



COMMENTARY

“The Voice of Manitoba Farmers”

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Agriculture Watching Province's Next Move

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With the federal budget behind us, now all eyes in the farming community have turned to the provincial government. They'll be bringing down a budget that will begin to define the top issues of the next election, and farmers want to know what's in-store for agriculture, alternate energy initiatives, and the environment.

In December, Keystone Agricultural Producers (KAP) submitted a wish list to the provincial government on what we'd like to see in this budget. We followed up in a meeting with Finance Minister Greg Selinger. Now, it's his move. Here's our Top 4 list of what farmers want to see on April 4, when the budget comes down:

- 1. A plan to completely eliminate education taxes from property.** The piecemeal approach isn't good enough anymore, because it's creating an even more complicated system of rebates and credits. At the same time, home and business owners are still paying more every year. As part of the Education Finance Coalition (www.letsplayfair.com), we're not saying that we have to fix the problem overnight. Instead, KAP is looking to government to announce a plan that will spell out how they can use economic growth and increases in provincial revenues to phase out the current, unfair education tax system.
- 2. Investments to grow green energy opportunities in rural Manitoba.** The government needs to follow through on its commitments and provide investments and leadership to kickstart the green economy across the province. These new opportunities – in areas like biodiesel, ethanol, wind energy, and biomass – have the potential to bring completely new streams of revenue into our communities, serve as a new market for farmers' crops, and let rural Manitobans show the rest of the province how we can improve the environment. KAP is also looking for a strategy that will encourage farmer and rural ownership of these ventures.
- 3. Direction on nutrient management regulations, along with a fair incentive package.** Farmers are stuck in limbo when it comes to nutrient management regulations. After intense negotiations with KAP and commodity groups, the government announced some draft regulations and asked for public

feedback. That process ended in January, but there is still no word on where we're going from here. More importantly, there has been no information about how the province intends to help farmers pay for adaptations they will have to make to adjust to the new regulations. Farming is already filled with enough uncertainty. We need to know what the plan will be, and how the province plans to share the bill. Farmers will do our part to protect the environment, but we can't do it alone.

- 4. Commitment to safety nets programs that work for farmers.** The recent federal government announcement of a contributory-style program is a welcome one, and we look forward to the provincial government's participation. The province must also ensure that it allocates resources to collect input from farm organizations on the future development of this program, to ensure it works for producers. Farmers are also looking for a stand-alone disaster program to help minimize the impacts of unpredictable challenges in the industry, and the provincial government must show leadership in its development. In this budget, the provincial government should also show its willingness to address regional gaps in national programs by allocating funds for companion programs.

For more information about KAP's priorities for this provincial budget, visit our web site at www.kap.mb.ca/policy.html and click on *Briefs to Government & Other Organizations*.