



## COMMENTARY

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### “The Voice of Manitoba Farmers”

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## Ideas in Action: Education Taxes

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It's been more than two decades since Keystone Agricultural Producers' farmer-members voted in favour of resolutions that demanded a change in the way that we fund education in Manitoba. A lot of things have changed since Brian Mulroney was Prime Minister, Howard Pawley was Manitoba's Premier, Mark McGwire hit his first major league homerun and Whitney Houston was at the top of the pop music charts.

But, while the popularity of politicians, musicians and celebrities have come and gone, one thing has remained the same here in Manitoba: The funding of education is still based on property taxation, an antiquated system that was established in the days of the one-room schoolhouse, a family on every quarter-section of land, and when most people lived outside of urban centres. The world has seen rapid change, but maybe time just passes more slowly in agriculture policy – especially when it comes to taxation.

In the beginning, the argument was easy. Farmers were paying up to eight times more in education taxes than their non-farming neighbour. In years when farm incomes were down, this was a particularly difficult pill to swallow, especially when the land and production buildings that they were paying education taxes on had actually generated little or no revenue. Frustrations ran high.

As a result of its members' input, KAP began to lobby the provincial government for a change. KAP's Assessment & Taxation Committee conducted research and shared their real-life frustration with the current system by showing what the impacts were on farm families. What followed was a stream of policy papers, supporting resolutions, meetings with MLAs and Ministers, and drawing public attention to the issue whenever possible.

Along the way, something changed. Farmers began to realize that this was a difficult feat to accomplish on their own, and that there must be others who felt unfairly burdened by the current education tax system. As it turns out, there is a broader base of opposition for the way that we fund education, whether it's from a farmer, a person living on a fixed income, a business owner, or a realtor. While they all have different reasons the focus is the same: Remove education taxes off of property.

All Manitobans can agree on a few key ideas about education, particularly that any change in the way we fund it should enhance the education system, not harm it. By 2005, KAP's farmer-delegates approved a new approach, one that would have the organization working with other non-agricultural groups to push for the complete removal of education taxes on property.

By putting pressure on government – on our own and through our partnership with others – we have seen some progress on the issue. Manitoba is now rebating 60% of the education taxes that farmers pay on their land. There's been no relief on farm buildings like barns, and the structure of the rebate makes it less than ideal.

Twenty years is a long time, but patience and persistence do pay off. Now is the time to push for a real change in the way that education is funded and, by working together it becomes a much more achievable goal.

For more information about why education taxes should come off of property, go to [www.letspayfair.com](http://www.letspayfair.com)

Keystone Agricultural Producers is Manitoba's largest general farm policy organization, representing over 7,000 farm families and 20 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.