

# Consumers increasingly look to Environmental Farm Plan standards

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For food buyers who love everything local, the Environmental Farm Plan program ticks at least some of the same boxes as organic certification.

Farmers work with a program administrator on site to identify ways to better protect soil, water and wildlife from the consequences of commercial food production and animal rearing, according to Karen Taylor, director of the Langley Sustainable Agriculture Foundation. "Manure management, wildlife protection, riparian management and composting are near the top of a long list of potential areas for improvement," Taylor said. "The consulting administrators help the farmer implement best management practices and develop a plan to make the farm more environmentally responsible."

The program is free and voluntary and the information gathered during the process is confidential, she said. If the farmer and the consultant identify an issue that requires drainage work, terraforming, equipment or new buildings and infrastructure the joint federal-provincial Growing Forward 2 agricultural technology program provides cost-sharing grants.

"A lot of farmers who go through the program are proud to display the EFPP sign, so their customers know they are running their farms in a sustainable way," she said. "It definitely improves their brand because customers want to know that their food is grown in a way that is environmentally responsible."

Recent consumer research conducted in B.C. found 85 per cent of shoppers rate local origin as more important than price when they buy fresh food.

Consumers were also more likely to choose local than certified organic foods. But that doesn't mean they don't care about the environment.

"The most important benefit for us was manure and nutrient management," said Brian Anderson of Langley's Aldor Acres dairy.

Anderson completed the program about five years ago and qualified for a grant to construct a building to protect manure from the elements, which helps protect surface and groundwater.

Adopting the program's recommendations for manure application - and completing some necessary drainage work on his own dime - improved the productivity of fields used for growing feed, mainly hay and grass silage, he said.

"We apply that manure back to the land, but it's really important that we don't overapply," Anderson said.

The experience has also ensured that Anderson has ready answers for people who ask about his farming practices when they visit the dairy.

"We are open to the public and when people come they want to know how we do things and that we are sustainable," he said.

The Langley Sustainable Agriculture Foundation is hosting a workshop on the EFP program on Sept. 20 from 9 a.m. to noon at the Langley Events Centre. Workshop attendance is free, but registration is required by emailing [langleyagriculture@gmail.com](mailto:langleyagriculture@gmail.com).

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