




SUMMARY REPORT OF THE
PRAIRIE FARMER & RANCHER FORUM

JUNE 2024



An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. The foreground shows a large, golden-brown field, likely a harvested crop. In the middle ground, there are green fields and a dirt road. In the background, there are rolling hills and a farmstead with several buildings and silos. The sky is clear and blue.

“Together, we discovered that among the diversity of the Forum members there is a unifying sense of pride and responsibility for the land we manage. No matter how big or small the acres, old or young the farmer or rancher, or the myriad of methods each individual employs in their context—we are doing the work of land stewardship.

We want our land to be productive, healthy, resilient, and viable for the future. We want to use technology and science to increase productivity without sacrificing profitability, we want to be profitable without having to stress the capacity of our labor or ecosystem into illness and disease, we want to feed the global world without jeopardizing our local world, we want to see our communities thriving and successful instead of deserted and dying. We do want the best for our industry and we have made outstanding progress already...

We know our context, we know our challenges, we are willing to learn and adapt to a changing world—we will continue to lead from the ground up.”



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Thirty-six producers came together in early 2024 to form the Prairie Farmer & Rancher Forum. These farmers and ranchers were randomly selected through a civic lottery process to broadly represent the demographic diversity and different production systems of Prairie agriculture. This citizens' assembly model has been used successfully in other sectors in Canada to develop grassroots policy recommendations, but it has never before been employed in the agriculture sector. The Forum's mandate was to examine issues and opportunities related to climate change and enhancing sustainable agriculture production on the Canadian Prairies. Our goal was to develop recommendations for a strong, sustainable, and prosperous Prairie agriculture sector.

Forum members met for multi-day meetings on three separate occasions to hear from experts on climate change, soil health, data and measurement, nutrient management, and a number of other topics related to sustainability and land stewardship, and to formulate recommendations for improvement. Between meetings, Forum members consulted with others in their communities to seek input and suggestions.

The Forum came to a strong consensus on a set of guiding principles and 36 recommendations centred around measurement, livestock management, soil health, natural habitat, nitrogen management, and energy. These recommendations are practical, achievable, and they are rooted in the experience of Forum members.

“The Forum brought together a range of perspectives from Prairie farmers and ranchers to deliberate on challenging issues that face the agricultural industry. As participants we were confronted with a host of information from experts and the scientific literature related to the causes and implications of a changing climate and the impact on Prairie agriculture.”

Executive summary

Together, the recommendations offer the sector a starting point for improving sustainability and profitability in Prairie agriculture.

The 36 Forum members varied by age, gender, location, scale, and type of production. Members were also selected to represent a range of opinions on climate change, from those who do not believe that human-caused climate change is occurring, to those who see global warming as a threat to human civilization, with many gradients of opinion in between.

This diversity led to conflict and disagreement at the first meeting, but by taking the time to listen to and get to know each other, the Forum members were able to find areas of consensus, each letting go of ideas they held dear in service of finding consensus on ideas that hold promise. In the end, a universal commitment to long-term land stewardship brought Forum members together and led to agreement on an ambitious set of recommendations.

“Somehow we have a boatload of recommendations and nobody died or went to jail!”

In an era of increasing polarization, the Prairie Farmer & Rancher Forum is an example of how a collaborative, honest, and open process of deliberation and dialogue can lead to consensus on substantial policy recommendations. It is also a testament to the wisdom, knowledge, and experience of Prairie producers.

Forum members are hopeful that all actors in the Canadian agri-food system—including primary producers, farm and ranch organizations, industry groups, food buyers and retailers, governments and consumers—will work to implement these recommendations and join in the vision of a healthy, sustainable, and prosperous Prairie agriculture sector, now and in the future.

The Prairie Farmer & Rancher Forum was organized by [Farmers for Climate Solutions](#), a national, farmer and rancher-led coalition of farm organizations, and funded by independent Canadian foundations, with an independent facilitator and co-leads from the Prairie agriculture sector.

All quotes in this report are from Forum members.

Learn more about the Prairie Farmer & Rancher Forum and read the full report at prairie-ag-forum.ca.



FORUM RECOMMENDATIONS AT A GLANCE

Our guiding principles

- **Farmer and rancher led**
Prairie producers are best placed to chart a path to greater sustainability. Farmer and rancher leadership should be recognized, supported, and enhanced.
- **Sustainability focused**
Sustainability includes environmental, financial, and social sustainability. The most important opportunities lie in systems and practices that increase both environmental performance and profitability.
- **Prairie context**
Prairie agriculture is unique in Canada and the world, with distinct opportunities and challenges. The distinctive contexts of Prairie farming must always be front of mind.
- **Innovation**
Farmers and ranchers have made great strides in increasing the efficiency and sustainability of their operations. These innovations should be recognized, celebrated, and spread.
- **Continuous improvement**
Farmers and ranchers are constantly learning, and must strive to continuously improve stewardship on their operations.
- **Collaboration**
We will be successful by working together with our fellow farmers and ranchers, governments, food companies, consumers, communities, and other stakeholders.

26 expert presenters

36 Forum members

Approximately **70** hours spent learning and deliberating during three separate multi-day in-person meetings and four virtual sessions.

36 recommendations

Recommendations of the Prairie Farmer & Rancher Forum

Cross-cutting

1. Establish baseline measurements for each priority category (Soil health, Natural habitat, Livestock management, Nitrogen management, Measurement, Energy) to assess future performance.
2. Encourage public funding of regional research centres and organizations.
3. Expand and continue to support producer-to-producer networks.
4. Increase public funding to support farmer and rancher-directed research.
5. Ensure transparency in academic funding.
6. Ensure that funders do not influence curriculum at universities and colleges.
7. Create a farmer and rancher organization (or support an existing farm and ranch organization) to ensure good communication with all stakeholders and ensure farmers and ranchers are included in sustainability discussions.

Measurement

8. Adapt and develop modelling systems that better reflect the differences in regions and practices, and that accurately measure the impact of changes in practices on sustainability metrics at the farm and ranch level.
9. Encourage farmers and ranchers to develop goals and measure quality of life in addition to other measurements.

Livestock management

10. Recognize the value and benefits of grazing animals and look at the entire production system when considering methane emissions in order to better clarify and understand the benefits.

11. Encourage the integration of crop and livestock production by fostering collaboration between grain farmers and ranchers.
12. Support grazing management that improves ecosystem health and producer profitability.
13. Improve and expand Business Risk Management (BRM) programs for livestock producers and explore opportunities to use these programs to incentivize Beneficial Management Practices (BMPs).

Soil health

14. Support farmer and rancher efforts to increase enduring organic carbon in their soils. Recognize the expanding research on more stable, long-term forms of soil organic carbon and the carbon cycle as important indicators of soil sustainability and health.
15. Identify soil tests that will act as the standard metrics for measuring soil health that include soil organic matter, soil organic carbon, microbiology, and mycorrhizal fungi, in addition to existing testing protocols.
16. Make available standardized sampling methods for soil testing, and train the agricultural community on proper sampling techniques.
17. Research existing and new agricultural products on the market—such as fertilizers, fungicides, herbicides, and insecticides—and their impacts on soil, water, human, and ecosystem health.
18. Research the effect of fertilizers and insecticides on crop mycorrhizal relationships and root growth inhibition, soil biology, and nutrient cycling.

Forum recommendations at a glance

“The 36 farmers and ranchers discussed diverse and complex views relevant to most Prairie farmers and ranchers. Those discussions are the basis of the recommendations that all agreed were relevant ranging from short to long term.”

19. Ensure that any mechanisms or products that come to market are properly tested and validated, ideally through regional field trials, ensuring they can deliver the outcomes they claim. Limitations of products should be clearly labelled.
20. Improve incentives to establish perennials to help address soil health and improve marginal lands, and to prevent the eutrophication of water bodies and rivers caused by excess runoff.
21. Support research regarding, and expand the use of, intercropping, cover cropping, polycropping, relay cropping, and animal integration.
22. Require traceability and composition of fertilizers from source to on-farm and on-ranch, and ensure farmers and ranchers have access to that information.
23. Develop programs to incentivize soil health improvements.

Natural habitat

24. Encourage and assist retention, building, and restoration of habitat, including wetlands, riparian areas, native grass, forest, and shelter belts.
25. Ensure all levels of government enforce existing regulations and legislation in place to protect natural habitat.
26. Advocate for relevant entities to implement terminology changes by renaming “wasteland” to new categories, for example “natural habitat” and “yard site.”

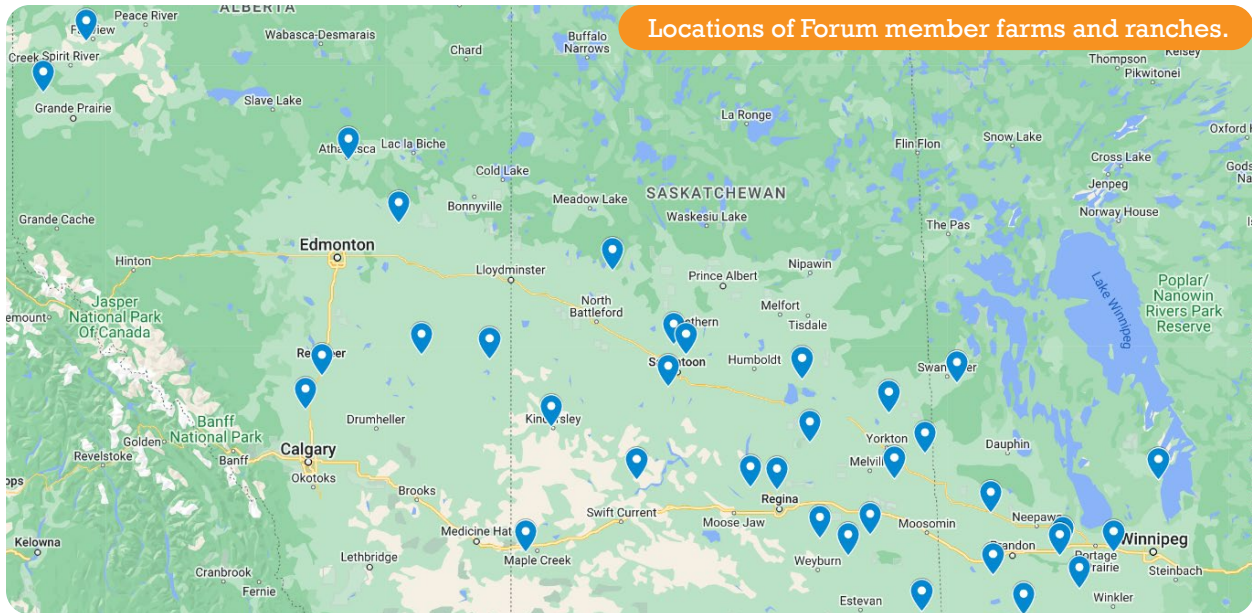
27. Explore opportunities to generate revenue from wildlife habitat to incentivize preserving natural habitat.
28. Encourage municipalities (both rural and urban) to capitalize on opportunities to enhance natural habitat.
29. Develop programs to incentivize naturalization of marginal lands.

Nitrogen management

30. Promote greater adoption of 4R Nutrient Management.
31. Conduct more research on how and where intercropping and cover cropping can lead to reduced fertilizer use.
32. Advance research on pulse crop diseases and pulse crop adaptation to allow more and continued integration of legumes into crop rotations.
33. Require all major urban centres to process their sewage and industrial waste in a manner that makes the nutrients safe and available for agriculture to complete the nutrient cycle.

Energy

34. Support farmers and ranchers to transition to lower emissions energy sources.
35. Expand research into on-farm fuel production using renewable energy (e.g. biodiesel, ammonia, hydrogen, etc.)
36. Remove barriers and provide incentives for on-farm and on-ranch renewable energy production.



FORUM SNAPSHOT

The Prairie Farmer & Rancher Forum brought together volunteers from very different backgrounds. The Forum was designed to represent diverse views because solutions are never one-size-fits-all, and a diversity of opinion can lead to better solutions. The Forum was also designed to broadly represent the agriculture sector of the Prairies to ensure the recommendations were developed for Prairie farmers and ranchers, by Prairie farmers and ranchers.

Although Forum organizers sought out as much diversity as possible, some agriculture sectors and Prairie regions were not represented in Forum membership. Sectors that were not represented included the dairy sector, feedstock operations, intensive livestock operations, poultry farming, egg production, and other specialized crops. Despite seeking to include as much diversity as possible, this process and report also did not include the experiences or views of Prairie First Nations, Indigenous, Métis, Inuit, racialized, or Black people, due to lack of applicants.

Sectors

- 23 oilseed & grain
- 19 cattle ranching & farming
- 7 other sectors

Provinces

- 8 Alberta
- 9 Manitoba
- 19 Saskatchewan

Ages

- 3 are under 35
- 13 are 35–54
- 20 are 55+

Gender

- 8 women
- 28 men

Forum snapshot

The Civic Lottery to select the members of the Prairie Farmer & Rancher Forum was conducted on December 1, 2023. Thirty-six people were randomly selected to participate. Together, the Forum broadly matches the demographics and population distribution of the agriculture sector on the Prairies.

Forum membership

Sharon Andreas
Sheho, SK

Russell Bayliss
Carnduff, SK

Quinton Cole
Creelman, SK

Ralph Davidson
Alliance, AB

Scott Duguid
Arnes, MB

Allan Duncan
Austin, MB

Steve Guenther
Osler, SK

Andre Harpe
Valhalla Centre, AB

Tom Harrison
Craven, SK

Harvey Hollman
Penhold, AB

Jeanette Jackson
Kindersley, SK

Audrey Jones
Medstead, SK

Heather Kerschbaumer
Fairview, AB

Joel Kienle
Quill Lake, SK

Arlie Laroche
Vanscoy, SK

Terry Levicki
Andrew, AB

Michael Muscoby
Windthorst, SK

Bill Nell
Francis, SK

Perry Nelson
Cardogan, AB

Garry Richards
Bangor, SK

Marcus Riedner
Didsbury, AB

Grant Rigby
Killarney, MB

Bruce Ross
Souris, MB

Otto Rottier
Athabasca, AB

Sam Sinclair
Strathclair, MB

Robert Smith
Sidney, MB

Philip Sobkow
Calder, SK

Carl Stewart
Oakville, MB

Stu Thiessen
Hepburn, SK

Ryan Thompson
Beechy, SK

Peter Tokar
Minitonas, MB

Norbert Van Deynze
Somerset, MB

Dana Vos
Maple Creek, SK

Stacey Wiebe
Canora, SK

Dolores Zelinski
Lestock, SK

One Forum member stepped down before Meeting #3.

“It is amazing how the organizers...recruited young members to participate in this Forum when they are so busy with children, community activities, and farm responsibilities. These are a diverse bunch not barking up the same tree and eager to challenge anyone. They are the greatest asset Canada has going into the future!”

CONCLUSION

“(Our Forum) was a collaboration of producers from varying backgrounds (operations, locations) who came with very diverse viewpoints and opinions. Diversity became our strength. We were able to find common ground in our concerns and our understandings. As we stopped to truly listen to others, we became more open to learning and researching the issues before us. The outside experts we were fortunate to hear from also informed our understanding to a large degree.

I hope that we have accomplished a greater common voice after our meetings than what we would have had before we began. I believe this experience really underscores the need for agriculture producers to do better to work together toward a common goal of sustainability for our sector.”



Learn more about the Prairie Farmer & Rancher Forum and read the full report at prairie-ag-forum.ca.