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Statement by the Delegation of Canada to the Sixteenth Session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development

Wednesday, May 7 2008, 3:00 pm – Long Term Agricultural Land Conservation and Rehabilitation Programs to Arrest Land Degradation

Mr/Madame Chairperson,

Canada's approach to land rehabilitation and conservation is based on the understanding that the productive capacity of working landscapes must be maintained in conjunction with long term ecosystem health.

Canada has initiated a number of long term land stewardship programs that demonstrate and encourage the sustainable land use and management. Canada's prairie ecozone occupies 46.7 million hectares, including 60% of Canada's cropland and 80% of its rangeland. Its climate is characterized by short, hot summers and long cold winters with low precipitation. The region has been subject to periodic droughts, including the 1930's drought which triggered severe wind erosion, with massive dust storms. These events left land in the region severely eroded, resulting in the inability of farmers to make a living or provide a good quality of life for their families. Canada has worked to assist farmers and rural communities in the adoption of sustainable management practices to conserve and rehabilitate eroded and degraded lands.

The **Community Pasture Program** manages 85 pastures comprising 930,000 hectares of fragile and degraded lands. Its' mandate is to conserve the land resource, protect it from future deterioration due to drought while utilizing the land for the breeding and grazing of livestock. The program's mission is to manage a productive, bio-diverse rangeland and to promote environmentally responsible land use and practices. Each year 3,200 farmers and ranchers graze 220,000 head of livestock on community pastures, helping to advance their economic stability and diversification. This program provides the added benefit of positively influencing the management practices of farmers, ranchers, and land managers on private and publically owned rangelands.

The **Prairie Shelterbelt Program** provides tree seedlings and technical assistance as a means of enhancing farm sustainability and the protection of soil and water resources. The program represents a unique and significant partnership between the Government and agricultural producers who recognize the value of planting and maintaining trees, distributing approximately 4 million of seedlings to 8,000 farmers annually. By enabling the integration of trees into agricultural landscapes, the program provides a science based means of achieving key objectives in agricultural competitiveness, profitability, sustainability, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and water management.

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To be successful, land conservation and rehabilitation programs must have measurable results. To this end, the Government of Canada established the **National Agri-Environmental Health Analysis and Reporting Program** to evaluate and report on the general state and trends of agriculture's interactions with the environment, and the **National Agri-Environmental Standards Initiative** to develop performance standards for agricultural production and land management practices.

Mr/Madame Chairperson, Land conservation and rehabilitation programs represent long term commitments that require the ongoing support of local land managers and governments. Environmental, economic and social benefits are maximized when all stakeholders support, benefit and contribute to conservation and rehabilitation programs.