

November 18, 2005

## **PILOT PROJECT REWARDS PRODUCERS FOR BEING RESPONSIBLE LAND STEWARDS**

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### **Federal-Provincial Agreement Supports Ecological Goods and Services Research Project**

On behalf of federal Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Andy Mitchell, Anita Neville, MP for Winnipeg South Centre, and Manitoba Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (MAFRI) Rosann Wowchuk today announced the launch of a three-year pilot project that rewards producers for being responsible stewards of the land.

The Ecological Goods and Services (EG&S) pilot project supports farmers in their efforts to maintain existing wetlands and riparian and natural areas, and to provide for permanent cover on fragile cultivated lands. It will be funded under the environment chapter of the Agricultural Policy Framework (APF).

"The health of the agriculture industry is closely tied to the health of the environment," said Neville. "Manitoba producers are working with governments and the industry to strengthen their longstanding tradition of carefully managing their farmland. Pilots such as the EG&S project are powerful instruments exploring different thinking and the federal government will follow its progress attentively."

"Under this innovative project, farmers in the Rural Municipality of Blanshard will receive a financial incentive to develop and maintain natural environments on their land, integrated with their agricultural lands," said Wowchuk. "It may also support other farming practices that provide environmental benefits. The concept is to motivate farmers to preserve and protect natural and fragile areas of land that have lower agricultural values but can provide environmental benefits for all Manitobans. This program complements the environmental goals of Manitoba's new Water Protection Act."

The APF is providing up to \$75,000 in transition funding this fiscal year for delivery preparations and additional funding support in the subsequent years. Other funding participants include the R.M. of Blanshard and the Delta Waterfowl Foundation. Other international conservation groups that recognize the importance of protecting Manitoba's wildlife habitat have also contributed to Delta's funding. The project will be administered by the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation (MASC).

The pilot project will provide payments to participating landowners. Lands that have been enrolled under Greencover Canada and Manitoba's Riparian Tax Credit Program are not eligible for this program.

"This project, which originated as the Alternate Land Use Service (ALUS) project, empowers farmers and rural communities to take the lead in environmental stewardship and is the first of its kind in

Canada," said Keystone Agricultural Producers vice-president Ian Wishart. "By recognizing the important environmental contributions of farmers, this pilot project is truly a new direction for agriculture and conservation in Manitoba and it has come through the dedication and hard work of all our partners."

"For many years the ALUS pilot project has been a top priority with the Delta Waterfowl Foundation," said Delta vice-president Robert Sopuck. "Our partnerships with farm and rural groups, especially Keystone Agricultural Producers and the Rural Municipality of Blanshard, have made it a reality. The pilot project will provide important information to allow the design of an efficient and farmer-friendly national landscape conservation program."

The R.M. of Blanshard, contained completely within the Little Saskatchewan River Conservation District, was chosen for the pilot project partly because its landscape is typical of agro-Manitoba and partly because of the significant support from local landowners and local governments.

The R.M. of Blanshard and the Little Saskatchewan River Conservation District were pleased to be chosen to host this pilot project. "This is a very exciting time for us and we would like to congratulate Keystone Agricultural Producers and Delta Waterfowl Foundation in having the foresight for this innovative project," said Richard Heapy, reeve of the R.M. of Blanshard.

"We would like to thank the federal and provincial government departments for their support in making this pilot project a reality," said Roy Greer, chair of the Little Saskatchewan River Conservation District. "It makes so much sense to reward farmers for providing good conservation practices."

The overall project will be directed by a management committee with representation from MAFRI, AAFC, MASC, the Delta Waterfowl Foundation, Keystone Agricultural Producers and the Little Saskatchewan River Conservation District. Evaluation of the pilot project will be undertaken through the University of Manitoba.

Canada's agriculture and agri-food industry has an important role to play in helping Canada meet its greenhouse gas reduction targets under the Kyoto Protocol. Working with governments across the country, Canadian farmers are taking action on climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture and taking measures on their farms that remove harmful greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. A healthy and vibrant agriculture industry benefits all Canadians.