

Topic

Ongoing federal interest in plastic pollution

Background

Since mid-2019, the Government of Canada has made several announcements related to plastics pollution. They are similar to commitments made in the European Union and California and could lead to the following:

- Bans on some single-use plastics as early as 2021 under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act;
- Measures to ensure that companies that manufacture plastic products or sell items with plastic packaging are responsible for managing the collection and recycling of their plastic waste;
- Investment in new Canadian technologies; and,
- Mobilization international support to address plastic pollution.

What is the latest?

- On March 11, 2020, the federal government announced intentions to designate plastics as toxic substances, under Schedule 1 of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (CEPA)
- A draft [Science Assessment of Plastic Pollution](#) was released on January 31, 2020.
- [The Minister of Environment and Climate Change Mandate Letter](#), released in December 2019 reiterated campaign promises surrounding plastics pollution.

What does this mean?

This denotes continued federal attention on plastics; some observers view the March 11, 2020 announcement as the first step along a path to allow the government to eventually ban some plastics, including single use plastics (SUPs).

What are single use plastics (SUPs)?

SUPs, often referred to as disposable plastics, are commonly used for plastic packaging and include items intended to be used only once before they are thrown away or recycled. The types of SUPs targeted include, among other items, grocery bags, food packaging, straws, containers, cups and cutlery.

What are common SUPs used in agriculture?

Some of the widely used types of SUPs in agriculture include:

- Containers for liquid pesticides and fertilizers
- Seed, pesticide, feed and fertilizer bags
- Grain bags
- Bale and silage wrap
- Bunker covers
- Mulch film
- Twine and netting
- Greenhouse cover, grow bags, pots and trays
- Maple syrup tubing

Are SUPs used in agriculture specifically targeted?

No. Announcements to date do not focus on agricultural plastics. However there may be 'unintended consequences' that could result from a ban or directive on other items. Cleanfarms will carefully watch and comment on the development of new legislation and regulation.

How are SUPs managed in agriculture? What recycling programs already exist?

'Extended Producer Responsibility' (EPR*) programs are available for a number of SUPs. Cleanfarms has been operating since 2009 to collect and recycle:

- Pesticide and fertilizer containers
- Seed, pesticide and fertilizer bags
- Unwanted pesticides and animal health medications
- Grain bags

Not all the programs are currently operating in every province. Plans are in place to expand existing programming and pilots for additional agricultural plastics are also available.



Fact Sheet – Single Use Plastics in Agriculture

Last update: March 18, 2020

*EPR means that a manufacturer or seller of these products has taken on the responsibility for the collection, recycling and/or safe disposal of these products at the end of their life.

What is Cleanfarms doing to improve plastics management in agriculture?

A number of initiatives are underway to improve the way agriculture manages plastics and other types of packaging used on farms.

- Cleanfarms, and its U.S. counterpart, the Ag Container Recycling Council (ACRC) are forming a joint committee to explore market opportunities for containers including bottle-to-bottle recycling
- Pilots are underway to offer seed & pesticide bag collections in western Canada. (They are currently available in eastern Canada, with pilots in the west.)
- Cleanfarms is piloting plastic ag-collection bags in Alberta and Manitoba to make it more convenient to recycle empty pesticide and fertilizer container programs.
- A new national study that aims to quantify the types and volumes of on-farm plastic wastes and then identify facilities that can manage or recycle them started in January 2019.
- Plans are underway to offer more pilots for agricultural films like bale/silage wrap, twine and greenhouse film. Stay tuned for more details.

What do I do if I make, sell or use a type of single use ag-plastic that does not have a recycling program?

Contact Cleanfarms. Cleanfarms is a not-for-profit industry stewardship company that works with all stewards (manufacturers, distributors and retailers) to provide convenient and efficient methods of collection and recycling or safe disposal of agricultural plastic wastes. We can also provide tips to users to access pilots like the 'Alberta Ag-Plastic. *Recycle It!*' program for twine and grain bags and suggestions to grower groups on best practices and ways to incorporate recycling into existing sustainability initiatives.

Is it likely that future measures will ban useful ag-plastic tools or increase costs to producers?

While SUPs used in agriculture are not currently targeted for bans, this plastic still needs to be managed. Cleanfarms encourages producers to stay informed about this file since we are seeing interest at both the federal and provincial level.

Recycling programs generally cost more to operate than the revenue generated from the sale of plastic to end markets. Typically, the cost to properly manage these products can result in an increase from 1% to 10% of the original cost of the product, depending on the product.

In some cases, the cost of a stewardship program will be offset by the avoided cost of disposal. It should be noted that it is usually illegal to burn or bury agricultural plastics on farm. That means these materials must go to an approved incinerator or landfill, most of which charge tipping fees. Municipalities have also banned some products from their landfills because there are better recycling options.

We encourage all producers to participate fully in Cleanfarms programs that are available to them and continue to engage in conversations about plastics management.

Contact

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