



COMMENTARY

“The Voice of Manitoba Farmers”

203-1700 Ellice Ave. ~ Winnipeg MB ~ R3H 0B1

ph: (204) 697-1140 ~ fax: (204) 697-1109

kap@kap.mb.ca ~ www.kap.mb.ca

For immediate release

September 19, 2008

Parties Must Commit on Agricultural Issues

By Ian Wishart, KAP President. Cell: (204) 856-6964.

This is the first in a series of four columns on agricultural election issues put forward by Ian Wishart, President of Keystone Agricultural Producers.

With the federal election in full swing, politicians are busy making promises to Canadians. After browsing through party brochures and websites, you will find lists of them on cutting taxes, providing more money for families, and protecting the environment. But after searching through these priorities, it appears there have been few clearly explained commitments on agriculture. Before the vote on October 14, Manitoba farmers need some answers.

First, we need to know if the party forming the next government is committed to investing in the future of agriculture. A good place to start would be ensuring the next generation of business risk management programs under *Growing Forward* work for producers. It is crucial to have farm income programs that are adequately funded, predictable, and bankable. Producers also need access to flexible companion programs that target regional or provincial needs.

Taking a look at what's needed in Manitoba right now, many producers throughout the province are facing difficult times due to excess moisture. They want to see a land and forage restoration program implemented along with other support which will help lessen the impact of feed shortfalls and animal health issues. An extension of the tax deferral program that is available to livestock producers in drought situations also needs to be extended to those facing flood situations.

Parties should be focusing on other investments as well, such as funding for research and infrastructure to develop new opportunities in agriculture, and increasing the commitment to infrastructure in rural areas. A hot topic has been the expansion of broadband internet service into rural Canada to ensure access comparable to urban areas.

Finally, with endless talk on their environmental platforms, it's time for all parties to put agriculture in the spotlight. Producers have demonstrated their ability and willingness to serve Canadians as the stewards of the land, and they want to see a nationally funded

conservation program. The clear choice of producers is Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS). The program is a natural fit with other federal environmental programs and objectives, including mechanisms to deal with greenhouse gas emissions and carbon offset trading. Producers have an exceptional opportunity to decrease emissions and create offsets, in order to participate in a national or international carbon market. Producers can deliver the environmental goods and services that society is demanding, but they need to see a new approach to agricultural and resource policy. To the candidates: We want to see the details on the investments your government would make to ensure agriculture thrives in Canada.

Keystone Agricultural Producers is Manitoba's largest general farm policy organization, representing over 7,000 farm families and 22 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.