

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 What are Agri-Environmental Programs?

Agri-environmental programs are voluntary, publicly funded incentive programs which fully compensate or help defray the costs to land holders for on-farm projects or activities which promote wise environmental stewardship. This report describes them, their aim, their purpose and how they work in Ontario and elsewhere. A related concept is that of Environmental Payments. These are payments to farmers beyond any cost-sharing grants in recognition for the services and benefits their on-farm projects make to the wider environment and therefore to all of society. They are a form of public good.

1.2 Stewardship of the Agri-Environment

Many farmers are good stewards of their land as a matter of faith, or other personal convictions concerning the conservation and care of their land and the natural environment. For these good stewards, a personal commitment to sound earthkeeping of their own land has traditionally been part and parcel of a cherished way of life. When these values underpin the vocation of farming they enhance the productivity of land without damaging it for the future. Stewardship is important in allowing the farm to be passed, intact, productive and healthy to the next generation. By this, the family farm may continue and prosper.

For Christian farmers, good stewardship is something done voluntarily, but it is also an obvious duty, part of a covenant or sacred trust between agriculturalist and Creator. This chain of responsibility and justification is also enlarged in this report.

A basic theme running through this report is that the agri-environment is everybody's business, even though it largely remains in the keeping and stewardship of farmers as private landowners or managers. Within this context agri-environmental incentive programs are conceived and implemented to encourage good environmental stewardship.

It is hoped that this report succeeds in describing these programs for what they truly represent; the working out of a fundamental and necessary project of environmental responsibility between farmers, governments and all other members of society.