

Response by

Alberta Sugar Beet Growers

to the

International St. Mary – Milk Rivers Administrative Measures Task
Force: Report to the International Joint Commission (April 2006)

Submitted by

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Introduction

Southern Alberta sugar beet farmers thank the members of the Task Force for their efforts in writing the Report to the International Joint Commission and the Commissioners of the International Joint Commission for instituting the process.

The objective of the International St. Mary - Milk Rivers Administrative Measures Task Force is of supreme importance to the members of Alberta Sugar Beet Growers.

If it is possible to find "opportunities to improve the existing administrative procedures for the apportionment of the St. Mary and Milk rivers to ensure more beneficial use and optimal receipt by each country of its apportioned waters," then we must look hard for them. Managing water resources will be of greater concern in the coming years than we likely even think.

Doing nothing is not an option.

In 2004 I sat in this ballroom and heard water engineers from Canada and the United States say they have always been able to sign off on the water sharing agreement for the two rivers. The Task Force Report made no other finding.

Therefore, southern Alberta sugar beet farmers think this leads to the conclusion that the basis of water sharing is fair. Recommended changes should be consistent with an "instantaneous flow" approach.

As the glaciers supplying melt water to the St. Mary rapidly recede, grander engineering solutions may be required on one side of the international border or the other. However, any solution must respect the need for southern Alberta water users to have access to an instantaneous flow from the sharing agreement.

Our Industry

Sugar beet in Alberta is grown exclusively on irrigated land in the southern part of the province. Our farmers are major water users. A modern irrigation infrastructure system supplied by an adequate amount of water, operated by sophisticated farm managers allows beet to exist and be competitive in the open Canadian sugar market.

The domestic market we compete in has the lowest bound tariff on refined sugar in the world. The NAFTA tariff on U.S. imports of sugar into Canada is \$0.00. Other countries are subject to a modest Most Favoured Nation tariff of about \$30.00 per tonne of sugar or approximately 8-12%. Raw sugar imports generally come in also at a zero tariff.

We have no sugar policy. The Canadian whole farm safety net program does not pay out much or often to diversified southern Alberta irrigation farmers. In real terms, access to irrigation water is our primary safety net. Without a secure and predictable supply of water, there is no southern Alberta sugar beet industry.

Water Policy Development

Despite the critical necessity of water to agriculture, policy development by farmers has been slow. It was only at the Annual General Meeting in Ottawa in March 2006 that the Canadian Federation of Agriculture adopted a water policy statement. The statement is at Appendix 1 of this paper.

The CFA water policy statement is our guidance in responding to the April 2006 Report to the International Joint Commission. We reiterate the main points here:

- Canada’s water resources must be protected and the Canadian government must protect Canadian water rights in all trans-boundary water treaties.
- No trans-boundary water treaties that impact agriculture should be renegotiated or amended without the clear consensus and participation from the Canadian agricultural community.
- The Canadian government must preserve agriculture as a priority user and caretaker of Canada’s water resources.
- Governments must work with the agricultural industry to ensure the long term quality and quantity of water resources. Governments must provide appropriate funding to support projects that ensure the long term sustainability of water resources for the public good.

Fundamental Differences Between the Parties

Alberta Sugar Beet Growers supports the Government of Alberta subscription “to the belief that the apportionment afforded under the 1921 Order is based on the instantaneous flow at any given point in time to ensure the viable operation of downstream canals and diversions.”

When the 1909 Treaty and the 1921 Order were agreed, irrigators on both sides of the border had livestock, crops, and domestic uses for the water on a year round basis. This requires an ongoing supply, every month of the year.

An interpretation using a volume-based concept of apportionment “could result in the upstream jurisdiction [being Montana or Alberta] utilizing the majority of the flow at a time when the downstream jurisdiction [being Montana or Alberta] might have a critical need for that flow, and then “passing” flows when they might be of minimal benefit to the downstream jurisdiction.” The applicable situation depends

