



NATIONAL DATA COLLECTION FRAMEWORK FOR BENEFICIAL MANAGEMENT PRACTICES



By Nevin Rosaasen, APG Sustainability & Government Relations Lead

Survey fatigue is real. There isn't a farmer out there who hasn't been pestered, enticed, or coerced to fill out yet another survey. The problem is, the different organizations, be it government or industry, often either do not have sharing agreements or even an idea of what other ministries, departments or industry groups are collecting. There is a need for a national data collection framework to reduce the number of surveys to capture this important Beneficial Management Practice (BMP) data and to develop a framework to ensure farmer privacy, while at the same time accomplishing what is needed to move the industry forward.

Why is data important?

Without data relating to BMPs employed on farm, the federal government is over-estimating emission data. The current practice is to take fertilizer sales, multiply

those sales by a coefficient for emissions, and this data feeds into the National Inventory Report (NIR), essentially, our international scorecard. Not only do we miss the BMP of Environmentally Smart Nitrogen (ESN), deep banding vs. broadcast, the government also misses out on other important data such as variable rate, sectional control, and the most important, the residual nitrogen that remains in the soil. We heard in Ottawa in early April that our NIR scorecard was going to be a very grim report. This was due to dry conditions on the prairies and assumed emissions from volatilization. However, many soil samples have been showing very high levels of residual nitrogen, often above 120 lbs/acre, which represents the results of BMPs being employed, and not captured.

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What other ministries are looking for data?

In Ottawa, the Ministries of Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) as well as Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) are working towards a National Biodiversity strategy and Integrated Pest Management Framework for our international commitments to reduce pollution on land (target 7 of the International Convention of the Parties on Biodiversity). While our government is in negotiations with international counterparts, they are using out-of-date pesticide data and are not accounting for new technologies being employed on the farm. Low drift nozzles, sectional control, pulse width modulation, turn compensation, green on brown technology (Weedit) and new green on green AI technologies are being adopted across broad acres in western Canada. These technologies are not reflected in our current biodiversity scorecard and we have new stewardship and water monitoring data which can give Canada a much better grade in our international benchmark. Initiatives such as Field Heroes, identifying beneficials before spraying and, at times, surpassing economic thresholds of crop pests to see the populations drop the next day due to predator and parasitoid insects are the stories and the practices that need to be accounted for.

Integrated Pest Management and Sustainability

We have other industry led initiatives such as the Foundations for Sustainable Crops led by the Canadian Round Table for Sustainable Crops (CRSC). This initiative managed to capture



(Left) Grain Growers of Canada representatives met with several Members of Parliament to highlight the importance of grain exports to Canada's economy.

(Below) Grain Growers of Canada representatives including APG Director Robert Semeniuk and Nevin Rosaasen met with Pierre Poilievre, Leader of the Official Opposition, to highlight key policy and research priorities out to 2050.



some Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and BMP data, however, the survey sample size was very small due to survey fatigue and concerns of the final outcomes as well as farmer privacy. The National Index on Agri-Food Performance is another initiative which will need better data as the pilots have identified data limitations, again, due to survey fatigue. Without good data, our domestic initiatives to demonstrate sustainability and our international scorecards will continue to fall short and leave Canadian farmers with a black eye on the international stage.

How can a National Data Management Framework be accomplished?

The path forward to ensure our BMP data is collected won't be easy. Industry and government will have to work together to initiate data sharing agreements, ensure producer privacy is protected, and avoid duplicating lengthy surveys farmers do not have the time, or generally want to fill out. So many times, we hear of farmers lying on their seeding intention reports to Statistics Canada for market reasons. Fair enough. When it comes to providing data on the

practices and technologies farmers are adopting, it is so important we understand the implications it has on agricultural policies coming out of Ottawa. No farmer wants to be regulated regarding emissions, be required to reduce pesticide applications, or be told how to run their operations. Farmers, industry and government need to come together to agree on how to ensure a national data collection framework can best serve farmers, and how we can better tell the true sustainability story of Canadian agriculture.