For more information on a given consultation, please follow the link to the relevant consultations page on the RCEN website.

1. **Climate Change Adaptation and Agriculture:** Agriculture Canada launched a process for developing an adaptation plan for Canadian agriculture to climate change by hosting a series of regional adaptation workshops. Several members of the Agriculture Caucus were invited to attend the workshops through an unofficial call for delegates with RCEN (Ngaio Hotte, Pembina Institute; Cathy Holtslander, Beyond Factory Farming; Tegan Adams, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives; Atul Jain, CAUSE; Janice Pitman, Keepers of the Athabasca; Jessica Ashmead & Jeremia Bickerstaff, Crooked Creek Conservancy Society of Athabasca; Wayne Ungstad, Ponoka Fish and Game; Christine Gingras, Nature Quebec). Josh Brandon (invited directly by AgCan) is leading a group of participants in the writing and circulation for sign-on of a consolidated ENGO position paper for this consultation.
2. **[2009 Meeting of the Federal Provincial Territorial Committee on Pest Management and Pesticides](#):** Several meetings were held regionally with federal and provincial/territorial pesticide regulatory agencies to discuss pesticide regulations at a regional level. These consultations were coordinated through the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) and did not involve an RCEN delegate selection process. Josh Brandon participated in the Winnipeg, MB meeting where there was a significant discussion on cosmetic pesticide bans. The focus of the stakeholder day discussion was on cosmetic pesticide bans. Three representatives from industry and three NGOs (Campaign for Pesticide Reduction, Canadian Cancer Agency and Resource Conservation Manitoba) presented followed by discussion and questions.
3. **Canadian Fertilizer Products Forum (CFPF):** CFPF is an industry based advisory group to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) which regulates the content, quality and efficacy of fertilizers. Since 2006 some RCEN members have participated in various working groups and attended meetings of the CFPF and CFIA in Ottawa. However, neither CFPF or CFIA have ever agreed to use formal RCEN delegate selection processes and financial support for members' participation. Presently, John Burcombe (Au Courant) still receives CFPF and CFIA mailings but did not take part in any working groups or meetings in 2009.

Related Consultations through other Caucuses:

Updates for consultations and activities related to Agriculture but which fall under other caucuses of the RCEN and are available in detail within the Annual Reports 2009-2010 of the caucus specified. These consultations include the following:

1. **Toxics Caucus- [Bisphenol A \(CAS 80-05-7\) Proposed Regulations Consultation](#):** Five ENGO delegates were invited to participate in a one-day Environment Canada (EC) consultation to discuss the proposed regulatory provisions to limit the concentration of Bisphenol A (BPA) released from industrial final effluent. Delegates participated in an open-forum discussion related to BPA use and regulation in Canada. Information from this discussion will be considered in drafting regulations. This consultation took place in Toronto,

ON, on November 27, 2009. Two members of the Agriculture Caucus were official delegates to this consultation. Some discussion and comments were included on the need for exploring the impacts of BPA on agriculture (e.g. through Ag plastics and sludge).

2. **Toxics Caucus- [Environmental Assessment Working Group \(EAWG\) and Subcommittees for substances regulated under the Food and Drug Act - recommendations for revised Environmental Assessment Regulations:](#)** Members (Kapil Khatter, Sandra Madray, Maureen Carter-Whitney and Gail Krantzberg) of the Working Group attended EAWG meetings in Ottawa on July 2009 and October 2009. In July, 2009, Maureen Carter-Whitney, Sandra Madray and Kapil Khatter participated in a bilateral teleconference with Health Canada to discuss direct human health assessment and cosmetics. Also in July, 2009, Maria Castro and Sandra Madray attended an EAWG workshop on risk assessment. At the October meeting, the EAWG decided to restructure the existing Subcommittees into "biologically active" substances - (Subcommittee #1), and "not designed to be biologically active" substances - (Subcommittee #2) with the intent to streamline the process and avoid duplication of work. Subcommittee 1 continued their work on active ingredients and Subcommittee 2 was revamped to include representation from foods, natural health products, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics and personal care products. Maria Castro and Sandra Madray continued work on the In Commerce List (ICL) Committee. All EAWG delegate members continue to be actively involved in subcommittee work and well as participating in working groups of the subcommittees. Subcommittees 1 and 2 are expected to complete their work by June 2010 and the ICL committee, by the spring of 2011.
3. **Toxics Caucus- [Technical Expert Group on screening assessments of living organisms on the Domestic Substances List \(TEG\):](#)** Maria Castro, Beyond Factory Farming, has been participating as the ENGO member in this Technical Expert Group since its inception in May 2007. She participated in two teleconferences in April and October of 2009. The screening assessment is a scientific evaluation of whether a living organism on the DSL is entering or may enter the environment in a quantity, concentration or under conditions that may become harmful to human health or the environment. The Technical Expert Group (TEG) advises the NSP on the Screening Assessment Project to ensure that the proposed process, intended outcomes and guideline documents are scientifically sound and transparent. Prioritization of the 45 organisms listed on the DSL and a pilot Screening Assessment of one organism have been completed. The TEG is expected to continue its work until at least 2012. More information about the process is available on the [EC website](#).
4. **Toxics Caucus- [Pest Management Advisory Council \(PMAC\):](#)** In October 2007, Sandra Madray (Chemical Sensitivities Manitoba) was accepted for a one year (not a two year term) with Health Canada's Pest Management Advisory Council (PMAC). PMAC reports directly to the Minister and gives advice to the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA). Sandra attended the PMAC meeting in Ottawa May 22-23, 2008. There has been a lengthy delay in re-electing Sandra and her alternate, Susan Sang (York Region Environmental Alliance) to the PMAC. PMAC meetings scheduled for 2009 were cancelled and there has been no official update on re-instatement or upcoming PMAC meetings.
5. **Health Caucus- [ENGO Participation in the Food Regulatory Advisory Committee \(FRAC\):](#)** One RCEN delegate (Josh Brandon) was selected to participate in the Food Regulatory Advisory Committee (FRAC), hosted by Health Canada. This multi-stakeholder committee will provide Health Canada's Food Directorate (FD) with broad expert strategic policy advice on the safety of food products. The FRAC will also provide advice on matters relating to strategic planning, priority-setting and environmental scanning of issues related to food safety, nutritional quality or other issues related to the FD's mandate. The first meeting of this Committee will take place in May 2010.