

Provincial Governments

Because of Canada's regional diversity in landscape, climate, and farm types, as well as the division of jurisdiction between federal and provincial/territorial governments, policies and programs to support sustainable agriculture are often designed most effectively in the regions. Provincial governments are usually in the best position to offer the practical support needed by farmers in moving toward sustainable agriculture, working in ways best suited to the farming needs of their regions. Successful technologies developed regionally can then be promoted nationally and applied in other settings where appropriate. For example, the agriculture ministries in British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec have each produced a series of guides to best management practices to improve farm productivity and profitability, as well as environmental performance, in their provinces.

Government Controls and Policy

Regulation has been the main government tool for protecting the environment. Federal laws such as the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, the Fisheries Act, the Canada Health Act, the Pest Control Products Act, the Plant Protection Act, and the Animal Protection Act contain provisions that are pertinent to the environmental performance of agriculture. New developments in biotechnology and other research and development tools are regulated to follow safety rules, and the Government of Canada supports science-based risk assessments for the products of biotechnology in order to protect the health of humans, animals, plants, and the environment.

Many provinces are in the process of issuing new regulations related to farming practice. In 1998, Quebec brought into force the Regulation for the Reduction of Pollution of Agricultural Origin to protect soil and water quality through provisions for the timing of manure application, the application of nutrients to phosphorus-rich soils, and the separation distances between watercourses and farm activities and structures. In Prince Edward Island, new legislation related to watercourse buffer zones will come into effect in 2000.

Municipal bylaws, usually designed to minimize conflict between neighbours, may limit the expansion of agriculture by controlling the siting of new operations, particularly intensive livestock operations. In some cases, environmental standards are developing faster than the ability of some farmers or commodity groups to adapt. Expansion of the Canadian hog industry is today most limited by the lack of cost-effective technologies