



Election Issues

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Keystone Agricultural Producers
203-1700 Ellice Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3H 0B1
P: 204-697-1140
F: 204-697-1109
E: kap@kap.mb.ca

I. Background and Introduction

Keystone Agricultural Producers (KAP) is Manitoba's largest general farm policy organization representing individual farmers and farm organizations throughout the province in 12 geographic districts. The strength of our organization is a result of our structure, which requires policy to be developed and approved by our membership through their district boards or commodity representatives.

Our mission statement reads: "to be a democratic and effective policy organization promoting the social, economic and physical well-being of all Manitoba agricultural producers."

Agriculture is, and will continue to be, a part of an ever-changing environment, as farmers continuously evolve and adapt to achieve goals and meet new challenges. Manitoba's farm economy is very diverse and any programming or policies need to take into account that diversity.

We encourage all party candidates to consider the following issues as part of their campaign for a strong agricultural economy and province.

II. Provincial Water Strategy

The province of Manitoba continues to experience significant challenges due to our inability to properly manage and adapt to the hydrologic cycle of the Red River Basin and Lake Winnipeg watershed. As well, Lake Winnipeg itself continues to be degraded and suffers from eutrophication caused by nutrient loading into the watershed from various sources. We need an extensive water strategy involving all stakeholders that addresses the multi-faceted challenges that we face in the Lake Winnipeg watershed. Our water problems, including the management of volumes during the spring and the overall quality, can not be addressed as independent issues. It will take a tremendous amount of planning, research, and commitment by government, industry and the general public to achieve the goal of developing and implementing a water strategy.

Manitoba Needs:

- A commitment from government to engage with all stakeholders to develop a water strategy that addresses the multi-faceted water issues that affect all of Manitoba;
- Cooperation between all government bodies within the Lake Winnipeg watershed and strong political partnerships;
- Research on the Lake Winnipeg watershed and its hydrologic cycles.

Ecological Goods and Services (EGS)

Farmers are the single largest group of landscape managers in the province of Manitoba. Current market structures do not recognize the non-exclusionary ecological goods and services that farmers provide through beneficial management practice implementation on their operations. One of the most beneficial practices a farmer can undertake is retaining a wetland on their property. While this increases operating costs and results in forgone revenue, there are many public ecological benefits that result. Specific to the goals of a water strategy, wetlands provide managed retention and release of spring runoff into the larger watershed, reducing the water flows during peak flooding season as well as holding nutrients back until vegetation is active and able to absorb them from the water.

While Manitoba has been a leader in the development of EGS policy and programming, we continue to fall behind other provinces in our implementation of these important initiatives. The Government of Manitoba must commit to working with municipalities and the federal government to implement a province-wide EGS program that provides incentives for land managers to retain wetlands and other ecologically beneficial landscape features.

As an initial step to developing an EGS program framework, KAP would like to see the government take action to remove tax disincentives for retaining wetlands on the landscape. Currently, landowners pay municipal property tax on Conservation Land that provides no financial benefit to the landowner but significant ecological benefits to the general public. A provincial program that provides a tax rebate on Conservation Land property tax would be a positive first step toward the development of a larger EGS program and would begin to recognize the costs and public benefits associated with the valuable work landowners do.

Manitoba Needs

- An Ecological Goods and Services program that provides incentives for landowners to retain wetlands and other ecologically beneficial features on the landscape;
- A Conservation Land tax rebate program that removes the tax burden that creates a disincentive to retaining Conservation Land.

III. Stable Funding for General Farm Organizations

The primary role of a general farm organization like Keystone Agricultural Producers is to communicate with government and lobby on behalf of all Manitoba farmers, regardless of the commodity they produce. Both government programming and regulations can have a dramatic impact on how farmers are able to effectively manage their operations. It is critical that government be able to work with a group that represents a unified voice for Manitoba's agricultural

sector. As the number of farmers in Manitoba continuously declines, it is imperative that a strong farm organization be in place to represent their views.

The current legislation that provides for a voluntary check-off system for general farm organizations' membership is not working as it should. Too many operations fall through the cracks either voluntarily or unintentionally but still receive the benefits of the work that is done on their behalf.

KAP continues to have difficulty with grain elevators not deducting from deliveries and despite frequent requests for help, the government is not willing to act on its legislated responsibility to enforce the check-off system. This leaves many producers under the impression that they are paid up members when in fact they are not.

The current system also creates significant revenue volatility in years when commodity prices are low or adverse weather conditions impact crop yields. The lower the total value of crops delivered by an operation in a given year, the less likely they will reach their membership threshold.

Stable funding will strengthen the ability of general farm organizations to work with government and contribute to strengthening the agricultural sector in Manitoba. We will be able to participate in more community engagement programs to better inform urban populations about the work and opportunities that exist on the rural landscape. As well, we anticipate significantly increasing our commitment to funding research and development of new and innovative sectors such as renewable energy based nitrogen fertilizer production.

Manitoba Needs:

- General farm organizations with a grassroots membership base to be adequately funded to be able to work within Manitoba and to represent Manitoba at the federal level;
- A commitment from political parties to introduce legislation that will provide a stable funding system for general farm organizations in Manitoba.

IV. Education Financing

KAP strongly supports the 80 per cent rebate committed in the recent budget to decrease education tax on farmland. Manitoba's farm families shoulder an inequitable share of the cost of education, through both property taxes on residences and a special levy on farmland and production buildings. KAP, along with the Manitoba Education Financing Coalition, supports removing education tax from property and expects the province to make education a commitment and fund it properly from general revenues. The government's practice of adding more and more responsibilities on schools—such as social services—without matching grants to support those new initiatives, is unfair. Education is a core service and should be properly funded from general revenues. We believe that

the current education funding system is inequitable and unsustainable for all Manitobans because it is based on property.

Manitoba Needs:

- The complete removal of education tax from all properties, including farmland, production buildings and all residences;
- The provincial government to develop a plan over five years to shift to a more sustainable way of funding education without placing an additional burden on tax payers.

For more information, please contact:

Doug Chorney, KAP President. (204) 785-3626.