

Federation seeks \$10 million to launch farm plan proposal

Producers would be paid for ecological goods and services

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A proposed plan that would see Island farmers paid for being good stewards of the land, benefiting the public good and preserving the province's water resources, could cost taxpayers an estimated \$10 million a year.

The plan, that if approved could become a pilot project in two Island locations, was presented to the Environmental Advisory Committee in Elmsdale Tuesday night by the P.E.I. Federation of Agriculture.

"As the largest single landowner group in the province, farmers are responsible for a large portion of the work and investment needed to protect the Island's water resources," said Mike Nabuurs, executive director of the group. "And farmers are unable to pass these costs on to customers."

The federation proposes that \$10 million be made available each year from various levels of government to help farmers and watershed groups protect water resources and recognize the need for farmers to earn an Ecological Goods and Services tax.

"We feel that producers should be paid for ecological goods and services," insists Eddy Dykerman, past president of the federation. "We are working with the Departments of Environment and Agriculture on a pilot project that will attempt to assign values to the many environmental services that farmers provide."

If approved, the pilot projects would take place on the Souris and Trout Rivers, considered two locales involved with heavy potato production.

The objective of the project is to provide financial incentives to producers for environmental priorities identified in the watershed's management plan. Some of the activities monitored and evaluated include: per acre financial incentives for land utilized for erosion control structures, hedgerows and grassed headlands, retirement of sensitive high- sloped land and acreage along watercourses.

The concept of farmers being paid for ecological goods and services is already happening in many other parts of the world and the federation says it is high time Canada catches up. The federation, which says costs should be shared by a variety of government departments, is calling for an amalgamation of about 25 watershed groups that would be funded by \$2.5 million per year.

"In terms of ecological goods and services payments to farmers we are suggesting that \$7.5 million be allocated on a yearly basis," said Dykerman.

From that amount, \$5 million would be paid out to Island farmers for EG&S while \$2.5 million will go for one-time capital costs to make the necessary changes on farms. The federation said a glass of water is free, while a bottle of water can cost more than \$1. An investment of \$10 million per year on a water supply works out to two cents per glass.