



PRESENTATION

“The Voice of Manitoba Farmers”

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Hog Production Industry Review

by the Manitoba Clean Environment Commission

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Introduction

On behalf of all of Manitoba's farm families, I am pleased to have the opportunity to present to the Clean Environment Commission on an issue that will have an impact on how we farm in this province in the future. I am the President of Keystone Agricultural Producers, which is the largest general farm policy organization in Manitoba. Our membership includes thousands of individual farmers, and we also have representation around our table from twenty provincial commodity groups. Our role is to represent and promote the interests of Manitoba farm families, and it is with this perspective in mind that I am here today.

As the CEC continues its review of the hog industry's environmental sustainability, it is critical that we understand the impacts that this process could have on all farms in the province as we move forward.

Sustainable Growth

Agricultural sustainability is like a three-legged stool, representing economic, social, and environmental considerations. One cannot exist without the others and so, from our perspective, it is critical that the CEC has an understanding of what impacts its recommendations may have. As farmers, we are also concerned about the future of our industry and recommend that the CEC give due consideration to the impact that its decisions may have on the ability of young farmers to build their operations and diversify or expand into the hog sector.

Linkages Within Agriculture & Our Communities

The CEC must recognize that agriculture is a very inter-connected industry. While your decisions on the environmental sustainability of the hog industry may appear to isolate and affect the 1,400 hog farmers in the province, the reality is that all of Manitoba's farmers will be impacted in some way, from the grain farmer who grows the feed for the

hogs, to the company worker that mixes it, and the truck driver that delivers it. This issue will have a wide reach, into Manitoba's rural communities, urban centres, and many homes throughout Manitoba. As a result of the current uncertainty in the hog sector, losses are being felt in the construction, equipment, and feed industries across the province. The economic reality is that hog production is good for Manitoba and, to ensure that these benefits stay in our province, we must be willing to provide them with the tools they need to continue to improve environmental sustainability instead of simply dictating that they continue to do more.

We must also be mindful of other industries that are looking to agriculture as a valued partner. In Manitoba, we continue to focus on opportunities in alternate energy and biofuels. To achieve the environmental rewards of this industry, the economic reality is that a strong livestock sector will be needed to use their co-products.

I farm near Elgin, Manitoba which is southwest of Brandon. I have seen the economic advantages of a sustainable and growing hog sector first-hand. Jobs have been created in our communities, and our area is also home to a new feed mill. An ethanol plant is also in development in the south-west. Part of their business plan includes the sale of high-protein feed, which is created as a by-product. As the pause on the hog industry continues and uncertainty remains in the industry, there is almost no growth. This decreases the opportunity for this biofuel facility, and may develop into a situation where these valuable by-products have to be exported out of Manitoba. Another proposal planned to link biotech hog production with alternate energy, and these plans are halted as well. Instead of developing our own value-added and alternate energy industries, we will be providing the raw materials for these opportunities to grow in other jurisdictions. This temporary pause has caused nothing but harm to economic growth in this province. It is not just the sustainability of the hog industry that's under review, but the sustainability of the rural economy.

Current Initiatives in Agriculture

In agriculture, we are fortunate to have farmers that move ahead with voluntary initiatives that protect and improve our environment, and hog producers are among the leaders. Farmers continue to lead the way in adopting new technologies and management techniques, aided by the information provided as part of some important voluntary programs.

These include the Environmental Farm Plan process, which helps farmers identify environmental risks on the farm, develop a mitigation plan, and implement it with some government cost-sharing. The Riparian Health Council and the Riparian Tax Credit have also had success in changing farmers' management practices near these important environmental areas. Most recently, we have seen exceptional response from farmers in the Rural Municipality of Blanshard, who are participating in an Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) pilot project. Over 70% of the landowners in this area have evaluated the environmental benefits on their land and have voluntarily enrolled in the ALUS program, for a relatively small per acre incentive.

The point of these examples is to show that farmers want to do the right thing, and will continue to do more if there is an incentive structure that provides the flexibility we need to run our businesses. Most often, new environmental initiatives come at a cost to the farmer and, to a point, we have been willing to absorb these costs. The problem now is that farmers have done everything they can, and can absorb no more simply because we have no way to pass along these costs to our customers. We strongly believe that if environmental benefits are enjoyed by all, that we should all share in the cost of providing them.

The Manitoba Pork Council lists all of the Acts and regulations that govern their industry on their web site, and certainly it is quite extensive. Over the last ten years, the hog sector has been under increasing scrutiny as it relates to environmental practices and this has led to a much broader understanding in the farming community about our collective responsibility toward the environment. As a result, hog farmers have been one of the most progressive sectors in conducting research, developing new technologies, and implementing beneficial management practices. Unfortunately, government regulations have not always kept up to the pace, and this must also be considered.

For example, a low-phytase barley variety has been developed and could provide another opportunity for farmers to lower the amount of phosphorus that has to be managed on the farm. The slow and complex nature of our variety registration system means that the federal government has seriously delayed its introduction. There is also a federal regulation in place that sets out guidelines for the minimum phosphorus requirements for feed rations, and this was developed decades ago. It's very possible that this is set too high, and could be revised to further decrease the amount of phosphorus managed on hog farms. On the provincial side, government has delayed granting permits to producers who wish to modernize or expand their manure storage facilities, or have set standards so high that they are impractical to implement. As a result, they are actually restricting the environmental improvements that the livestock industry wishes to make. The point of these examples is to illustrate that it is not only the farmer who has a role to play. All levels of government have to put a priority on developing a practical and reasonable approach that works with agriculture.

Since the mid-1990s, hog producers have had a peer-review system in place to help deal with environmental issues. Producers are also required to complete manure management plans, which are designed to ensure that these nutrients are applied in an environmentally sustainable manner. Just as importantly, these plans are being enforced across the province.

There are other structures currently in place that address environmental sustainability. If there are complaints about a hog farm, these can be taken to the Farm Practices Protection Board, and thorough investigations are undertaken. If a farmer is found to be at fault, remedial action is required and this, too, is enforced. Regulations about the location and environmental suitability of hog barns are also part of the municipal planning process, as local councils must identify areas where hog barns can and cannot be located.

All of these processes are designed to ensure the overall sustainability of the hog industry. However, regulation alone simply cannot provide the widespread environmental impacts that Manitobans are looking for, which is why KAP continues to support voluntary, incentive based initiatives. We recognize that there is certainly a need for regulation and enforcement but, as I've mentioned, many of the issues identified by the CEC for consideration under this review - like land use planning, water quality, odour, and disease transmission – are already addressed by existing regulations. Others, like nutrient management, will soon be enforced by regulation.

In short, a balanced mix of incentives and regulations are needed to ensure the ongoing environmental sustainability of the hog sector, and for agriculture as a whole. We encourage the CEC to focus its recommendations on this area.

Closing Remarks

On behalf of Keystone Agricultural Producers and the farm families that we represent, I wish to thank you for the opportunity to present during this review of the hog sector's environmental sustainability. We take our role as land managers seriously and, in addition to the voluntary initiatives that we undertake, there are also a wide range of programs and regulations that compel hog farmers - and all farmers - to protect and improve our environment. Farmers and their families strive to ensure that future generations will grow in a sustainable Manitoba.