

Sustainability Visioning Project for the Canadian Flax Industry

BACKGROUND

The Saskatchewan Flax Development Commission (SaskFlax) began collaborating with Natural Resources Canada to complete a sustainability visioning project in 2008. This work is part of the research program of Natural Fibres for a Green Economy Network (NAFGEN). Our objectives of the visioning project are to develop a shared language of sustainability among the stakeholders of the flax value chain, to collectively create a sustainability decision-making framework and to identify the industry's actions that will align with fundamental sustainability principles. The intended outcome is the design and development of sustainable "biorefinery systems" for oilseed flax and industrial hemp, addressed in a separate project.

By participating in the project, SaskFlax confirms its commitment to sustainable development.

SUSTAINABILITY VISION STATEMENT

Through example of our practices, the impact of our products and through the regional development opportunities we create, the Canadian flax industry is recognized as a contributor to healthy, vibrant and sustainable communities.

By leading the production and promotion of flax and flax-based products to the world, SaskFlax is recognized as a leader in the development of a sustainable society. Our sustainability vision describes a state where the flax value chain is aligned with the four basic sustainability principles of The Natural Step¹ Framework.

The following strategic goals further define this vision:

- Complete plant utilization
- Flax and flax products are solutions for sustainability
- Flax is considered by producers to be a "crop of choice"
- Production and transformation have a net positive impact on natural and social systems
- Regional transformation of flax seed and straw
- Development of necessary human capital and leadership



PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Saskatchewan Flax Development Commission

Established in 1996, SaskFlax is governed by a six-member Board representing 12,000 flax producers in Saskatchewan. SaskFlax operates on mandatory but refundable check-off dollars to fund research, education, market facilitation and communication activities to enhance better management practices and to increase net returns to producers. More than 70% of Canada's flax is grown in Saskatchewan.

Natural Resources Canada

NRCan champions innovation and expertise in earth sciences, forestry, energy and minerals and metals to ensure the responsible and sustainable development of our nation's natural resources. As a partner in Canada's Agricultural Bioproducts Innovation Program (ABIP), NRCan is working to develop sustainable "biorefineries" for flax and hemp.

Natural Ag Fibers for the Green Economy Network (NAFGEN)

NAFGEN is a multidisciplinary network that brings together Canada's top researchers, industry and producers to help create additional profitable natural fiber-based industrial value chains by improving varieties, technologies and processes, and by improving products made out of natural fibers. NAFGEN is led by Flax Canada 2015 and funded through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's ABIP.

¹ <http://www.naturalstep.org/en/applying-framework>

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THE PROCESS

Natural Resources Canada and SaskFlax contracted with The Natural Step (TNS) Canada to use the Natural Step planning model with the flax industry group.

E-Learning

Participants were assigned an account to access the Natural Step Canada's "Step by Natural Step", a three-hour online course that entailed interactive exercises and presentations about the principles and objectives of sustainability. At the end of the course, group members could opt to complete an online exam and be "graded" on the knowledge gained through the process. While there were a few technical difficulties to overcome in the rural areas, participants appreciated the opportunity to log in when it suited their schedules and learn at their own pace.

Group Conference Calls

Four bi-weekly calls were held in which participants called in to a facilitated telephone meeting to discuss sustainability issues and various elements of the course. Participants enjoyed the opportunity to interact with other members and increase their familiarity with the subject.

Backcasting Workshop

Twenty participants from across the value chain gathered in Saskatoon in March 2009 to discuss a sustainable strategy for the flax industry that supports environmental protection, social development and economic growth. The group looked at challenges and opportunities for the flax industry arising from the emerging sustainability movement and determined priorities for a sustainable future.



Report / Vision Statement

The SaskFlax Board of Directors reviewed and later adopted the final report from the Sustainability Backcasting workshop. A draft vision and action plan were prepared to address different stages of the generic value chain.



NEXT STEPS

The flax sustainability group is now working on:

- Defining specific value chains for flax seed and straw that can be used to elaborate and validate the vision, goals and actions.
- Gather feedback on action items from specialists, researchers and stakeholders from different parts of the value chain
- Obtain endorsement of the vision and action plan from Canada's flax industry, the NAFGEN Steering Committee, and governments, and

the implementation of priority sustainability action items.



SaskFlax



Natural Resources
Canada

Ressources naturelles
Canada

NAFGEN

Natural Fibres for a Green Economy Network



Agriculture and
Agri-Food Canada

Agriculture et
Agroalimentaire Canada

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PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

SaskFlax is proud to have engaged an active group of leaders and innovators in this process.

Allen Kuhlman farms near Rouleau, SK. He is the current Chairman of SaskFlax.

Mary Beckie teaches at the University of Alberta and is an Associate with The Natural Step Canada.

Chad Park is a Senior Sustainability Advisor and founding member of The Natural Step Canada.

Alvin Ulrich is the President of Biolin Research and Director of Crop Fibers Canada.

Joe Hogue is the Straw Purchase Manager for Schweitzer-Mauduit Canada, a worldwide supplier of specialty papers.

Glenn Payne is the Provincial Specialist, Bioproducts for the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture in Regina, SK.

Lyle Simonson is a producer from Swift Current, SK. He is the Vice Chair of the SaskFlax Board.

Allen Sturko is the Industrial Technology Advisor with the Industrial Research Assistance Program of the National Research Council in Winnipeg, MB.

Erwin Hanley is a Director on the Board of SaskFlax. He farms near Regina, SK.

Barb Cox-Lloyd is a businesswoman, former head of the Business Mentorship Institute of Saskatchewan, and the current Executive Director of Habitat for Humanity Saskatoon.

Leah Soroka is Director, Foresight and Science Promotion, for Health Canada in Ottawa, Ontario.

Leslie Sanders is a home economist and consultant from Saskatoon, SK.

Lee Pengilly is a rancher, writer and published author from Melville, SK.

Chris Hale is a founding member and current Director on the SaskFlax Board. He farms near Rouleau, SK.

Linda Braun is the Executive Director of SaskFlax and President of Food Focus Saskatoon, a consulting company providing services to the agriculture sector.

Gregor Beck farms near Rouleau, SK and is a Director on the Board of SaskFlax.

Venkata Vakulabharanam is the Provincial Specialist for Oilseed Crops with the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture in Regina, SK.

Dave Sefton is a director on the Board of SaskFlax, as well as the Vice-Chairman of the Western Grains Research Foundation. He farms near Broadview, SK.

Maria Wellisch is Research Advisor for the Sustainable Conversion of Bioresources in the Industrial Innovation Group at Natural Resources Canada in Ottawa, ON.

Gordon Rowland (*not in photo*) is a plant scientist and flax breeder at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, SK.

Grant Whitmore (*not in photo*) is Crop Procurement Specialist for Bioriginal Food and Science Corporation in Saskatoon, SK.



Back row: Allen Kuhlman, Mary Beckie, Chad Park, Alvin Ulrich, Joe Hogue, Glenn Payne.

Front row: Lyle Simonson, Allen Sturko, Erwin Hanley, Barb Cox-Lloyd; Leah Soroka, Leslie Sanders, Lee Pengilly, Chris Hale, Linda Braun, Gregor Beck, Venkata Vakulabharanam, Dave Sefton, Maria Wellisch.