

# PWCP – A Funding Opportunity for Prairie Farmers

Lynsay Perkins, Communications Coordinator, Manitoba Association of Watersheds

**SEAN SMITH IS** a third generation Manitoba farmer who started using beneficial management practices (BMPs) on his family farm hoping they would have a positive impact on their operations. So far, it's working.

"We have seen many benefits from BMPs," says Smith. "Lower input costs, better weather resiliency and we have seen our yields continue to improve."

Smith's farm has also been off synthetic fertilizers for five years, saving them money and reducing nutrient runoff.

When it comes to reducing reliance on synthetic fertilizers, legumes have a place in the spotlight. Their proven ability to fix nitrogen and reduce greenhouse gas emissions makes them a low-risk option for producers wanting to try something new. That's why legume crops play a role in several of the beneficial management practices funded through the Prairie Watershed Climate Program (PWCP).

PWCP, funded by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Agriculture Climate Solutions – On-Farm Climate Action Fund

(OFCAF), aims to help producers address climate change by implementing BMPs on their land. The program funds up to 85 percent of eligible activities with a cost-share approach, and is delivered by watershed districts across Manitoba.

The program is designed to increase implementation of select BMPs in three categories – rotational grazing, nitrogen management and cover cropping. For pulse and soybean growers with mixed livestock operations, all three categories may be relevant, but for grain farms, relevant practices will likely fall under nitrogen management and cover cropping activities.

Eligible nitrogen management activities include planning practices such as agronomic support for nitrogen management plan development, soil testing, and soil mapping. They also include certain changes to fertilizer application like upgrading to polymer-coated urea, use of a blend of nitrification and urease inhibitors as well as dual inhibitors, and equipment upgrades to

improve fertilizer incorporation. Adding legumes to crop rotation, including cash crops, is also funded up to \$35 an acre.

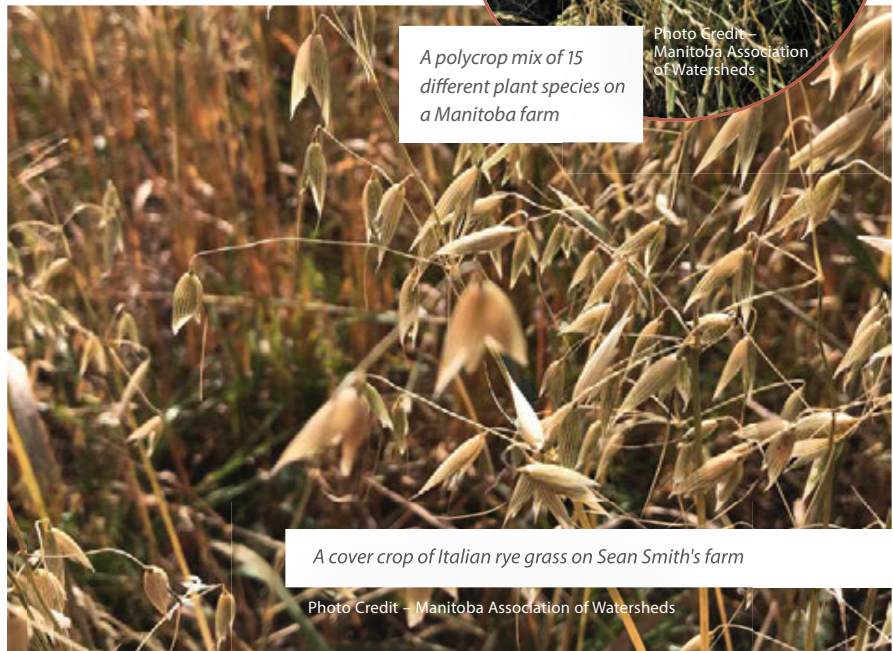
For cover cropping activities, PWCP provides funding for agronomic support for seeding cover crops, , seeds and seeding costs for fall-planted cover crops, intercropping and polycropping, as well as full-season or perennial cover crops. It's important to note that in this category, cover crops cannot be harvested with the intention of going to market (ie cash crops).

All BMPs offered through PWCP have a host of benefits to a producer's land, such as improved soil health, improved water



Legumes and grasses being used for cover cropping

Photo Credit – Manitoba Association of Watersheds



A polycrop mix of 15 different plant species on a Manitoba farm

Photo Credit – Manitoba Association of Watersheds

A cover crop of Italian rye grass on Sean Smith's farm

Photo Credit – Manitoba Association of Watersheds



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A late-autumn tour of Sean Smith's farm

infiltration, and reduced soil erosion, to name a few. They also provide benefits on the business end, such as increased crop yield, lowered nitrogen application rates, and potentially increased marketability of more sustainably-grown crops.

"I expect to see the greatest benefits to continue in our farm's ability to handle droughts and large rain events," says Sean Smith. "As we continue to increase our organic matter, we will be increasing both our water holding capacity and water infiltration rates."

In addition to the direct benefits to producers, implementing BMPs also has long-term benefits to the environment. Producers who adopt beneficial management practices like the ones funded through PWCP are part of a solution, both for addressing a changing climate as well as for ensuring that the long tradition of farming on the prairies continues to thrive.

Smith believes that implementing the types of activities funded through PWCP is integral to the future of farming in Manitoba. That's why he has also hosted

farm tours to encourage others to try new beneficial management practices and to help other farmers see some of the ways they can be implemented.

"I am passionate about keeping rural communities strong," he says. "I feel that isn't possible without prosperous family farms who are involved in the community and can be passed on to the next generation."

Every farm is unique, so any practices a producer applies for under the Prairie Watersheds Climate Program must be recommended by a licensed agrology professional (with demonstrated competency in the agronomy practice area that may include a CCA designation). PWCP-funded projects must be new practices or be an expansion of a previous practice onto new acres.

Manitoba's watershed districts each have their own regionally-specific priorities, as determined by regional integrated watershed management plans, and governed by each district's local board of directors. Program availability and prioritization of eligible activities may

vary from one district to another. The best resource for producers interested in PWCP is your local watershed district. Watershed district staff are available to walk you through the process and provide support along the way.

PWCP funding is open to any producer in Manitoba whose land is within a watershed district boundary. The program is also delivered in Saskatchewan through the Saskatchewan Association of Watersheds. Visit the Manitoba Association of Watersheds' website at [manitobawatersheds.org](http://manitobawatersheds.org) to access a map of watershed districts in Manitoba or to learn more about the Prairie Watershed Climate Program. ■

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