



“The Voice of Manitoba Farmers”

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“NISA” Back in Action?

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It looks like NISA is ready for a sequel. Five years after the farmer-approved Net Income Stabilization Account program was ended, it's back in the news as the federal government announced its plan to invest \$600 million into a similar type of program.

With all of the criticism of current farm programs that has been in the news in recent years, an observer might think that farmers were never happy with whatever had been in place. That was the difference with NISA. It had been developed with real input from farmers and was practical and workable.

Its self-directed “save in good years and draw funds in tough years” design, combined with a contribution incentive from government, made NISA a flexible farmer-favourite. If government is true to its commitment and introduces a program with these same positive qualities, farmers may still have more good things to say about agricultural safety net programs.

Above all, farmers need flexibility and predictability – even though these two things may sound like complete opposites. Farm operations change over time, and plans can also change in an instant because of weather or prices. This, combined with the diversity in agriculture across Canada, means that flexibility is key. But, farmers also need to know that support is there in times of financial trouble, and ideally they should know how much support is available, when they can receive it, and what impact it will have on the farm's operation.

NISA was able to successfully combine these two important traits, and farmers should hope that the new “contributory-style producer savings account” being talked about by government does the same.

There is one hurdle remaining in the development of this new program. This kind of program has always been cost-shared by the federal and provincial governments and the individual producer. Manitoba's government must put its support behind this program, and use its influence to get other provincial governments on board.

After suffering through a number of difficult years without an adequate safety net, farmers can take some small comfort in the fact that the right type of program is coming back to life. Combined with the federal government's initial funding commitment of \$600 million, this gives another ray of optimism into the farming community. As with all announcements, the devil will be in the detail so we hope that discussions will be held with farm organizations like Keystone Agricultural Producers (KAP). We need to ensure that this new program will be effective at meeting both the needs and expectations of farmers.

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.