



## COMMENTARY

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## **Potash Industry Takeover**

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There has been a lot in the news lately about BHP Billiton's attempted takeover of Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan. This must be an exciting time of potentially windfall gains for shareholders. For Saskatchewan, this too is a major issue as potash has generated a great deal of business and jobs for the province. But for those of us who are the ultimate consumers of the product, there is uncertainty.

The standing committee on agriculture already flagged the lack of competition in the whole fertilizer sector as a problem, and clearly buyouts and amalgamations will not improve that.

Nutrient inputs for agriculture worldwide have moved from just another mining commodity to something more strategic. Access to nutrients to feed growing populations has caught the attention of governments worldwide. Canada is positioned well in most regards with domestic sources of nitrogen (through natural gas), phosphorous and potash. However, making sure that access at competitive prices to all of these fertilizers is important for all types of agriculture. Paying too much for these inputs can make Canadian agricultural exports less competitive.

Governments these days are reluctant to interfere with "market" forces, but clearly there are national interests at play. Canada's competitive edge in many markets depends on access to crop nutrients at reasonable prices, and we as producers do not want to lose that.

Depending on corporations who answer only to shareholders will not necessarily be in our best interests. We all need to pay attention to what happens here--it is not just about shareholder profits.

*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.*