

risk, accompanied by funding for stewardship programming. Studies have shown that agricultural land provides habitat for more than 80 percent of species known to be at risk in Canada, making the participation of farmers and ranchers in stewardship programs essential to the conservation of important wildlife habitats (e.g., wetlands and woodlands).

Production Intensity

The concept of eco-efficiency can be applied to agriculture to produce more-valuable goods and services using fewer materials and energy inputs, in turn minimizing losses to the environment and reducing pollution. Agriculture uses many inputs in the production process, including capital, labour, machinery, land, water, nutrients, pesticides, and energy. Because inputs are priced in the marketplace, there is some incentive to use them efficiently.

An indicator estimating residual nitrogen (nitrogen left in the soil after the crop is harvested) shows a strong trend of increasing levels in all provinces except British Columbia between 1981 and 1996. In humid areas of the country, this trend may be associated with declining water quality resulting from nitrogen contamination. Another indicator shows that energy input into Canada's primary agricultural production grew by 8 percent during this period, while total energy output (e.g., energy held in agricultural products) grew by 13 percent, mainly a reflection of the situation in the Prairies, which make up most of Canadian farmland.

NEXT STEPS

Despite considerable progress toward rural development and sustainable agriculture in Canada, much more work is needed. The following items are priorities for this work.

Rural Development

- continued dialogue with the residents of rural and remote communities to keep in touch with their interests and needs
- development of a Federal Rural Action Plan putting in place actions responding to the 11 priority areas under the Federal Framework for Action in Rural Canada
- enhanced opportunities for youth to obtain education and training and find long-term employment in rural regions.