

# COMMUNICATING WITH CONSUMERS—SUSTAINABLY

*Real conversations mean real results*



AWC chairman Kent Erickson and daughter Runa in this year's winter wheat crop during filming for our consumer focused sustainability video. Check out the video at [albertawheat.com](http://albertawheat.com).

# MEET THE AWC STAFF



**Erin Gowriluk**  
**Government Relations & Policy Manager**

**E**rin Gowriluk oversees government relations and policy for AWC. In addition to her work on policy issues such as rail transportation, variety registration and plant breeders' rights, Erin's role has evolved to include policy issues related to environmental sustainability. In response to an increased emphasis on environmental sustainability issues, Erin leads the Environmental Policy Committee, a joint committee with representatives from Alberta Barley and the Alberta Wheat Commission. Erin also represents the Commission with the Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta and is on the Communications Committee with the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Crops.

Erin continues to lead sustainability initiatives including the Alberta Crops Sustainability Certification Pilot Project. Like most of the projects Erin has led, this one involved collaboration from all four crop commissions in the province of Alberta. Farm-level sustainability is becoming increasingly important and Erin is excited to work directly with Alberta farmers to determine what sustainability means at the farm level.

*By Victoria Russell*  
**Communications & Events**  
**Co-ordinator**

**O**ver the past several years, consumers have grown increasingly aware about the food they eat. Consumers rightfully want to feel good about the ingredients they are choosing for themselves and their families, and they are eager to understand more about where their food comes from (traceability) and how it's produced (sustainability).

As in any industry, customer demand is the key driver of success. For that reason, the food-production industry has made a major shift in delivering on the need for transparency and openness with consumers.

This story can be illustrated through many major advertising campaigns, with the best example coming from McDonald's. The company wanted consumers to know that the beef they were eating was locally and sustain-

ably sourced, and McDonald's invited consumers to ask anything about their ingredients through the "Our Food. Your Questions." campaign. McDonald's has set a positive example in terms of both sustainability and transparency.

These changes in our value chain are driven by consumers' desire for openness and transparency.

When it comes to the changes consumers are looking for, sustainability is growing into a common theme. The AWC, like many other organizations in all levels of our value chain, has recognized the necessity of taking initiative when it comes to sustainability as it relates to agriculture, as well as the need to share what's happening with the consumer.

Sustainability in the crop sector is the focus of the next several pages in this section, because this year, the Alberta Wheat Commission has taken major steps forward in getting

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involved and leading the wheat industry forward—sustainably.

You will learn more about the Alberta Crops Sustainability Certification Pilot Project, a major initiative that the Alberta Wheat Commission is leading in collaboration with Alberta Barley, the Alberta Canola Producers Commission and Alberta Pulse Growers, as well as the people behind the work. And you will learn about a research initiative we are investing in that supports sustainable fertilizer application.

While farmers have always been stewards of the land, they are eager to share their stories with consumers to gain social licence. That's why, with sustainability, we've taken it upon ourselves to deliver on the transparency consumers are looking for and share these initiatives with you. We want to share the good-news stories coming out of Alberta's fields and tell you about all the work farmers are doing to ensure that you're proud to buy Alberta-grown food.

But there's more than that—we want to hear from you. We want to learn what sustainability means to you and how it impacts your day-to-day life. We want to share your voice with farmers in the same way we share the stories of our 14,000 farmer members with you. Our strategy is about finding opportunities to be accountable and transparent to our growing consumer market. Ultimately, you are our end users, and talking candidly with you is one approach to bridging the gap between city and farm.

To share farmers' sustainability stories, we've developed a video that talks about some of the work we are doing with farmers. We encourage you to watch the video at [albertawheat.com](http://albertawheat.com) and learn more about what farmers are doing every day to preserve the land used to grow safe, high-quality crops for generations to come.

## SPOTLIGHT ON RESEARCH

### *Fertilizer management for sustainable crop production*

By **Hannah Konschuh**  
**Research Manager**

**T**here is increasing pressure for crop production in Western Canada to be sustainable, largely to gain social licence with consumers. Now, more than ever, consumers want to be sure their food has been grown in an environmentally responsible way, while maintaining the high quality standards that Canadian-grown food is known for.

The Alberta Wheat Commission is investing in a project led by Dr. Miles Dyck, a University of Alberta professor who aims to build on scientific knowledge supporting best management practices for fertilizer application.

Dyck's project will study the efficiency of co-ordinated long-term fertilization practices. Using valuable long-term data from the University of Alberta's Breton Classical Plots, which have been maintained under various fertility treatments since the 1980s, Dyck will study the interaction and potential benefits of long-term nitrogen and sulphur application and the effect on fertilizer use efficiency.

"Efficient use of fertilizer nitrogen requires an adequate supply of sulphur and other macronutrients (P, K)," said Dyck. "Soil sulphur deficiency may be increasing because of greater frequency of crops with high sulphur demands (canola, pulses) in rotations



University of Alberta research staff collecting samples in the Breton Classical Plots. Photo: Courtesy of Dick Puurveen, University of Alberta.

and because of decreased atmospheric deposition following stricter industry regulation."

The benefits of employing best management practices are twofold: first, they help maximize the efficiency of applied fertilizer, thus contributing to farm profitability, and second, they help avoid negative environmental impacts often associated with fertilizer use. For example, efficient use of fertilizer reduces the amount of nitrous oxide, an important greenhouse gas, released from soil into the atmosphere.

"The goal of this work is to encourage farmers to adopt best management practices to improve long-term fertility and sustainable crop production as well as to meet the increasing environmental performance demands required for market access."

The project is being co-funded by the Alberta Wheat Commission and the Alberta Crop Industry Development Fund, with a total funding contribution of \$124,000.

Information on this initiative and others in AWC's research portfolio can be found at [albertawheat.com/research](http://albertawheat.com/research). Check back for updates.

# SUSTAINABILITY BEGINS AT THE FARM

By Erin Gowriluk

**M**ore and more, we are hearing from multinational companies like McDonald's, Unilever, Kellogg's, General Mills and Anheuser-Busch that their customers are demanding products that contain sustainably sourced ingredients. In response to these demands, these companies have developed key performance indicators or "sustainability metrics" that will be applied to the entire supply chain, starting at the farm.

So what does sustainability look like at the farm level? How will these metrics be applied to on-farm practices? How do we know what, if anything, needs to change about the way we farm in order to maintain access to key export markets? The answer is that we don't know—but we'd like to find out.

In March 2015, representatives from Alberta's four crop commissions—Alberta Barley, the Alberta Canola Producers Commission, Alberta Pulse Growers and the Alberta Wheat Commission—underwent on-farm assessments in three major, internationally recognized sustainability certification programs.

The first program was the International Sustainability and Carbon Certification (ISCC) PLUS. The standard seeks to demonstrate farmer compliance with global sustainable agriculture requirements. It is certifiable by independent certification bodies, recognized by the global market and employed by farm groups across North America. The European Commission recognizes it as one of the first certification schemes to demonstrate compliance with the European Union's renewable energy directives.



AWC director Kevin Bender and Control Union auditor Doug Higgins during Higgins's sustainability assessment for the Alberta Crop Sustainability Certification Pilot Project. Photo: Rob McMorris.

The second program was the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative's Farmer Self Assessment 2.0. This platform is the main food and beverage industry initiative supporting the development of sustainable agriculture initiatives worldwide. The organization strives to develop sustainable agriculture through a continuous improvement process that allows for a more flexible adoption by farmers. Relevant members include Anheuser-Busch, Heineken, Kellogg's, General Mills and McDonald's.

The third and final program included in the on-farm assessments was the Unilever Sustainable Agriculture Code. This scheme was developed in 2010 as part of Unilever's continuous improvement efforts. It was created and tested by a network of practical agronomists, farmers, consultants and sustainability advisors, and is applied to agricultural raw materials sourced by Unilever.

The purpose of this project is threefold. First, our farmer members

want to better understand consumer expectations around agriculture and sustainability, and we believe that these consumer-driven programs are the most efficient and effective means to collect that information. Second, farmers also want to contribute to this important conversation, and this project will prepare them to address consumer expectations in relation to the on-farm practices employed in modern agriculture. Finally, we want to assess farmer readiness. These sustainability programs are not about satisfying a niche market. Farmers' ability to satisfy these requirements will determine whether or not they can access major markets in the future. Project results will identify any gaps or areas where farmers could consider making some changes. We are very confident that Alberta farmers are poised and ready to meet the challenge, and that will be demonstrated in the many improvements that have already been made on farms across the province over the years.

# SERVING ALBERTA'S WHEAT PRODUCERS

**M**andated by Alberta's Marketing of Agricultural Products Act and funded through a mandatory, refundable check-off, the Alberta Wheat Commission has established our place as an organization that serves, guides and helps shape the evolving wheat industry on behalf of 14,000 wheat producers in our province. Our mission is to increase the long-term profitability of wheat and Alberta wheat producers. We carry out our mission through our four program areas, led by our management team and guided by our farmer directors and regional representatives.

## RESEARCH

Through our research program, AWC is investing over \$1.7 million per year in innovative research and development that aims to meet customer requirements and sustain the reputation for high-quality ingredients that Alberta-grown food is known for. Our key priorities are improving genetics, agronomic performance, and resistance to diseases and pests.



## MARKET DEVELOPMENT

AWC plays a key role in building the Canadian wheat brand and developing international markets as part of a larger "Team Canada" approach. Canadian wheat is known on the world stage for its high quality parameters, and, subsequently, approximately three-quarters of Canadian wheat is exported to key markets such as Japan, Southeast Asia and the United States. We are also proud to continue building relations with Canadian markets to ensure that Canadians have access to the high-quality food grown in their own backyard.

Another major initiative led by our Markets team is development of a new website, that will significantly improve farmers' ability to make well-informed marketing decisions and maximize the value of their crops. Known as PDQ, short for Price & Data Quotes, the site will provide information on cash grain prices for a broad range of commodities as well as data on grain movement and trade. A test version of PDQ has been established at [pdqinfo.ca](http://pdqinfo.ca).



## GOVERNMENT RELATIONS AND POLICY

AWC has an active hand in collaborating with our federal and provincial governments, as well as partnering organizations, to identify policy issues and develop advocacy initiatives that help address issues faced by producers. Through these initiatives, our policy program also strives to encourage investment in Alberta's wheat industry.

Over the past year, AWC has focused its policy and government-relations efforts primarily on key national issues affecting producers, including rail transportation, crop-variety registration in Canada and amendments to the *Plant Breeders' Rights Act*. We are also building our place in the on-farm sustainability conversation by leading the Alberta Crops Sustainability Certification Pilot Project in collaboration with Alberta Barley, the Alberta Canola Producers Commission and Alberta Pulse Growers. This initiative will assess producers' readiness to meet growing consumer demand for sustainable food production.



## COMMUNICATIONS, GROWER RELATIONS AND EXTENSION

Our Communications and Grower Relations program is integral in building the AWC brand by actively communicating the initiatives we lead and collaborate on with our 14,000 farmer members. We also have a visible presence throughout the year at trade shows, crop walks and conferences, making ourselves available to both our farmer and consumer audiences.

AWC recognizes that the continued development of both current and prospective farm leaders is critical to the future of the wheat industry. This means we have made it a priority to provide education and scholarship opportunities, share knowledge, and encourage skills development in people of all ages.

