



COMMENTARY

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For immediate release

April 25, 2011

Add Agriculture to Election Discussions

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With the federal election approaching, Canadians continue to be bombarded with messages from candidates on many different issues such as crime, poverty and health care. These items significantly affect people across the country, but one other important issue needs to be added to the list and that is agriculture.

Farmers work to produce food for Canadians and international customers, but there are some critical items that need to be addressed by the federal government in order for us to continue to succeed as farmers.

At the top of the list is the Growing Forward Agricultural Policy Framework. Farmers are calling on political leaders to commit to improving Growing Forward and we want to see continued investment in areas such as environmental sustainability, business risk management programs (BRM), and research and innovation. A major focus must be a renewed commitment to BRM programming including AgriInsurance, AgriStability, AgriInvest and AgriRecovery. While some programs such as AgriInsurance and AgriInvest have been workable, others like AgriStability are failing. We need programs that are more responsive to the challenges that farmers are facing. It is important that the next generation of Growing Forward which comes into effect in 2013 is dependable and predictable without gaps in programming during the transition.

Farmers provide a variety of ecological benefits to rural and urban communities and we are asking the federal government to increase its support for programs that strengthen and enhance sustainable practices. Agriculture has traditionally provided food and fibre and we are proposing to extend its role to the production of ecological goods and services (EG&S).

Ecological goods and services provide benefits such as improved wildlife habitat, biodiversity, carbon sequestration and soil renewal. Farmers alone are not in a position to bear additional costs to provide these services. Therefore, governments need to implement policies and programs which facilitate progressive environmental impacts to the rural landscape. As farmers, we do our part in being good stewards of the environment. KAP wants to see government step up to the plate and show leadership on this critical issue.

KAP is calling for a balanced approach to cost sharing Canadian Grain Commission fees. With the current review of CGC fees in progress, we have made several recommendations. Farmers know that the CGC provides significant benefits to the Canadian public such as food safety and quality standards that are recognized

internationally. It is clear farmers are not the only ones who benefit from these services and therefore farmers should not pay all of the costs. Services that benefit the general public should be fully funded by the government and services that benefit the general grain industry should be cost shared. KAP believes the services that directly benefit producers or end users should be covered by those who request the service.

Rail transportation is a key issue affecting Prairie farmers because we are captive shippers and we do not have access to alternate means of transportation in order to distribute our products to our customers. We want to see a commitment from the federal government to make changes that will benefit agricultural stakeholders. Problems with railway operations in Western Canada continue to hurt farmers financially. We want to have efficient rail service, but we also want the railways to share the benefits of their efficiency with shippers.

Meaningful adoption of the Rail Freight Service Review report by government would include rewards and penalties for shippers and the railways. Farmers are also asking for a full costing review. Another key issue is the closure and loss of rural branch lines. This loss creates additional shipping costs for farmers and the rural communities that lose the service. KAP wants to see the federal government show support for farmers and rural communities that are working on purchasing rail lines going through the abandonment process.

KAP has advanced member concerns over the past months in order to get our message out to political leaders, and our organization will continue to work with other farm organizations and the Canadian Federation of Agriculture to ensure the issues that are important to farmers are front and centre. We all need to eat so we ask voters and politicians to take our issues under consideration and to make agriculture a top priority.

If you're a farmer who would like more insight into what KAP is doing for you and how we are working to build a better operating environment for all farmers in the province, please contact us at 204-697-1140 or through email at kap@kap.mb.ca.

Keystone Agricultural Producers is Manitoba's largest general farm policy organization, representing over 7,000 farm families and 22 commodity groups throughout the province. Our strength is our democratic structure, and our mission is to represent and promote the interests of the province's farm families.