

# Indianfarm Creek Watershed News

Fall 2010



## You're Invited!

December 2, 2010, 7:00pm

Municipal District Office – 753 Kettles St., Pincher Creek

### Agenda

Guest Speaker: Julia Baird, PhD Candidate  
University of Saskatchewan

“Perceptions of Agricultural Property Rights and Water Quality”

Update: Taren Cleland

Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development

“Alberta Stewardship Network Grant and Bioengineering”

Open Discussion: Project proposals and funding opportunities

Please come and join in discussion with your neighbors about the direction of the Watershed Group! Share your ideas for future projects and learning sessions! All ideas welcome!

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Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development

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**Government  
of Alberta** ■

# Perceptions of Agricultural Property Rights and Water Quality

## Julia Baird, PhD Candidate, University of Saskatchewan

My doctoral dissertation was to understand how society as a whole and various sectors of society individually see agricultural property rights related to water quality. Some of my work was done in southwestern Alberta, including the Indianfarm Creek watershed and surrounding areas of Pincher Creek and Lethbridge.

### Main findings

- Agricultural landowners, rural residents, and urban residents are in general agreement that landowners should be compensated (at least to some extent) for managing water quality.
- The general viewpoint is that agricultural landowners are good stewards of the land. For the minority of landowners who are not good stewards, there is agreement among respondents that action should be taken to ensure that these 'bad' landowners meet minimum standards of care.
- There is a cautious willingness to consider the idea of a performance-based program to manage water quality, if the program overcame the difficulties in measurement, monitoring, and enforcement.

**Performance-based programs:**  
*programs that make payments based on achieving defined water quality outcomes.*

### How do people perceive water quality?

Slightly more than half (55%) of watershed respondents rated water quality as good to very good, and no one gave it a rating lower than neutral. Respondents outside the watershed rated their water slightly lower, but still generally good.

Watershed respondents were less concerned than other respondents about water quality. Over 80% of rural and urban respondents indicated at least some concern, while approximately 60% of watershed respondents indicated some concern about water quality.

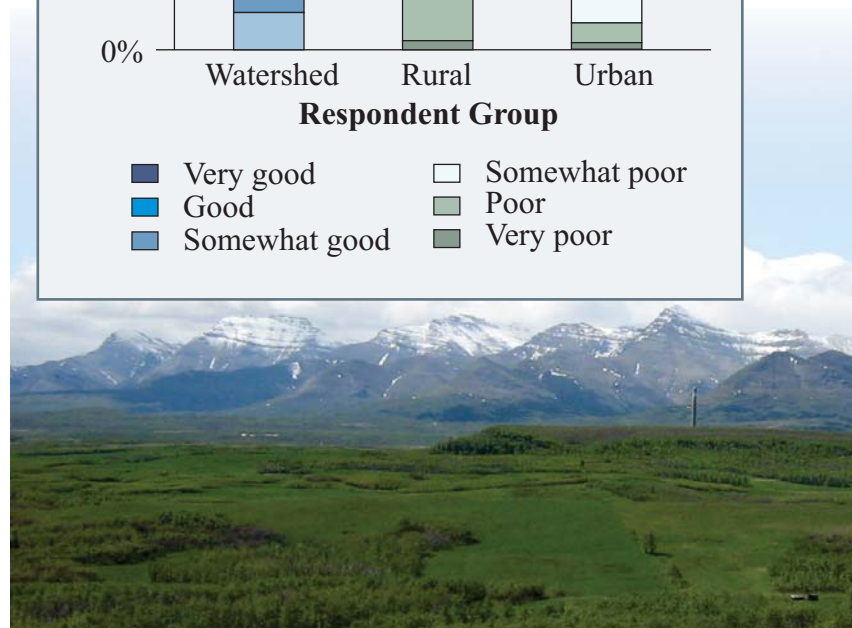
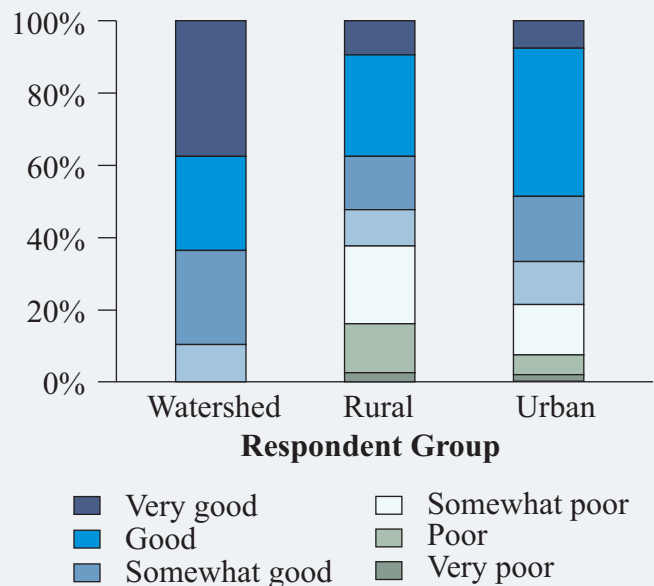
### Respondent groups were comprised of:

**Watershed:** 19 families living in the Indianfarm Creek Watershed

**Rural:** 75 families living in rural communities along the Oldman River between Indianfarm Creek Watershed and Lethbridge

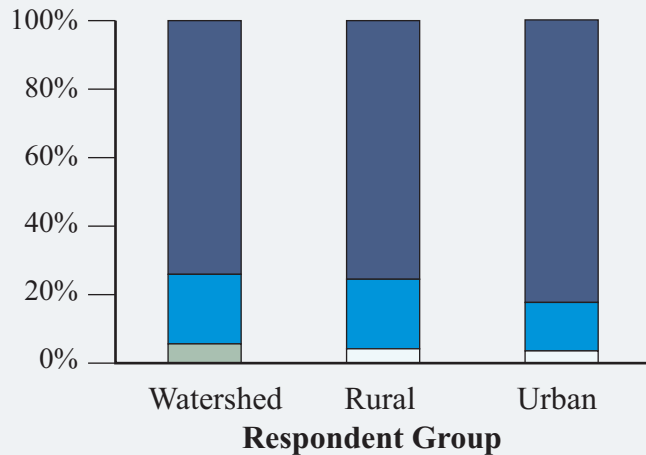
**Urban:** 174 families living in the City of Lethbridge

### Ratings of surface water quality perceptions by respondents



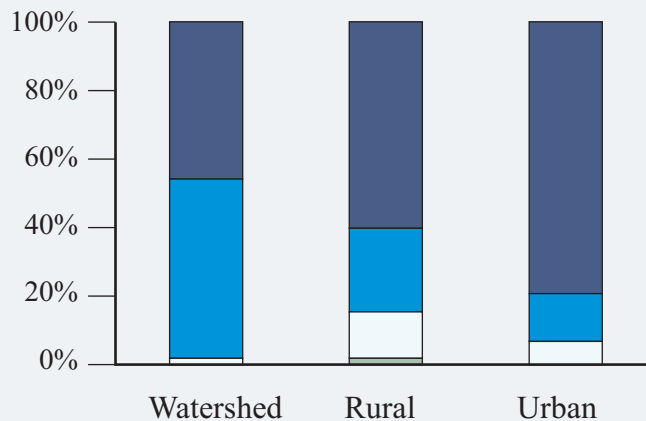
**Respondent group perceptions on how responsible agricultural producers and the governments are for agricultural water quality.**

**Agricultural producer responsibility**



- Very responsible
- Moderately responsible
- Somewhat responsible
- Not responsible at all

**Government responsibility**



**Whose responsibility is it to manage water quality?**

Watershed respondents thought that, in general, the agricultural producer is “very responsible” for water quality on his/her land. Respondents tended to equate giving the public responsibility for water quality with giving them license to dictate what happens on agricultural land.

**Role of Government?**

Watershed respondents were less in favour of governments creating agricultural water quality programs than respondents outside the watershed. Responses were mixed about whether government agri-environmental programs for water quality should be voluntary. Watershed respondents generally were in greater favour of voluntary programs, while regulation of water quality was regarded more positively by other respondents outside the watershed.

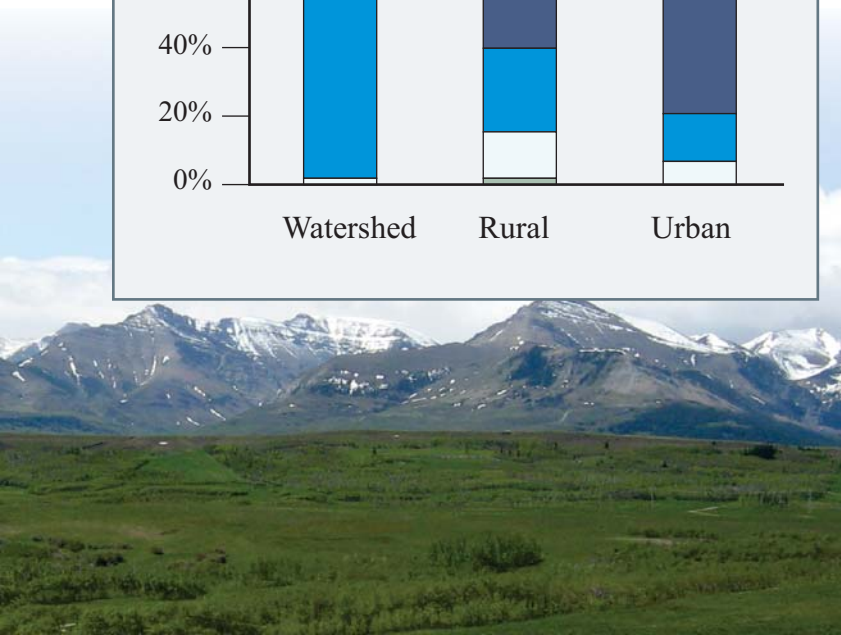
**Role of Landowner?**

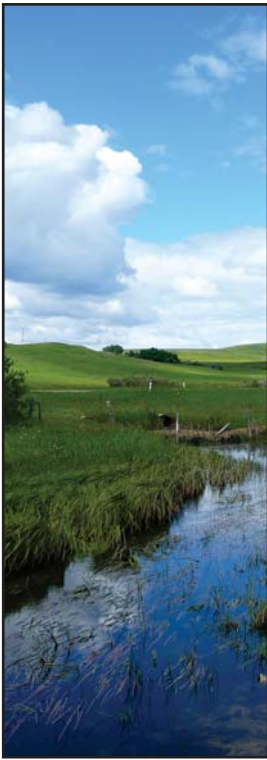
Watershed respondents feel strongly about their property rights as agricultural landowners and their ability to be a good steward of the land. Some of the comments made during interviews were:

- 'landowners should have the freedom to manage',
- 'farmers own the land',
- 'farmers should be rewarded for good management',
- 'ranchers should receive rewards for not polluting', and
- 'if people like things a certain way, they should pay'.

The only limit to the property rights that most respondents agreed upon was that agricultural producers that used environmentally harmful management practices should be regulated to reach a minimum standard of care.

Respondents outside of the watershed referenced the idea of 'proper management'. Several comments were made related to bad practices being penalized and good practices rewarded, and that there should be standards in place to ensure water quality is not degraded by agricultural practices.





## What types of programs would agricultural landowners support?

Responses to program types were mixed.

**Cost-share/incentive program:** This traditional program support was the favourite option for watershed respondents.

**Performance-based program:** Many interviewees commented that this type of program would be nice, but was not feasible. The main concerns about this type of program were difficulty in monitoring water quality output and enforcement.

## What are the most important factors to focus on when developing a new program?

Factors that stood out as the most important to focus on for new agri-environmental programs were:

**Social Priorities** such as sustaining rural communities and ensuring water quality for future generations were ranked the most important, followed closely by

**Economic Priorities** such as the cost-effectiveness of the program and financial incentives for agricultural producers.

### Thank you!

A big “Thank You!” to all of the landowners who took the time to meet with me last December. I understand that your time is valuable and I appreciate that you were willing to spend some of it answering my questions. It was a real pleasure to spend time in your watershed and I met many friendly folks during my visits.

### The next step...

I am working on gathering information on performance-based programs that are working in other regions of Canada, the US, Europe, and Australia.

Ultimately, this study will highlight the importance of considering the values and viewpoints of stakeholders when looking at implementing new agricultural programs.

If you have any questions about the results, or would like more information please contact me (Julia Baird) by email: [julia.baird@usask.ca](mailto:julia.baird@usask.ca) or by phone: 403-454-6556.



Many thanks to the participating producers for your interest and cooperation. Also, thanks to the project partners for the technical and financial support, including:

