KEYSTONE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS

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National Water Security Strategy - Consultation

Keystone Agricultural Producers (KAP) is Manitoba's general farm policy organization, providing a unified voice for farmers on issues that affect agriculture. KAP represents and promotes the interests of all Manitoba farmers and 18 commodity associations. KAP is pleased to respond to the Canada Water Agency's consultation on a National Water Security Strategy.

Without water, life does not exist on Earth. And producers, who raise crops and livestock, require an adequate water supply for successful production. E.g., spring wheat, canola, and soybeans each require between 1-2 million liters of water per acre for growth. Livestock are no different. A hog consumes approximately 1000 liters throughout its lifetime while a beef cow drinks around 15,000 liters.

Given water's importance for agriculture, KAP welcomes the development of a National Water Security Strategy. The strategy provides Canada with a unique opportunity—an opportunity to harness our strengths. Consider that 20 percent of the world's freshwater reserves exist in Canada. Consider that Canada is a leading global food exporter. These facts should compel government to take decisive action that uses our geography and resources for a competitive advantage. And action matters—consider that natural disasters are more frequent and have affected food security, while geopolitical tensions and wars have disrupted supply chains once taken for granted. Below are ideas that should be included in the National Water Security Strategy.

<u>Incentives</u>

Lastly, a successful National Water Security Strategy requires appropriate incentives. Water is a unique commodity—it is required for life but has no global price like canola or crude oil. On top of this, producers are price takers, meaning that they cannot pass on additional costs. Achieving strategy goals within the agriculture sector will likely require appropriate incentives. Producers provide many ecological goods and services that create social and environmental benefits, but these benefits may provide little financial incentive. Farmers maintaining wetlands, conserving wooded areas, and creating riparian buffer zones provide environmental benefits but face increasing pressure to expand their land base under rising input costs. For farmers, ecological solutions must be economically sound. Water flows over significant farmland acres, and implementing water-based policies that make economic sense will increase farmer adoption and success.

<u>Water Infrastructure</u>

Manitoba's water infrastructure is aging and has not kept pace with current needs. Proper water infrastructure is imperative in places like Manitoba considering its geography—most of southern Manitoba exists on an ancient glacier lakebed. And the aging infrastructure situation is similar across Canada. The recent droughts and floods in the last decade have shown the challenge infrastructure systems face when dealing with natural disasters.

And despite Canada's significant water resources, very little agricultural land is irrigated. Canada's agricultural land base is shrinking, and producers are being asked to do more with less. Increased infrastructure funding builds resiliency. More funding builds a system that can withstand climate shocks. A system that can withstand shocks equals a more secure food supply that contributes to national security. Any water strategy must emphasize these funding opportunities. (1) Expand reservoirs and retention systems. (2) Update water systems that reduce seepage and evaporation losses (e.g., pipelines). (3) Increase on-farm irrigation opportunities. And any investment must effectively store water in wet years and make it available in dry years.

Inventory Data

Despite Canada's large water resource, significant water data inventory gaps exist. A strategy can help bridge this gap by creating data standardization, updating historical hydrological baselines, increasing knowledge of current groundwater aquifers, and improving collaboration between governments and stakeholders. Better data lead to better decision-making, both for government and producers. Decisions will become proactive rather than reactive because accurate data, rather than assumptions, create better policies that reflect current water conditions.

Water and Security

Water, national security, agriculture, and food security are interconnected. A secure domestic food supply keeps food inflation reasonable, minimizes food shocks, and prevents food shortages. The starting point is water. Water drives agriculture by ensuring crops and livestock receive an adequate supply that creates a base for a secure domestic food supply. A secure domestic food supply positions Canada as a major food exporter that contributes significantly to global food security. E.g., Canada's agri-food exports equalled $101.2 billion in 2025. And raising agriculture's presence through initiatives such as the National Food Security Strategy can help improve the public's understanding of Canadian agriculture. At a time when some countries are facing acute water shortage, Canada can position itself as a leader by improving its water management and increasing its domestic and international food supply.

Education

Any strategy that compels change requires education. And how that education is delivered matters for farmers. Education can be delivered through publishing a strategy that is clear, concise, and understandable while ensuring goals are achievable and implementable. Policymakers need to recognize existing structural gaps (e.g., program delivery options) whether they are recommending actions that are either realistic or aspirational. And identifying issues also requires adequate knowledge among the targeted audience. E.g., improving water quality by increasing adoption of 4R Nutrient Stewardship represents a reasonable goal but not all farmers know of the 4Rs. Also, top-down approaches to education may create resistance with a farmer audience. Two methods exist to reduce resistance. (1) Create peer-to-peer farmer networks that allow farmers to deliver the message. (2) Involve farmers in designing policy and research.

Collaboration

Water governance in Canada is fragmented. Water decision-making belongs to many institutions across federal, provincial, territorial, and indigenous governments. A shared responsibility is a valuable approach, but effective shared responsibility requires collaboration. Without effective collaboration, governments risk drafting public policy that ignores the bigger picture.

Policy making cannot be done in isolation. Given the various government departments that manage water policy, collaboration between groups becomes even more important. When limited collaboration exists, the outcomes are clear—e.g.: data gaps, duplication, and transboundary disputes. Collaboration is not a panacea to water issues, but it is part of the solution. And the Canada Water Agency is a good place to improve collaboration on water issues.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on a National Water Security Strategy. If you have any questions about this submission, please contact KAP's policy manager, Neil Van Overloop, at neil.vanoverloop@kap.ca.