

The KAP Alert

May 16, 2008

Keeping WCB Coverage Voluntary for Ag

Media Commentary by President Ian Wishart

The issue of workers' compensation coverage is just another 'iron in the fire' for Keystone Agricultural Producers. This spring, the Workers' Compensation Board began a consultation process to look at expanding mandatory coverage into new sectors and agriculture is on the list. While we put a high priority on making farms as safe as possible for farmers, their employees, and their families, KAP does not believe that mandatory WCB coverage will achieve that goal.

We all know that the family farm is a very unique workplace in comparison to almost all other industries, because it's where we work and where we live. Because of this, there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution. Our focus has to be on continually improving safety, but a 2004 report by Deloitte Inc. found no correlation between WCB coverage and improved safety.

Education and awareness programs are the key to building a stronger safety culture on Manitoba's farms. Because every farm is different, we think that voluntary self-assessments and assistance to develop farm safety policy plans are two positive approaches that work with the individual farm's needs.

Farmers do currently have the option to take WCB coverage, and some farmers have found this to be an appropriate tool. However, other farmers have opted to subscribe to private insurance programs. KAP believes it should be a farmer's decision to select the approach that works best. Many of the private programs extend a worker's coverage for 24 hours, as opposed to just the hours of work, and this can be a greater benefit to the worker than WCB.

Agriculture is also in a time of change, and we don't believe that now is the appropriate time to add WCB into the mix. Changes to the Employment Standards Code have just been imple-

mented for farm workers, and more certification programs for pesticide and manure applicators have also been put in place. With this increased training, we should expect fewer injuries on the farm.

KAP believes that farmers need the appropriate education and resource materials to improve safety, and organizations like the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association have a wealth of resources and access to expertise. We remain committed to promoting the message of farm safety using all available avenues.

There is a role for WCB to play. By better communicating the advantages of its products and customizing the options to meet the needs of agriculture, it may increase the uptake and acceptance by farmers without resorting to mandatory coverage.

It is crucial that farmers be given options for employee insurance and protection. KAP's preferred approach is one where government, farm groups and farmers work together. While we are opposed to mandatory workers' compensation for agriculture, we strongly believe that education, self-management, and training will help to improve safety for farmers, farm families, and farm employees.

KAP News

We'll be starting with a new format for the KAP Alert next week - your feedback will be much appreciated!

The office will be closed on Monday, May 19 for Victoria Day. Our summer office hours begin next week, and we'll be open from 8:00 to 4:00.

The KAP Alert is published weekly by Keystone Agricultural Producers

To provide feedback, please contact Lenore Kowalchuk at communications@kap.mb.ca

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Member Benefits: Estate Planning

Getting started on estate planning is a tricky thing if you just don't know who will come back to farm, how much longer you want to keep farming, where everyone will live if they come back to the farm, or about the costs.

All of these "don't knows" may sound like good reasons not to talk to professional advisors about planning, and may even seem like good reasons not to get a will. However, not having all of the answers is exactly why you should have a basic will, and at least a temporary estate plan. Don't write it yourself. Don't buy a kit. Call KAP's Member Benefit hotline, and we can direct you to professionals that know agriculture and are ready to help.

Here's one tip: Instead of leaving your property to your spouse directly, leave them property in a trust. Trust property is taxed separately, and at all of the low graduated tax rates, instead of heaping the income on top of other income and pushing your family into the highest tax bracket. You can gift any type of asset to your family in trust through a will or a beneficiary designation in life insurance or annuities. You can give total

control and freedom to your spouse or partner, or have the assets managed by other family members or a public trustee - that part is totally up to you.

If you have a company, or have ever thought you should have a company, call the KAP Member Benefits hotline to explore the many interesting advantages that partnerships and corporations can offer. Many farmers and ranchers have companies, but like wills, very few companies take advantage of layered structuring to allow you to pay family members very low tax dividends, or create multiple capital gains exemptions.

This may sound somewhat complicated, but professional guidance from the KAP Benefit Estate Planning program will steer you in the right direction. When you consider the cost of paying significantly more tax than you should, this service may save you a great deal.

To arrange for a personalized consultation at your farm, **please call: 1-866-527-0123, ext. 1.**

In the News...

The provincial government and the Manitoba Trappers Association have extended their **problem predator removal program**. The program is similar to the one implemented in the past, which mainly assists livestock producers. The first step for farmers who have a predator problem is to contact their local Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation office. For more information about this service, please contact Barry Verbiwski at Manitoba Conservation at (204) 945-7751.

The recovery of **used oil, used oil filters and used oil containers** continues to be on the rise. The Manitoba Association for Resource Recovery Corp. is asking for some volunteers who may have information about how much oil they purchase, and how much is taken out when doing an oil change. Ideally, they'd like to get some information from grains, special crops & livestock producers with various sizes of operations. If you are willing to help provide some better information about oil use in agriculture, please contact Ron Benson at MARRC at

marrc@mts.net or (204) 632-5255. For more info, go to www.usedoilrecycling.com.

The **Woodlot Association of Manitoba** is holding a spring field day on *Wetlands, Woodlands & Wildlife* on May 31 near Grand Beach. Speakers and displays will look at growing mushrooms, trail-making equipment, and other items of interest. Registration is \$5 and can be made by calling (204) 453-7102 or emailing mjames@prairie.ca.

Manitoba's Office of the Chief Veterinarian is currently conducting **research on livestock medicines**. They are collecting information that can be used to assist in the development of policies in relation to medicines used in livestock production in Manitoba. To provide your input, please follow this link & complete a brief survey: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=4aMbVW76Scqjsog98k5khg_3d_3d