

Ag Forward:

managing on-farm plastics



Introduction

Cleanfarms and the Alberta Agricultural Plastics Recycling Group (APRG) are publishing a series of information articles for Alberta farmers to develop a shared understanding of the importance of used agricultural plastics resource management.

A common theme throughout this monthly series will be an exploration of how ag plastics, once used, can be recycled to reclaim the natural resources and the invested energy, returning them to the economy where they can be remanufactured into new products.

This practice is important to Alberta farmers because it contributes to agricultural sustainability that begins and ends on the farm, providing stewardship for future generations, as well as environmental health. Future articles will feature discussions on change management such as first sellers and manufacturers taking responsibility for used materials (extended producer responsibility), and explore practical recycling, including opportunities and challenges, for products such as grain bags, silage and bale wrap and baler twine that have real-time applications for farmers.

Cleanfarms is operating a three-year pilot project for grain bag and baler twine recycling in Alberta. The project is led by the multi-stakeholder APRG. Funds were granted by the Government of Alberta and are being administered by Alberta Beef Producers.

Can the Ag Sector Achieve Zero Plastic Waste on the Farm?

July, 2021

Modern farming utilizes technologies and innovative products that can help farmers operate efficiently with a goal of higher productivity yields in both crops and livestock.

Some of these tools are well known in today's farming operations and include items made of plastic, such as grain bags and baler twine, as well as

plastic containers – jugs, drums and totes – that are used to deliver products such as pesticides and fertilizers. While these are convenient and sometimes essential tools around farms, they can be difficult to manage when they are empty. However, innovative ideas from industry and farmers can lead to better outcomes for managing these materials.



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Filling a grain bag at the end of harvest season in Alberta

Waste analysis studies in the province estimate that Alberta farmers generate just over 14,000 tonnes of various types of ag plastic annually, which is about the same as Saskatchewan, and includes containers, grain bags, plastic baler twine, bale wrap, silage bags and bunker covers.

Many farmers have shared their preference for options that avoid ‘use and discard’ practices, but admit they are challenged to find alternatives. More and more, they look to the manufacturers of these products and packaging to offer solutions to the mounting volume of plastics used to deliver crop input products or to store and preserve harvested crop and livestock fodder.

Attitudes about managing these used materials are shifting not only on the farm, but within ag industry circles, as well. Many manufacturers of ag products using plastics fund recycling programs available to farmers through Cleanfarms programs to advance the circular economy for plastics. The circular economy considers all aspects of the product design to minimize unnecessary products, and design

materials that can be reused or recycled, keeping them in the economy and out of the environment. The Government of Alberta has already committed to advancing a circular economy for all plastics in the province.

Ultimately, the goal is to achieve zero plastic waste in the agricultural sector meaning that for farmers, these materials can be used efficiently, never becoming waste, which contributes to positive on-farm stewardship.

“The impact for Alberta farmers is two-fold. We can operate our farms with less clutter, keeping both the outbuilding areas and the land free of plastic materials and we can contribute to a more sustainable, environmentally responsible farm operation for ourselves and our families. Recycling programs are a significant step in protecting the future in the ag sector,” said Dean Hubbard, an Alberta wheat farmer and APRG member.



Find out more:



[Alberta Ag-Plastic. Recycle-It!](#)



[View published and upcoming editions](#)

Upcoming edition: A look at how ag plastics recycling works in Alberta – the challenges and opportunities

[Cleanfarms](#) is an agricultural industry stewardship organization that contributes to a healthier environment and a sustainable future for Canadian agriculture by developing and operating programs across Canada specifically for farmers that collect used ag plastics for recycling, as well as other ag-related used and unwanted materials for recycling or safe disposal. [cleanfarms.ca](#)

The [Agricultural Plastics Recycling Group](#) (APRG) was formed in 2017 and comprises more than 20 organizations representing agricultural producers, retailers, manufacturers, municipalities, non-profits and others. The group is committed to finding solutions to manage agricultural plastics. [aprg.ca](#)