

RCEN Green Paper on Agriculture and the Environment
Executive Summary
February 2007

Even the most sustainable forms of agriculture have an impact on the environment: by favouring some species – the crop plants and animals – over others, the farmer changes the ecosystem within which agriculture takes place. A natural ecosystem becomes an agro-ecosystem. That does not mean that agriculture cannot be environmentally sustainable. Agro-ecosystems can be designed in such a way as to offer habitat to a wide range of wild species and maintain a high level of biodiversity and ecosystem function.

However, in some parts of Canada the conversion of nearly all land to human land uses, including agriculture, has led to the near extinction of native ecosystems. Agriculture is also depleting and polluting natural resources: soil, water, air and biodiversity. More sustainable agricultural systems, e.g. organic farming, exist and are implemented by a minority of farmers. Society must support farmers in a move towards a more sustainable Canadian agriculture, either by paying fair prices for products that cover the true cost of sustainable production, or by a system of direct payments for environmental goods and services.

Recommendations

- **All government policy and policy instruments must include amongst their objectives that of moving agriculture further towards environmental sustainability.**
- **Every ecoregion in the country in which agriculture takes place needs an agri-environmental management plan.**
- **Agro-ecosystems must be designed to naturally support healthy and thriving populations of crop plants and animals without the use of pesticides or veterinary drugs.**
- **Funding for the National Agri-Environmental Standards Initiative (NAESI) should be extended.**
- **The National Agri-Environmental Health Analysis and Reporting Program (NAHARP) should be expanded.**
- **Research is needed on the development of crops that are better adapted to local growing conditions, including the agricultural potential of native plants.**
- **All income support programs for agriculture should in some way be tied to environmental performance of the farm. Direct payments for environmental goods and services should be considered where needed.**
- **Greater emphasis is needed on local and regional agricultural production for local consumption.**