

GRowing Outcomes in Watersheds (GROW)

*A home-grown ecological goods and services program for
Manitoba*

PUBLIC CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

AUGUST 2017



MINISTERS' MESSAGE

Dear Manitobans,

Manitoba's agriculture industry is well positioned as an environmental solution provider with a tremendous opportunity to provide vital ecological goods and services. As society faces the need to address numerous environmental issues such as water quantity and quality, loss of natural capital (including soils, water and biota), and climate change, it is important to understand how the agriculture sector can contribute to the solution. This government is committed to developing a unique made-in-Manitoba program to secure ecological goods and services for the benefit of all Manitobans. Based on the Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) model, the new program is called GRowing Outcomes in Watersheds (GROW). This program will help to reduce the impacts of flooding, reduce nutrient loading, improve water quality, protect wetlands, mitigate the effects of droughts and protect drinking water sources in partnership with landowners, non-government organizations, and federal and municipal governments. By embracing innovative approaches and a long-term view, the agriculture sector has unique opportunities to sustain natural capital and advance beneficial management practices that provide valuable ecological goods and services.

We are committed to delivering real, measurable outcomes that demonstrate value for the investment we're making in programs to improve the health and resiliency of our watersheds. As we develop the GROW program for Manitoba, our goal is to make the most effective use of government and industry investments, while achieving the desired outcomes of reduced flooding, and improved water quality and nutrient management across agro-Manitoba.

This government is a listening government - we want to hear Manitobans views on issues that matter to them. We look forward to sharing ideas, strengthening partnerships and building new ones as we work toward a better Manitoba.



Sincerely,

original signed by

Ralph Eichler



Sincerely,

original signed by

Rochelle Squires

Introduction to GRowing Outcomes in Watersheds (GROW)

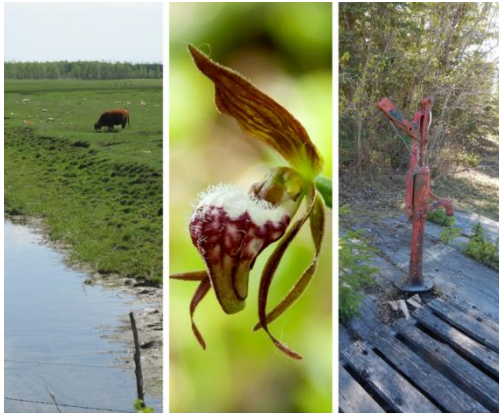
Manitoba Departments of Agriculture and Sustainable Development have committed to implement a program based on the Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) model to help reduce flooding and improve water quality and nutrient management. It is being done in partnership with landowners, non-government organizations, and federal and municipal governments. This program, GRowing Outcomes in Watersheds (GROW), will provide a made-in-Manitoba approach to environmental programming across the agricultural landscape of Manitoba.

Ecological goods and services (EG&S) are the environmental benefits derived from healthy ecosystems and include market goods produced from ecosystems (e.g., food), the benefits from ecosystem processes (e.g., water purification), and non-material benefits (e.g., recreation).

ALUS is an example of a program that is driven by local communities and landowners. Eligible lands under ALUS generally include restored or maintained wetlands, riparian areas, native prairie and others. ALUS is delivered through community-based organizations, and was originally developed in Manitoba by Keystone Agricultural Producers and Delta Waterfowl Foundation. ALUS payment levels vary greatly, depending on the location and agricultural practices permitted.

Manitoba will develop a homegrown approach to ecological goods and services programming – a community-driven program that provides sustainable, targeted results on the landscape, including reduced impacts of flooding, reduced nutrient loading, improved water quality, protection for wetlands, drought mitigation and protection of drinking water sources.

This new provincial program will allow for flexibility to build on the success of existing federal and provincial program delivery through conservation districts on a watershed basis, to target projects for maximum results on the landscape and ensure programming is locally relevant, integrated and responsive to local priorities.



Proposed Principles of GROW

1. Sustainable
2. Targeted, watershed-based approach
3. Locally-delivered, farmer focused
4. Voluntary
5. Measurable
6. Evidence-based evaluation

Expected outcomes of GROW

Reduced flooding

Improved water quality, including drinking water

Improved on-farm management of nutrients

Improved resiliency to the impacts of a changing climate

Improved biodiversity and habitat

Enhanced carbon storage

Enhanced sustainable food production

Improved groundwater quality and recharge



Are there additional program principles that should be considered during program development?

What other opportunities could be leveraged through this programming?

Which outcomes would you prioritize for funding under GROW?

Proposed Eligible Beneficial Management Practices (BMPs)

The following BMPs have been proposed for inclusion in Manitoba's GROW program for their ability to provide environmental benefits and meet program objectives. All of the priority BMPs may result in changes in land use for sensitive or marginal areas. For example, small water retention projects may intentionally inundate areas for a short time in the spring to reduce peak flows downstream. These areas may typically already hold some water, so the intention of the BMP would be to design a structure to retain and control the release of water downstream. Similarly, a grassland restoration project may take land that has historically been annually cropped and convert it back to a more suitable use for that soil and landscape by establishing a perennial native or tame forage stand.

Priority BMPs:

- small water retention projects
- grassland restoration, enhancement and reclamation
- wetland restoration and enhancement
- riparian area management

Additional BMPs for consideration:

- soil health improvements - includes implementing new cropping systems to improve soil health, such as a one-time payment to establish a cover crop, inter-crop or poly-crop system
- natural area management
- shelterbelts/eco-buffers
- woodlot restoration, enhancement and rejuvenation
- aquifer recharge protection

What landscapes and practices should be eligible for the GROW program?

Are there any landscapes or practices that should NOT be eligible for the program?

How can this programming be integrated with other programs and initiatives?

How should funding for these practices be allocated? How would you prioritize these practices?

Funding and Governance of GROW

Any new ecological goods and services programming must be sustainable in the context of broader government objectives. Manitoba currently offers a range of agricultural and watershed programming designed to provide environmental benefits, while minimizing environmental risk associated with industry practices.

Proposed Funding Criteria

Manitoba is proposing an evidence-based project evaluation framework to prioritize funding toward provincial outcomes. To be eligible, a project must provide an incremental benefit to the environment that is consistent with watershed management plans and targeted to local and provincial priorities. For example, lands must be enhanced to be eligible, not simply protected in their current state. Cross-compliance with other provincially-delivered programs is being considered. For example, producers may be required to have a completed Environmental Farm Plan to be eligible for payments under GROW or watershed authorities (conservation districts) may have to show how project outcomes align to GROW criteria. Funds leveraged through other sources may have additional criteria that recipients would have to meet.

Funding Administration Model

The GROW program will integrate funding from multiple sources to meet program objectives. There are several different ways that the multiple sources of funding can flow to watershed authorities (conservation districts) and farmers. Reduced red tape, efficiency and transparency will be important principles to consider when developing this model.

Governance

Manitoba is fortunate to have many passionate and dedicated organizations delivering services to farmers. We want to leverage this existing capacity to manage and deliver GROW. We see opportunities for watershed authorities (conservation districts), non-government organizations, industry, Crown corporations and all levels of government in partnering on the program.

How should GROW be funded?

How should funding levels for projects and payments be determined?

How can we leverage funding from non-government, municipalities, industry and landowners to achieve more outcomes on the landscape?

How should projects be evaluated or prioritized for funding?

HOW TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK

We want to hear from you. Please take advantage of this opportunity and provide your thoughts and suggestions on the GRowing Outcomes in Watersheds (GROW) Program. All comments received in response to this consultation document will be read and considered as we move forward.

Comments collected in response to this consultation document may be used by the Manitoba government to inform changes to existing legislative, regulatory, program, and policy frameworks.

Written comments can be provided by:

Email to watershedconsult@gov.mb.ca with the subject line “GROW Consultation”

Mail written submissions to:

Attention: GROW Consultation
Box 11, 200 Saulteaux Crescent
Winnipeg, MB R3J 3W3

The deadline for feedback is October 6, 2017.

This paper is available in alternate formats by contacting the Department's Accessibility Co-ordinator at 204-945-4451.