

Jason Lenz – Grain and Cattle farmer, member of NEFP Communications Committee

- Jason is a part of the communications committee, but became even more enticed to give this presentation when hearing who else was on the panel alongside him.
- He farms southwest of Bentley, Alberta in the Blindman Valley on an operation with 2000 acres of crop production and a small, commercial cow-calf herd.
- Jason views the Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) as an important reference tool and sees how the National Environmental Farm Plan (NEFP) has the potential to be the go-to delivery mechanism for sustainably sourced food.
- Jason completed their farm's EFP in 2006 following a one-day workshop with Alberta EFP and will soon need to be renewed. The process is different than it was 10 years ago, but in retrospect, it was a very useful exercise.
- Jason refers to his EFP binder whenever he has a question about how various farm practices fit into the EFP he completed.
- He views "awareness" as one of the most important outcomes of completing the EFP program: Prior to completing the program, Jason had not really considered how or where he could make some of the areas on his farm more environmentally friendly. But the EFP program helped him identify both areas of environmental well-doing and as well as areas of concern, then helped him to set realistic action plans to improve environmental practices and conditions.
- Sometimes it's important for farmers to take a step back and re-evaluate their operations from a different perspective. Jason believes that EFP enables this.
- When regularly asked why he completed the EFP, Jason answers that he became interested in the cost-shared project funding from the Growing Forward program as well as implementing beneficial management practices.
- Jason's first cost-shared project was the purchase of GPS-guided steering for one of their tractors – and later on a combine – an important piece of technology that is considered a beneficial management practice that today is considered standard.
- His farm also adopted a minimum tillage practice allowing for less diesel fuel in the production cycle.
- Jason was also able to access funding for the construction of a new double-walled fuel tank in 2011, helping to eliminate any ground contamination from spillage or leaks.
- Looking ahead, Jason will be constructing a pesticide storage facility to ensure these products are kept in a safe, controlled environment.
- These improvements only touch on the crop production side of Jason's operation –there are many more beneficial management practices and projects for livestock operations that have an equality positive environmental impact.

- Most farm operations are looking to continuously improve how they do things. Being so closely tied to the environment, they need to maintain and protect our soil, water and air. Farmers are able to use EFP as a delivery mechanism that highlights their sustainable practices and prepare for any shift in markets that may ask for sustainably sourced products – some of which Kevin Sich spoke of.
- Jason believes that self-assessment is key to the EFP's success because it drives home that "awareness" point that he spoke of earlier. Until a producer can actually see how his farm measures up to some of the criteria within an EFP, they can't be sure if his operation is aligned with acceptable environmental standards, nor will they be able to determine whether they are in compliance with any sustainable sourcing scheme.
- This is also where grain companies or processing companies can help farmers by sharing the information they receive from some of their most successful farmer customers.
- Many of the practices highlighted throughout this panel are practices that most farmers are already doing today.
- For example – record keeping in fields helps create awareness.
- As a farmer, Jason says it makes business sense to perform soil samples and build nutrient management plans around the results of those tests. Crop records that record important information about each field pass – be it seeding date, herbicide rate or fungicide timing are important not only for the farmers' reference but also to crop input suppliers and grain buyers.
- In today's grain marketing world, farmers need to know the cost of production to be able to measure the value of each and every input used on our crops. The use of contracts is not new, but it is becoming the norm.
- Farmers need to be able to help themselves and become aware of these marketing opportunities in order for our businesses to succeed.
- By signing a malt barley contract, Jason realizes that access to his crop records likely won't result in a premium, but he knows that he has sold his barley at a profitable level and it will go somewhere once it's harvested.
- Going down this path not only makes sense for a company like Rahr and their customers, but also to farmers to ensure the long-term viability of their land and the maximum profitability of their operation.
- By having a completed EFP in place, Jason believes farmers can prove and demonstrate to consumers that they are doing their very best to protect the environment that grows the healthy safe food they eat.
- Overall, this allows the agriculture industry to gain public trust.
- Jason hosts both public tours and visits from buyers who are interested in what he grows and how it's grown. He is open and transparent about today's modern farming techniques.
- By attending events like this as a farmer, Jason knows the value in farmers having their voices and perspectives being heard. There aren't many farmers in the room today, but for those who are, Jason encourages you to speak up on our behalf as we build a National Environmental Farm Plan that works for all of us.

- The people you are sitting beside are here for the same reason and that is to do what we can to protect and maintain the environment where our food is grown and to ensure that the men and women growing it are given every opportunity to be successful.