

MANITOBA AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL INITIATIVES

SUMMARY OF GROWING FORWARD INDUSTRY INFORMATION MEETING

Held February 18, 2009 at the Winnipeg Winter Club

Attendees: 43 representing industry stakeholders
17 representing AAFC, MAFRI & MASC
Total: 60

Preamble: *These notes reflect the questions and answers following the presentations at the information meetings. In addition, participants were asked to complete "Immediate Feedback" sheets commenting on each suite of programs as well as on program delivery and communications. Twenty-three feedback sheets and one additional post-meeting response were received.*

This is a summary document and is not meant to reflect every comment made at the information meeting, nor do the comments necessarily reflect the opinion of all of the stakeholders.

➤ **Advisory Groups**

- A number of respondents produced diagrams on their feedback sheets suggesting a structure for a new group model. They had suite advisory groups reporting to a Growing Forward working group that in turn would report directly to the minister. It was suggested that these advisory groups include representatives from producers and producer groups. The proposed Growing Forward working group model would include a representative from each suite's advisory group.

➤ **Innovation Suite**

- There was a question regarding how the Innovation programming priorities would be set. Producer groups would like to influence these priorities.

The response noted that the Agricultural Policy Framework (APF) helped build strategic alliances and strategies in some areas. Some of the work in determining innovation programming priorities

has been done but needs to be implemented. Groups may talk to MAFRI about their needs and strategies.

- A concern was raised that MAFRI needs to define specific programs and targets for innovation funding because much of the funding is for undefined programming.
- MAFRI needs to develop relationships and create links with current research done nationally (at the federal level). There is a subtle nuance to the legislation which will not allow Growing Forward to support federal research at research stations in our province. MAFRI recognizes that commodity groups like to work, or fund work, at research stations. All concerned will need to work together, including colleges that could access the research funding upon submission of proposals.
- It was asked if innovation funds would be limited to food processing and development. The response indicated that there will be funding for production technology, but a proposal would be required.
- There is opportunity under Growing Forward to address sustainability issues at the production level. Growing Forward will support start-up dialogue on the long-term sustainability of resources but will need collaboration from stakeholders.
- Setting priorities for the Innovation Suite is the responsibility of all stakeholders whether it relates to climate change or programs in innovation.
- Transportation issues were raised regarding smaller volume products' access to freight cars.

➤ **Business Development (Skills) Suite**

- Funds are available under the Business Development (Skills) Suite for on-farm and post-farm training. The training needs of food processors will be assessed and funding provided according to those needs. The Manitoba Food Processors Association requested that training be coordinated with them, as training is part of their mandate. They receive federal funding for the training.
- Funds will be directed towards on-farm training. Courses could be organized in different ways – distance education, group training from business development specialist, workshops etc. The Business Development (Skills) Suite will be providing funding to rural areas. Rural training is separate and more intense. This

reinforces MAFRI's commitment to explore the concept of training in rural communities.

- Web-based training will be supported under the Business Development (Skills) Suite.
- It was pointed out that Human Resource Councils (HRSDC) have been developed to address human resources issues, and coordination will be needed to avoid duplication of roles/duties.

➤ **Integrated Food Safety, Biosecurity and Traceability Programs**

- Growing Forward programs facilitate the adoption of food safety programs, traceability, and biosecurity. Growing Forward is meant to advance the industry in those areas as opposed to being an enforcement mechanism.
- MAFRI will focus on a holistic approach to food safety and address the biggest risks and how to mitigate them.
- There is a need to discuss on-farm programming with producer groups to ensure integration with national on-farm food safety programs already in place.
- MAFRI intends to use an integrated on-farm food safety system that meets the needs of various stakeholders. MAFRI has indicated that it will avoid duplication of programs. MAFRI also intends to consult with the industry to discuss the needs of each sector to address gaps in traceability, biosecurity, and food safety programs.
- Producers, non-federally registered food processing facilities, livestock assembly yards, food transporters, warehouses, and packaging plants are eligible for funding.
- Traceability encompasses all sectors in the food supply chain. The priorities are livestock and poultry.
- There is a difference between how industry and government look at traceability. Producers see traceability as a marketing and branding tool, while the government sees traceability as an emergency planning or emergency management tool. Effective traceability systems can serve both objectives.
- Manitoba and other provinces are doing their parts by developing provincial premises registration systems while producers are doing animal identification. Growing Forward will help move traceability forward by helping with implementation of traceability activities.

Producers support traceability and are counting on provincial support for the implementation of traceability. The traceability system MAFRI is trying to build will meet the needs of various stakeholders including governments and industries.

- It was noted that the complexity of creating a tracking and traceability system for Canada has been underestimated. The system is enormous, multi-faceted, cross-country, and needs some standardization. It is hard to recognize the added value of the work in developing tracking and traceability systems in their early stages, but will help demonstrate value to producers in the long run.
- Producers wanted to know how they will be classified in cases where they have packaging facilities on the farm. Will they be classified as a producer or processor under Growing Forward? Food Safety Initiative (FSI) staff will assess the cases and determine eligibility.

➤ **Environmental Programming**

- There is no existing federal/provincial/territorial agreement to have an ongoing Alternative Land Use Service (ALUS) program. However, under the Growing Forward agreement there is funding for research on Ecological Goods and Services.
- MAFRI was asked if it is collecting environmental and/or food safety data for use in regulation or enforcement. The point made is that Canada is short of aggregated data on food safety and the environment. The response indicated that the purpose and type of data collection will vary depending on the program and its purpose. In general, we collect data for use in verifying activity related to the program and to obtain information needed for policy development and program evaluation.
- Demand driven programs are difficult to budget and manage, particularly if producers decide to come on board late. Under Growing Forward, beneficial management practices (BMPs) will be targeted and MAFRI may have to consider yearly or national allocations to stay within budget.
- MAFRI wants a single window of delivery so that producers can get to know of all the programs (climate change, nutrient management funding, beneficial management practices, water distribution, etc.) that they can access. We need to have a clear package for producers on where they can go for funding. An important element in the single window of delivery is coordination between programs.

- Environmental Farm Plans (EFPs) are considered current for 5 years. Some of the plans will expire in 2010 and producers may need to update them to obtain beneficial management practices funding.
- MAFRI anticipates a faster turn-around time for approval of projects since the province is now delivering the program.

- **Delivery of Programs**
 - MAFRI is still working on program delivery criteria.

 - Producer and producer groups are concerned about downloading program application forms where there is no high speed internet. Clients can come into Growing Opportunity offices and print off the application forms there, or they could have the forms faxed to them upon request.

 - MAFRI will ensure the applications forms are simple to download.

- **General Comments**
 - MAFRI needs to ensure programs do not run out of funds. As well, MAFRI needs to continue to tackle issues such as transportation, farm input costs, and market development (branding Canada) at a national level.

COMMUNICATIONS COMPONENT

This section provides participants' responses to the four questions (Q1 – Q4) asked under the communications component of the questionnaire. The questions and responses are as follows:

Q1) *In question #1, participants were asked to identify what they felt government could do to ensure there is a seamless level of communication between Growing Forward programs and clients.*

- Participants feel that providing commodity groups with current program and information updates would be useful so they can pass on such information to their members in monthly mail outs and newsletters. Participants encouraged delivery of concise, integrated information, processes to get input, ongoing communications between MAFRI and program clients, regular updates with ongoing meetings, as well as news releases to producers in community newspapers, etc.
- Government should ensure consistency between programs whenever possible and clearly outline program differences to Growing Forward clients. For example, identify programs that will fund capital and those that will not and those that will fund only certain percentages, especially if a company or producer is participating in more than one program.
- A big picture perspective should be provided to clients and should focus on what programs need to accomplish rather than on program restrictions. This will help those seeking funding in planning, following guidelines, and meeting program requirements.
- Use the MASC database to contact producers.
- Government should establish advisory committees for each program category and hold provincial meetings.
- To avoid program, activity, and communication duplication, MAFRI should ensure that its staff is aware of work that has already been completed, and what is in process. Staff should also know what others are currently working on and what they have worked on in the past. Using GO Centre advisors (MAFRI staff) is important. Horizontal teams should also be encouraged to communicate and partner with producers and commodity associations.
- The province was commended for its strong efforts to communicate and was encouraged to keep working on improving in this area.

Q2) Question # 2 required participants to rank a set of methods of communication (1 = most preferred and 6 = least preferred; see table below) applicable to Growing Forward programs. As some methods were not ranked by some participants, “nr” has been added to the table below to capture them.

A total of 23 attendees participated in this survey and 17 responded to this question. The table below shows their preferred methods of communication.

Using “Email to your organization for your distribution” method as an example, the table shows that out of the 17 respondents, 10 would prefer the method of MAFRI e-mails to respective organizations for distribution. Five respondents would prefer this method of communication as their second choice. One respondent each ranked this category as third and fourth highest preferences.

Generally speaking, the table shows that “Email to your organization for your distribution” is the most preferred method of communication. Ten of the 17 respondents ranked it first. The next preferred method is “Email to individual members of your organization who have provided their contact information for this purpose”. This was ranked first by five of the 17 respondents. The survey shows that “Visit to your local GO office” and “Newsletter” are the least preferred.

Methods of communication:	Ranks: 1=Most, 6=Least preferred						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	n/r
A) Email to your organization for your distribution	10	5	1	1	0	0	0
B) Email to individual members of your organization who have provided their contact information for this purpose	5	5	1	0	2	0	4
C) MAFRI website	3	1	7	2	1	0	3
D) Visit to your local GO office	0	2	1	6	2	1	5
E) Postal Mail	2	0	2	3	3	4	3
F) Newsletter	0	1	1	3	5	3	4

Note:

Column numbers do not add up to 17 because two respondents were indifferent between some communication methods. One gave A, B & C the rank of 1, and E & F the rank of 4; the other assigned A & B the rank of 1 and C & E the rank of 3. The “nr” (not ranked) column accounts for the rest.

Other:

Respondents were given the opportunity to specify other preferred methods of communication. One respondent indicated “Direct communication by MAFRI staff to other organizations and government departments at all levels” would be preferred and ranked it third.

Additional Comments:

- It was noted that frequent, short communication to all contacts was preferred to long and infrequent ones. Frequent communications are especially important in the four to five year programs. This accounts for program evolution and facilitates networking.
- Action items, especially deadlines, should be clearly identified.
- MAFRI is encouraged to strive for adequate staffing levels and for increased partnership between its staff and producer associations. Meetings with commodity organizations were deemed very important.

Q3) *When asked how MAFRI can ensure there is sufficient information available to clients on Growing Forward programs, responses were:*

- Advisory groups are needed to monitor communications and provide recommendations to MAFRI.
- Online reference documents need to be kept current. Sending updates (or notices of updates to documents online) directly to clients via e-mail was recommended.
- Program guides or catalogues (similar to the *Seed Manitoba* guide) could be distributed to clients.

Other ideas:

- Establish a process through which program clients can subscribe to program updates through the proposed advisory group.
 - Expand contacts within client industries and organizations.
 - Communicate directly with producers, producer organizations, and other stakeholders.
- Respondents suggested that commodity groups’ annual meetings should be used as a form of information delivery (displays, presentations, pamphlets etc.). They also suggested that adequate support for GO Teams and the existing phone services should continue to be provided.
 - Appropriate staff training in key positions is encouraged to ensure they have the right information and know where to direct producers for information.

Q4) Respondents were requested to identify some communication weaknesses with the APF.

- One of the weaknesses cited about APF was its inability to respond to client communication and questions (ex: is there a market for the product) fast enough.
- Another APF weakness was described as its “hurry up and wait” approach. APF required very detailed, time consuming information from clients, but would change requirements and then expect clients to accommodate these changes on very short notice.
- MAFRI should have done much more to communicate across government levels. There was very little APF communication between organizations; there were too many APF programs; and there was not enough coordination.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/QUESTIONS/SUGGESTIONS:

- Respondents expressed their satisfaction with this meeting, encouraged MAFRI to hold similar meetings in the future, and expressed their willingness for partnership and assistance to MAFRI when called upon. Leads were commended for their high level of skill in dealing with industry concerns at the meeting.
- Flexibility in programs does not hinder producers. However, when the rules are tweaked after a program/project has been approved, producers cannot go back and reapply so they lose out.
- Concerns were expressed about marketing innovations and new products --- where to sell innovations and new products and who would buy them.
- Clarifications were asked for on:
 - a) How program funding allocations would be co-ordinated, especially for activities that cross the allocation boundaries? E.g. a food safety innovation that develops a new or existing business.
 - b) Where the innovation or business development is a "new" food product, what criteria would be used to ensure the food product would be healthy, not sugar or trans-fat laden?
- Regulations that protect what was done yesterday and inhibit ability to innovate or move ahead should be identified and amended as quickly as possible. It was also suggested that more money go into practical solutions, “not pie in the sky” ideas, and ensure Growing Forward dollars are re-allocated if there is no uptake at the innovation end.

- Timing was expressed as a concern, because four years may not be long enough to get innovative ideas up and running.
- As Growing Forward moves ahead, press releases need to recognize the contributions made by producers.
- The need to strive for increased partnership between MAFRI staff and producer associations was stressed, adding that it is absolutely imperative that MAFRI strive to improve program efficiency and turn-around time for approval.
- The Winter Club audio system was noted as inadequate. One participant suggested holding these meetings in a venue with a proper sound system, contacting the Winnipeg Winter Club to include guarantee of a proper sound system, or by finding a different location.