



NewsWatch Saskatchewan
JANUARY 4TH, 2007 12:30 HRS.

GX ON AGRICULTURE
with guest host Doug Falconer

ALTERNATIVE LAND USE SERVICES (ALUS)

DOUG FALCONER (Program Host):

The Saskatchewan Party is calling on the NDP Government to immediately provide funding for the establishment of an ALUS pilot project. ALUS stands for Alternative Land Use Services.

Last Mountain Touchwood Sask Party MLA Glen Hart says the province doesn't seem to want to meet with the players involved.

GLEN HART (Saskatchewan Party MLA):

Talking to the organizations that are trying to get a pilot project up and running, they seem to be having some difficulty meeting with Ministers of the Crown and they would like to talk to the Ag Minister, to the Environment Minister to see if they are interested in this concept and see if they would help with a pilot project.

DOUG FALCONER (Program Host):

And so far, things aren't moving very quickly that way?

GLEN HART (Saskatchewan Party MLA):

No, it doesn't appear to be. And it's somewhat ironic when Ag Minister Wartman back in 2005 at a federal-provincial ag ministers meeting endorsed the concept and had agreed to work on the development of ALUS and see if it was a workable program for Saskatchewan and across the country. He agreed to that and yet his officials and himself are very slow in meeting with APAS and the Delta Waterfowl organization – these are the two principal drivers on this pilot project.

DOUG FALCONER (Program Host):

For our listeners who may not be familiar with ALUS, what exactly is it?

GLEN HART (Saskatchewan Party MLA):

The ALUS concept envisions paying a landowner for the ecological goods and services that they already provide to society. Things like wildlife habitat, protection of riparian areas along our waterways – all those sorts of things are of benefit in an environmental sense to all of us. And yet the landowners, the farmers are the ones that are incurring all the cost and aren't really receiving any compensation for those additional costs. This alternative land use concept is something that is really taking hold in other parts of the world, particularly Europe. There is work being done on it in the U.S. In Manitoba, there is already a pilot project that was in operation in 2006. Other provinces are looking very seriously at getting pilot projects up and running so they can evaluate the concept and see how they can work out some practical ways of implementing a system of rewarding landowners and producers for the ecological goods and services that they provide.

DOUG FALCONER (Program Host):

Is it possible that the Saskatchewan Government is waiting to see what kind of money they're going to get from the federal government in the budget?

GLEN HART (Saskatchewan Party MLA):

I don't think we're talking in terms of large dollars here for this pilot project. That should not be a consideration at all. We're talking about a small amount of dollars in terms of government spending to get this pilot project up and running. The folks that are organizing this already have some private dollars in place. What they need is a bit of help at the provincial level and at the federal level to get a pilot project up and running for 2007. So we're not talking in terms of large dollars at this point in time. So I really can't see any reason why this NDP Government can't step up to the plate and help get this off the ground.

DOUG FALCONER (Program Host):

To get something running this spring, would we need an announcement in the next month or two?

GLEN HART (Saskatchewan Party MLA):

I would think so. You would have to talk to the APAS people and the Delta Waterfowl people about timeframes. But it would be my opinion that we need to have a decision at the provincial level very soon because it takes time to set something like this up and we can't wait until March or April and say well,

we've got some dollars for you. That's way too late. We need to have something done now.

DOUG FALCONER (Program Host):

However, Saskatchewan Agriculture Minister Mark Wartman explained his government's position on this ALUS proposal.

MARK WARTMAN (Saskatchewan Agriculture Minister):

Well, first of all I think it's important to point out the Sask Party which is not accountable for any budgeting would fund anything that comes along if they think it would gain votes.

Secondly, we have been working with the groups that have been promoting ALUS. We've been working with the ecological goods and services program for sometime. And though we do approve the concept of the program, clearly we have indicated that we are not going to provide any funding for a pilot program which is virtually the same as the ALUS pilot project underway in Manitoba. That pilot project is to provide information not only provincially but nationally. And so to duplicate that program at this point, neither the federal nor the provincial governments want to duplicate a pilot program.

Where we have been working with the Saskatchewan Agri Environmental Advisory Council which is composed of experienced and well respected farm leaders, clearly they have not focused on ALUS as priority programming.

The kind of thing that we have been doing is working with farmers both individually and as group to do environmental farm planning. That has received very, very good responses and great uptake on the program. And in most cases, I think they are finding some real successes in terms of doing individual environmental farm planning than working with regional groups to make sure that they are following best practices. And there is support available to help them with some of the projects they're doing.

So basically from our perspective, the pilot project that is going in Manitoba should provide both provincial and federal governments with some good information. There is no value really of duplicating the program, the pilot project here. We want to find out what the impacts are.

I think it's also important to know that some people clearly see the ALUS program at a time of low farm income as another way of getting a new revenue stream. And so there will be people that will push it for those reasons.

But clearly we want to see good sound environmental farm practices. We think those are best business practices in most cases. And we support the development of good and better environmental farm planning.

DOUG FALCONER (Program Host):

Would you be open to meeting with the players here in Saskatchewan in spite of the fact that you wouldn't be funding this program?

MARK WARTMAN (Saskatchewan Agriculture Minister):

Well clearly we've had many discussions with people who are promoting the program. And they know that we understand the program. We understand what they are proposing. And they clearly understand now it's around political lobbying is what it sounds like because they clearly understand the position that we've taken on it. So if there is something new comes up certainly they can approach us to see whether or not a meeting would be in the offing.

DOUG FALCONER (Program Host):

Minister Wartman, can you tell us when this Manitoba ALUS pilot project is going ahead? Is it going ahead this spring?

MARK WARTMAN (Saskatchewan Agriculture Minister):

It's underway already.

DOUG FALCONER (Program Host):

Can you give us any details on it?

MARK WARTMAN (Saskatchewan Agriculture Minister):

It's basically what is proposed here. They are going to be evaluating in an RM in Manitoba or an equivalent of an RM. They will be putting somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$600,000 dollars. It's supported by the Keystone Agriculture Producers and this pilot project in the Municipality of Blanshard will investigate the cost and the benefits of the ALUS proposal.

DOUG FALCONER (Program Host):

That's Saskatchewan Agriculture Minister Mark Wartman explaining that there is no need to conduct an ALUS pilot project in this province since the same project is already underway in Manitoba.
