



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

Livestock Assistance Good First Step

February 22, 2008

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

The provincial government made a good move this week, and responded to the livestock sector's need for assistance. Manitoba's livestock farmers are being caught in a serious financial squeeze between rising costs and decreasing returns and the need is becoming urgent.

The \$60 million aid package includes low interest loans and financial extensions that should help to improve cash flow for livestock producers and their families, and will give them a bit of breathing room to make the best business decisions possible for their operations. Despite the extremely challenging environment, the province is showing their commitment to help producers weather this storm.

For these sectors of agriculture, it's a good first step. Farm families that raise livestock have been hit by rising feed and energy costs, depressed prices, and a strong Canadian dollar that is decreasing the value of their exported animals. The cattle sector is still in recovery mode after BSE closed exports and slashed incomes, so many families have already drawn down on their financial reserves as much as they could.

The Manitoba government also announced that it will share the costs of testing cattle for tuberculosis near the Riding Mountain National Park. This recognizes the increased costs that producers incur in the area, because the elk herd is protected by the park but may carry the disease and infect livestock. It's time for the federal government to also take on their responsibility and commit money to pay for their share of this testing.

As livestock producers and their families work to make it through these challenging times, it's important for them to know that governments are behind them and their industry. The provincial announcement is a good first step, but there are a lot of other good recommendations out there on what should be done. Keystone Agricultural Producers, the Manitoba Cattle Producers Association, and the Manitoba Pork Council have all put ideas forward, and now the provincial and federal governments need to help livestock producers get past this financial squeeze and back into the business.

Ian Wishart owns and operates a mixed farm near Portage la Prairie, which includes cattle, potatoes, and forages.