

2016 DUC/CPS forage program offers farmers a financial break for grassland conversions

(Jan. 26, 2016—Camrose, Alta.) Last year's drought conditions in some areas on the Prairies had many farmers looking for greener pastures and this year's forage program recently launched by Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) and Crop Production Services (CPS) might be the perfect solution.

Available to agricultural producers in the three Prairie provinces, the DUC/CPS forage program offsets the cost of Proven Seed forage varieties when producers convert cultivated land to hay or pastureland. In Alberta and Saskatchewan, producers receive a rebate of \$100 per 50 lb. bag of forage seed; in Manitoba, producers receive a rebate of \$50 for every new forage acre seeded as part of the program.

The response to this year's forage program has been very positive, says Craig Bishop, DUC's regional forage lead, especially in light of recent economic and climatic conditions.

"Declining prices for wheat and other cereal crops, as well as a simultaneous increase in beef prices, are leading many landowners to seriously consider the move to increase their cattle herd," explains Bishop. "This, in turn, spurs a demand for increased forage. The drought of 2015, in particular, resulted in many poor hay crops in several areas and further motivated producers to convert additional land to forages. That year, we saw 25,000 acres of cultivated fields across the Prairies be put into grass with this program with CPS—a significant increase from previous years."

Bishop adds that reducing input costs, especially at a time when expenses are rising more quickly than revenues, makes a real difference to a farmer's or rancher's bottom line. "Offering an incentive to producers to convert their cultivation to forage is an extremely cost-effective means for increasing grassland and makes good agronomic sense. Essentially, the program covers approximately 40 – 50 per cent of the producer's seed investment."

In addition to helping cattle producers and their herds, more seeded forage acres also benefits waterfowl. Bishop explains that research shows that the level of waterfowl nesting and success is significantly higher in areas of perennial cover or grasslands than in cultivated fields. It also helps with other conservation measures such as critical wetland restoration efforts.

"The link between wetlands, associated grasslands and waterfowl productivity is well understood," says Bishop, "and initiatives like the DUC/CPS forage program ensures that farmers in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba also receive the benefit from increasing their forage base."

The DUC/CPS forage program is best suited for producers in the parkland and prairie regions. Anyone interested in the program or who wants more information should contact their local CPS retailer or DUC conservation program specialist.

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