

# AESA

Alberta Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture Program

## PARTNER PROFILES

2005

### Low Cost Manure Injection Demonstrations in the Peace

In the Peace region, local area hog producers were looking for an alternative method of applying liquid hog manure to their fields. Three years ago, the Fairview Applied Research Association (FARA) launched a project through the Alberta Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture (AESA) program to develop a low cost liquid manure injection system for demonstration. This project continues today under the AESA Farm Based Extension Partnership of the Municipal Districts of Clear Hills No. 21, Fairview No. 136 and Peace No. 135.

“Under the project, a liquid hog manure injector was designed and built, that allowed local area hog farmers to try it on their operations,” explains Gerard Aldridge, Conservation Technician. “The system required some modifications over the years, and is now working quite well. Two local cooperators continue to use and demonstrate its use.”

Jacob Hiemstra, in the MD of Peace and Tjerk Dejong, in the MD of Fairview are the cooperating hog producers. The injector is designed to attach to their liquid manure tank. “Some of the challenges initially faced by the producers were lack of enough horsepower to adequately pull both the tank and injector together,” says John Zylstra, AESA Peace Region Conservation Coordinator. The size and weight of the equipment also created problems under wet soil conditions. “We believe these problems can be solved and this system will work well.”

In the early stage of this AESA project, father and son Gerben and David Bosma, hog producers located in the MD of Fairview, also decided to adopt the practice of liquid hog manure injection, building their own system. “They developed a slightly different system with swivel type coulters and parallel lift, and are now having good success,” says Zylstra.

This year the project is focusing on modifying the equipment so it will work

better for applying manure through trash or stubble on the fields. They’re also trying to address the issue of additional wear and tear on machinery. “We’re working with adding coulters to the system to cut through the straw, which should help with the general overall performance of the system under variable weather conditions,” says Aldridge. Last fall the field conditions were so wet, the demonstrations had to be postponed.

“Local area hog producers continue to be interested in this project, and are committed to looking for ways to improve their nutrient management

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**Producers are looking for ways to continually improve their operations...**  
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practices, such as reducing odors during application,” says Aldridge. “One area hog producer decided to try applying a temporary straw lagoon cover last year, and is pleased with the results,” says Aldridge. Soil testing remains an important component of manure management and is ongoing. Some of the local area hog producers have also completed Environmental Farm Plans.

“Producers are looking for ways to continually improve their operations, and many of the beneficial management practices (BMPs) they are using and demonstrating go beyond what they are expected to do,” says Zylstra. These same BMPs used to improve nutrient cycling and soil quality also reduce odors and greenhouse gases. Aldridge adds, “Through these efforts and demonstrations, local area producers are also improving relations with their neighbors and the general public.”

A demonstration day is planned for late September showing the latest modifications and success of the system. “We will be holding this demo day in partnership with Alberta Reduced Tillage LINKAGES (RTL), who has also provided investment into the project towards improvements in the system,” says Aldridge.

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### Big Meadows Soil Conservation Association: Model of Producer Group Success



The producers of the Big Meadows Soil Conservation Association have been working together since the early 90’s to address soil conservation and environmental issues. The Association began with a focus on reduced tillage and direct seeding. Over the years they have expanded their focus to include good grazing management, riparian management and nutrient management practices.

Tara Lea, Program Agrologist with Smoky Applied Research and Demonstration Association (SARDA), has been working with the Association for the past eight years. “This group is very interested and willing to try new things,” says Lea. “The members take the time and make the effort to do demonstrations, which is really good.” Today, many members remain active in the Association, and 75% of them are using practices to extend the grazing season, and to improve grazing management practices.

The group has demonstrated a range of practices including growing corn, other crops for swath grazing, alternative pasture watering systems and other practices to extend the grazing season. Some of the producers have established year-round watering systems, while others have focused on summer grazing watering systems. One of the cooperators has developed his cattle operation to be primarily pasture or swath grazing, except for a three-month period before and during calving season.

“Many of our current demonstrations have been going on for the past four years to provide some long term information,” explains Lea. One small plot demonstration is helping to assess pasture fertility. “We have had manure management trials going on over the past seven years. We’ve finished putting on the manure, and now are measuring the time it will take for the effect of the manure to wear off.”

On another 6-acre stockpile forage demonstration, the objective is to compare different grasses and legumes to determine which ones are better suited for fall grazing.

“The Big Meadows Soil Conservation Association is a great example of a group of producers who work very well together and continue to be committed to the Association over the long term,” says Lea. “They are very willing and open to learning about and exploring new ideas.” The members meet once a month during the winter, and during field days and tours over the summer. SARDA, Big Meadows and the MD of Big Lakes work together on the annual SARDA summer tour. “All of the members are active in the community in organizations including the local Agricultural Society, Wild Rose Agricultural Producers and others. They share information and ideas with other producers, and some members sit on the local MD Ag Advisory Committee.”

The Big Meadows group is a model of a successful producer association that has worked together for many years, always with a conservation and environment focus. Their initial focus on direct seeding of cereal and oilseed crops and direct seeding into forage stands, which included a group decision to jointly purchase a direct seeding drill to be shared among group members, has evolved over the years. Today their priorities include extended grazing, riparian health and nutrient management, and the group continues to work together to find new ideas and new ways of managing their operations successfully.

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PHOTO CREDIT - JOHN ZYLSTRA

# LARA Helps Local Producers Implement Beneficial Management Practices

In partnership with AESA, the Lakeland Agricultural Research Association (LARA) continues to help local area producers successfully implement good practices. With a mixed farming area including a large number of livestock operations and cropping operations, the program priorities range from integrated crop management and soil protection to sustainable grazing and riparian management.

“One of our priority areas is integrated crop management, which includes an increase in forage production and practices to extend the grazing season,” explains Jason Boorse, Conservation Coordinator. “We’re also working with Ducks Unlimited Canada and Alberta Reduced Tillage LINKAGES to demonstrate the success and benefits of growing winter cereals.”

Sustainable grazing and riparian management are priority areas. LARA works with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development - Public Lands and Forests to offer pasture assessment workshops focusing on riparian and pasture management. “We want to help producers understand the whole grazing system and to help them develop management practices to protect their pastures long term through rotations and other practices,” explains Boorse.

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Water quality and water management is also a priority. Boorse is the local agriculture representative on the Moose Lake Watershed Group, helping them with their program planning and implementation, and initiating projects that are agriculture based.” By keeping an agriculture voice in the group, Boorse helps them look at the big picture and address everyone’s needs.

“We also have a shelterbelt and agroforestry program, which seems to be one of the most popular areas of interest right now,” says Boorse. “We held an introductory workshop early this spring to provide producers with an introduction to agroforestry.” As part of the three-year planning program, Boorse plans to hold additional workshops over the next two years. Next year will be a more specific hands-on workshop focusing on planting, tips to successful establishment and other information. “In year three, the focus of a workshop will be on tips to keeping woodlots or shelterbelts healthy for years to come.”

LARA is also planning their annual open house and field day this summer. Producers will have the opportunity to tour through all of the plots and demonstrations. “One of the demonstrations is a 4 acre shelterbelt site planted with a variety of PFRA trees,” says Boorse. “The stand is now six years old and is quite impressive.” This demonstration is open throughout the year, and has interpretive signage and information for self-guided tours.

“We also have a demonstration comparing direct seeding and conventional seeding that was established 13 years ago,” explains Boorse. “We’re now starting to get some long term results and producers can see the differences in management practices.” Other demonstrations include winter cereals, extended grazing and pasture management trials.

Although measuring practice change and success can be difficult, Boorse is finding ways to do that. “With the three-year shelterbelt program, we will be able to work directly with producers and know how many are ordering trees, and the number of trees planted,” says Boorse. “At field days and other events, there is an opportunity to talk to producers and follow-up on whether they have implemented changes, or if they are still looking for more information.” Boorse relies on agriculture census data to also measure practice changes in the area.

Boorse works closely with local newspapers to get information and articles of interest out to local area producers. “This generates a lot of interest and calls for more information,” says Boorse. “The key is to continue working closely with local producers to make sure I understand their needs and for them to trust me.”

LARA has an 80-acre site located close to Bonnyville that is dedicated to the improvement of agricultural practices in Northeast Alberta through applied research of field crops, forages, horticultural, and of course, sustainable agricultural practices. This site is open to the public year round (1-888-773-7072).

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## MD of Wainwright Works Successfully With Local Producers One-On-One

Under the AESA program, the MD of Wainwright is working one-on-one with local producers to develop nutrient management plans, pasture and riparian management and integrated crop management. Other projects include demonstrations and plot trials. “Many of the demonstrations are field size, so we can take the producers out of the classroom and out to the field to learn,” explains Somerlee Bennett, Assistant Agricultural Fieldman/Conservation Technologist. “We often work individually with producers to help them adapt and implement management practices that work best for their operation.”

One of the successes is using a producer mentor process. “We work with a producer who has implemented a good management practice successfully, and showcase him in the area,” says Bennett. “People are more likely to talk directly producer to producer, and feel more comfortable knowing he is within their area. They know local producers have a better understanding of financial limitations or other issues behind the new practice, and people can be more straight forward about that.”

One of the priority areas is manure management and in particular looking at the integration of liquid manure into forages and cropland and the benefits producers are realizing. “A lot of producers are finding benefits in terms of cost and return analysis, determining long term benefits and improvements to the environment,” says Bennett. “For example, in the past, one producer had been feeling pressure about his operation, but once others realized he had an established manure management plan, and that we were working closely with him, people were more supportive.”

Another priority is water management, with the efforts focused mostly on working individually with producers along the Battle River. “We’ve taken a vested interest with Alberta Environment to focus on this river, and although we’ve tried to stimulate a watershed group, so far the producers have been doing a lot on their own,” says Bennett. “We’ve just been guiding them and providing information as requested.”

In terms of measuring success, some of the results come from surveys and others from personal discussion with producers. “We’ve initiated a big effort this year to conduct surveys to evaluate and measure the success in our program,” explains Bennett. “Generally we’ve seen a decrease in summer fallow, an increase in direct seeding and a lot more integration into permanent cover pastures, which for our soil zone is really promising.” There has also been a big uptake of the Alberta Environmental Farm Plan program.

There are also a lot of changes happening with local grazing associations, including a bigger priority on pasture and riparian management and water quality. For example, the Strawberry Plains Grazing

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Association was nominated for an Emerald Award in 2004 in the Community Group Category. “Being a finalist was a big step for the Association, and as a result they are increasing their partnership with another grazing association to do more projects this year,” says Bennett. “Some of their projects will be showcased along with others for the Western Area Training Base at this summer’s AESA Regional Tour.”

Bennett plans to continue with the success of working one-on-one with local producers and in smaller groups. “Many of our summer meetings will be short one or two hour tail gate meetings with a few producers,” says Bennett. “We will also continue to showcase producers locally, and at larger events.” The priority remains working one-on-one with producers to help them implement management practices that work best for their operation.

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PHOTO CREDIT - SUSANNE BRUMMELHUIS, DUCKS UNLIMITED CANADA

## Vulcan County's AESA Program Expanding

In the Vulcan County, the AESA program began as a part-time effort. The initial successes of the program, combined with increased interest by local producers, have led to an expansion of the program to full-time. Over the next three years, the Vulcan County expects to expand the program even more.

"The two core areas that we are focusing our AESA program on are improving pasture and cropping management practices," explains Shilo Andrews, Conservation Technician. "Integrated into both of those areas is nutrient

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**...It's their decision to make the changes ...**  
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management, with manure management related to good pasture management, and fertilizer management related to good cropping practices."

Producers are encouraged to get involved through information provided in regular newsletters, and a weekly local newspaper column that focuses on timely conservation and sustainable agriculture issues. "I prefer to provide the information to producers and then work with them one-on-one," says Andrews. "By having the producers come to me and working with them one-on-one, it's their decision to make the changes and that is the way it should be." If Andrews sees some serious issues, she will approach the landowners, but generally prefers to have them come directly to her.

Some of the current demonstrations around the County include wildlife demonstrations, a salinity reclamation demonstration and several different types of shelterbelt demonstrations. "We recently put up six hawk nesting platforms around the County, and are hopeful we will have some success with those," says Andrews. "I'm planning to hold a Native Pasture Assessment Field Day this summer, which provides the opportunity for producers to learn how to identify plants and to be better able to assess the health of their pastures."

Andrews does hold some workshops, and finds that most of the producers that attend are already very interested in doing something. "I follow-up and work with those producers individually,"



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says Andrews. "I also provide technical assistance to the Alberta Environmental Farm Plan Company Program, which puts me in contact with a broader group of producers in the County. It's a good tool to get my name out there and let them know what I'm here for."

The Vulcan County AESA program will continue to focus on the two core areas of good pasture and good cropping practices. "We plan to expand the program over the

next three years, with an increased focus on pasture management, and a higher priority on soil testing," explains Andrews. "I'm trying to encourage producers to have a better understanding of what's in their soils, so they can manage nutrients better." They may be able to reduce inputs where appropriate, or increase inputs to achieve higher yields, or better utilize their manure resources.

Andrews is beginning to see successes with their program efforts. "I think the best way to achieve success in our area is knowing the local producers and the feel of the County," she says. "I think working with producers one-on-one, and providing lots of support and follow-up to make sure they are getting the information and assistance they need works the best in this area." Andrews is looking forward to the further expansion and increasing commitment of local producers to practice change in the Vulcan Country over the next three years of the AESA program.

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## Wheatland County's Range Program

The Wheatland County Range Program evolved from input and leadership by local producers, and continues to be managed through a producer-led committee. "Before we initiated the program, we decided to develop a survey and interview producers in our county to help understand exactly what their needs were," explains Mike Sauve, Watershed Coordinator. "We used the information and knowledge gained by the survey to implement our Range Program."

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**The key to success is to offer programs and events that will provide value to producers**  
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The results of the survey helped identify some of the problems producers were facing in their pastures. These included issues surrounding general productivity, weed management, water and riparian management. "We also used the survey as a teaching tool to introduce some of the concepts of good grazing management to producers," says Sauve.

One of the problems identified by several producers was weed problems and weed control, particularly in pastures that were inaccessible by tractors and conventional

sprayers. "We modeled a solution after the Clearwater County's program in the north of making a boomless pasture sprayer available for rent to producers."

The survey also showed that few producers were adopting rotational grazing strategies as part of their pasture management. "We started offering producers the opportunity to participate in a Pasture Health Assessment Workshop, which we've now been offering annually for the past three years," says Sauve. "This has been very successful, and provides producers with a tool for measuring the health and productivity of their pastures." A new project initiative under Wheatland County's Range

program this year is a grazing project that includes various partners: MD of Rocky View, Foothills Forage Association and Cows and Fish Program.

Although Wheatland County's Range Program was originally managed separately from their Watershed Program, the two programs are now managed together under their AESA

program. "Both the Range Program and the Watershed Program are managed by a producer-led committee, which provides direction into our programs," explains Sauve. "Now that they are managed together we can work on joint projects that work for both water and range issues, creating greater efficiencies." One example is an upcoming summer tour that will profile both water management and range management strategies.

Sauve explains that trying to measure success is a challenge, especially in terms of watershed and range management where changes are very slow. "We take success as producers getting involved with programs and workshops, and having new producers participate that we previously hadn't worked with." Sauve is also planning to conduct another survey in a few years.

There have been a lot of positive comments from producers about their successes, particularly with using the pasture sprayer

to address weed problems, and the Pasture Health Assessment as a tool to improve their management. "The key to success is to offer programs and events that will provide value to producers," says Sauve. "This is especially important in the environment we're in right now in both the livestock and grain industries. Producers aren't likely to spend time or money in things that don't necessarily improve their bottom line or operation."

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PHOTO CREDIT - DELANEY ANDERSON

# Mountain View County Sees Successful On-The-Ground BMP Adoption

In Mountain View County, significant progress has been made with producer adoption of beneficial management practices (BMPs). “One of the reasons for our success, is making funding easy and accessible for producers for implementing projects,” explains Lesley Gavelin, Rural Extension Specialist. “We’ve been able to do that by accessing different funding sources through the County.”

In addition to AESA, past funding has been received through programs such as: Community Lottery Boards, EcoAction Canada, Rural Water Development Program (PFRA) and Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) Stewardship-In-Action Initiative. “This year much of our funding is through Alberta Conservation Association (ACA) Grant Eligible Program. “Having funding more at the local level has been quite an attractive feature for many producers,” says Gavelin. Local producers are also beginning to access funding programs such as the Canada Alberta Farm Water Program and the Canada Alberta Farm Stewardship Program.

“We work with individual producers to help them develop and implement BMPs that work for their operation,” explains Gavelin. “We have worked on a variety of projects such as riparian fencing projects, whether exclusion or controlled access to those areas, off-site watering systems and year-round watering systems.” Producers have relocated wintering sites and corrals to meet the new Agricultural Operation Practices Act (AOPA) requirements. Others have developed runoff control projects, including building catchment basins to capture runoff. “We’ve also helped producers with funding to fence off treed areas, and build shelters elsewhere for cattle.”

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**We work with individual producers to help them develop and implement BMPs that work for their operation**  
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As part of a larger project, the Little Red Deer River Watershed Initiative, several partners came together to assist with planning, accessing funding and implementing environmental stewardship projects. Partners include: Mountain View County, MD of Bighorn, MD of Rocky View, Red Deer County, ACA, PFRA, Alberta Environment and Friends of The Little

Red Deer River Society (FLRDRS). “Initially we met monthly to address specific issues, and allocate funding resources,” says Gavelin. “Our program doesn’t currently have as much funding as it did in the past, so we’re not meeting quite as often.”

In terms of success, Gavelin sees it as an ongoing challenge of working with people and assisting them to make positive environmental changes in their farming operations. “Many people prefer to work with us one-on-one, and prefer individual attention to their specific projects,” she says. “We’re trying to make sure they have access to all of the information and resources they need.” Although in the past Gavelin had to contact people to encourage them to get involved in the various programs, people now recognize she is available and are contacting her directly. “People are now calling me, and see me as an information link.”

“One of our challenges will be the severe flood damage we’ve suffered during the month of June, along creeks and rivers across the whole county, but particularly in the western areas,” says Gavelin. “We’ll assist producers in accessing flood disaster funding to rebuild fences and off-site watering systems that have washed away.” Reconstruction and repairing flood-damaged projects will be one of the most important stewardship efforts over the next few months. Another potential project will be river clean ups because of the damage and debris/garbage that has been washed down streams and rivers and deposited.

Over the summer, Gavelin has three field days planned, two in July (7 and 27) and one on August 16. “We are focusing on both pasture health and riparian health assessment, doing hands-on health assessments with the Cows and Fish Program,” explains Gavelin. “We’ve also invited DFO to provide information on fish habitat and what fish species are found in area streams.” An electric fencing demonstration is also planned. These demonstrations and group events support the success of individual BMP implementation projects in the Mountain View County.

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# Encouraging Watershed Groups To Take Ownership – A Successful Approach

In the MD of Bighorn and the MD of Rocky View, the ‘hands-off’ approach to supporting watershed and community groups is showing success. This strategy encourages groups to have high ownership, be self-supporting and leads to long-term success for the groups.

“We realized early that we couldn’t offer everything to everybody,” explains Tim Dietzler, Agricultural Fieldman for the MD of Rocky View. “We tried to encourage groups to form to the level they felt comfortable with their own leadership, while we provided support.” As the groups moved forward, they relied on the MD for information, speaker suggestions and support where needed.

“Our biggest successes are with the groups that continue to take ownership and control; these remain active and functional,” says Dwight Tannas, Agricultural Fieldman/Watershed Coordinator for the MD of Bighorn. “The really successful groups are often located in very visible locations (e.g. upstream of a large city like Calgary), where proactive measures were initiated years ago.” One long-standing successful watershed group is the Ranchers of Jumping Pound, supported jointly by both Bighorn and Rocky View.

“This group of ranchers really saw the need to do something and to be leaders by example and doing things right,” says



Tannas. All of the ranchers are on the creek, and take ownership and pride in their management practices and initiatives. “The fact that they are all ranchers is significant, in that they understand and trust each other,” adds Dietzler.

The group formed to look at ways they could increase protection of their creek. The first step was to reassess what they were doing on their ranching operations that might impact the creek. “The natural step was the Alberta Environmental Farm Plan program, and they moved into that as a self-assessment through a group workshop,” explains Dietzler. “A number of the members had already implemented beneficial management practices (BMPs), so the interaction and sharing of their successes was really helpful.”

The next step was to develop and focus on BMPs that were right for each individual operation. “They have evolved

from a watershed group to a community group based on a watershed, and are now looking at other issues such as the potential impact of oil and gas development,” says Dietzler. “The group continues to determine their own destiny and make it work on their own.”

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**We’re seeing a phenomenal change in attitudes towards water quality and riparian health, and pasture management**  
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There are other groups that tend to be more adversary rather than a working group, and tend not to be as successful. “These groups rely on getting attention through having a voice and getting in the media, that although may have a place, makes it difficult to support them,” says Tannas. Often the membership of the group includes others who are not landowners, and who don’t take real ownership. “My role is to help them bring their focus back to doing specific projects, and one of the groups is now looking at riparian health assessment with the Cows and Fish Program.”

As a result of their efforts, both MD’s are seeing practice change in their areas. “Awareness change is one of

the hardest things to measure, but we certainly are seeing trends that people are becoming more aware,” explains Tannas. “We’re seeing a phenomenal change in attitudes towards water quality and riparian health, and pasture management.” Tannas notes that they are also seeing a move to working more one-on-one with individuals, rather than as a group. “We work with them to help find the practices that work best for their operations, and to access funds that can help them implement practice change.”

In the MD of Rocky View, AESA funds are supporting a full-time Agricultural Engineer BMP Specialist rather than a watershed coordinator. Murray Green is the specialist and his role is to meet with landowners and to encourage them to work through the Alberta Environmental Farm Plan process. Then he assists them on their individual farm or ranch to determine what BMPs are most suitable for their operation and to help them with implementation. “Although we’ve moved away from group-related support to more individual efforts, we continue group support in a more hands-off way.”

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AESA Partner Profiles is a feature of the Alberta Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture (AESAs) program.

AESA’s vision is that Alberta has a thriving agriculture and food industry that is operating in an environmentally responsible manner. Its mission is to lead the agriculture and food industry in addressing environmental challenges. And its goal is to develop and deliver collaborative environmental stewardship initiatives that result in sustainable growth of Alberta’s farm, ranch and agri-food processing industry.

The purpose of AESA Partner Profiles is to provide a forum for profiling AESA program partners and their community based local programs addressing environmental issues in Alberta’s agriculture and food processing industry.

For more information on the AESA program, call 780-422-4385



The Agricultural Policy Framework (APF) – A Federal-Provincial-Territorial Initiative