



**For Immediate Release**

## **Forage & Grasslands: Less Plane Talk, More Plains Talk Please**

*Canadian Forage and Grassland Association's carbon offset protocol development underway  
for Canada's great northern plains*

**MONCTON, NB. (Oct. 7, 2019)** - Canada's national election 2019 has recently focused on campaign plane usage and carbon offsets. However, leaders from Canada's forage and grassland associations say the candidates should be focusing more on Canada's northern great plains, home of some of the most periled and threatened ecosystems in the world.

A recent webinar hosted by Bluesource and the Climate Action Reserve included a first-ever Canadian public review component. The [Canadian Forage and Grassland Association](#) (CFGAs) is currently developing a Grassland Protocol for Canada - including a large segment around the northern great plains - as part of the CFGAs's Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada Agriculture Greenhouse Gas Program (AGGP) that will underlay the foundation of a carbon offset program to keep these valuable lands intact and globally position the Prairie grasslands as carbon benefactors.

At one time, there were 141.5 million acres of Prairie grasslands across Western Canada. According to the CAR webinar only 26 million acres remain; the balance has largely been converted to annual crop production. Only one per cent of these grasslands are secured under some sort of conservation easement. Cedric MacLeod, CFGAs executive director, says the development of the CFGAs protocol will make a solid case for the carbon abilities of grasslands while supporting producers.

"We don't want these grasslands to be parks or set-aside lands," says MacLeod, who is leading the CFGAs grassland protocol project, including six fields in Manitoba and sites in Saskatchewan and Alberta. "These are hard-working landscapes and lifelines for producers, communities and our nation's economy. If we can give a powerful selling point via grasslands' ability for carbon capture globally, Canada wins. We need that information to help us make our case."

MacLeod says the CFGAs AGGP has finished its first field season of measuring fields to complement the offset discussion. Results are being compiled nationally to assist with the protocol and Year One results should be communicated soon. Intact and productive grasslands are naturally designed to capture carbon. These often livestock-utilized pastures have plants that bolster photosynthesis, deep roots and healthy soil. That's the recipe for carbon capture. The unfortunate thing is grasslands are getting pounded in the meantime by economic pressures around technology-aided agricultural production despite the incredible values of these grasslands to society.

"It's a tough scene and a heck of a conundrum," says Duncan Morrison, [Manitoba Forage and Grassland Association](#) (MFGA) executive director. "The CFGAs protocol should bring a valuable mechanism to the ongoing scenario of accelerated loss that so far has been pretty much unimpeded.

Meanwhile, there's enough science and literature that proves the values of grasslands from their carbon-capture ability to ready our actions and outreach as we finalize the CFGA protocol project going forward."

Concurrently, there are other upsetting signals around grassland loss from the associated steep declines in grassland birds due to habitat loss, to water quality concerns, to depleted community resiliency around weather events like floods and droughts. With the advancement of producer-led, science-based regenerative agriculture and the soil health focus, there is some hope on the horizon. Still, grasslands need more attention and urgency.

"We believe we are sitting on potential economic boon with incredible national economic gains, widespread producer uptake and global prominence primarily via the adoption of a producer-valued system that promotes retention and enhancement of existing grasslands," says MacLeod. "The CFGA carbon offset protocol will help us all better understand that potential and to engage collectively toward solutions and prosperity."

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### **About CFGA AGGP**

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Agricultural Greenhouse Gases Program (AGGP) supports projects that will create technologies, practices and processes that can be adopted by farmers to mitigate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. These projects will also help farmers increase their understanding of GHG emissions. In 2017, the CFGA began pursuing an avoided-conversion-of-grasslands protocol. Pilot programs, such as [the ones currently being conducted by the MFGA](#) and other provincial forage associations, are now underway to look at the role of forages and grasslands in reducing GHG in Canada.

The results of the CFGA AGGP will inform the development of a Forage and Grasslands Protocol that will list practices that comprise the activities eligible to generate GHG reduction and removal credits. As well, a Best Management Practice (BMP) Manual will be developed to serve as a guide for ranchers and project developers wishing to implement the Forage and Grasslands Protocol, with a full list of eligible BMPs and direction for how to adopt these practices.

### **About Canadian Forage and Grassland Association**

Incorporated in 2010, CFGA provides a national voice for all Canadians who produce hay and forage products and for those whose production is dependent upon forage/grassland production.

### **About Manitoba Forage and Grassland Association**

MFGA promotes the economic prosperity and environmental benefits of forages, grasslands, cover crops and healthy soils to benefit our forage and grassland producers, local communities and society.

### **For More Information:**

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*MFGA interacts with tens of thousands of Manitobans through our communications, collaborative projects, and outreach that promote the importance and well-being of Manitoba's forages and grasslands. On a national scale, MFGA proudly partners with like-minded groups across Canada.*