



COMMENTARY

“The Voice of Manitoba Farmers”

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KAP Responds to the Provincial Budget

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Manitoba released its budget, and a number of new commitments for agriculture and rural development were announced. As with all government announcements, the devil will be in the details of how these programs will flow out to the farming community, and we are still waiting to learn more about some of the initiatives that have been launched.

On the positive side, the introduction of a Safe Farm pilot project is a positive step, and it shows that government is willing to work with farm families to build safer workplaces. KAP is pleased that the province is following through on our recommendation to create this program, which is a voluntary program that will offer incentives to farmers that evaluate their farm's safety practices and develop an action plan to decrease their risks. By working together, we will be better prepared to ensure that farmers, our employees, and our families remain safe on the farm.

The budget also included some increased spending to assist the next generation of farmers as they enter the industry. One program will focus on providing training to young women to take on larger roles in the farm enterprise, and that's a positive step. Another will enhance the Bridging Generations Initiative to help in transferring ownership and control of farms to young farmers. A further rebate from MASC to young farmers was also announced, and we're waiting for more details on how this will work. Our Young Farmers Committee will also be taking a closer look at these programs as they roll out to ensure they meet the needs of agriculture's beginning farmers.

Some of the other agricultural announcements in the budget don't go nearly as far as KAP was asking. KAP has continued to fight for education tax relief and fairness, by advocating that the provincial government shift education taxes off of property. Some new education tax credits were announced in the budget, and the provincial government committed to increasing the rebate on farmland to 80% over four years. It's a step forward to the ultimate goal of restructuring how education is funded in Manitoba. KAP will continue its lobby efforts to get education taxes completely off of farmland and production buildings, and eventually all property, as part of the Education Financing Coalition (www.letspayfair.com).

On the environment, the government did announce \$2.5 million to help farmers adapt to the proposed nutrient management regulation. The draft regulations are still being reviewed by the Clean Environment Commission, so we don't know yet what the final rules will be, so it's difficult to evaluate what the impact of this budget announcement will be. If the regulations remain similar to what was submitted to the CEC, the funding from government simply isn't sufficient because it will have extremely limited impact once its split across all of agro-Manitoba. KAP and its partners have recommended a \$100 million, multi-year approach to government to ensure that farmers have the tools they need, but the budget fell far short of this target. KAP has said time and time again that we are doing our part to protect the environment, but we need to do this in partnership with government and society.

As the voice of Manitoba's farmers, it's now our job to make sure that the government lives up to the commitments they've included in the budget, to help them develop program details that will work, and to push for improvements where we see gaps in funding or direction. With an election expected in the near future, it's sure to be an interesting year for agriculture.