



COMMENTARY

“The Voice of Manitoba Farmers”

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Promises, Promises

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During elections, a lot of promises are made by a lot of candidates from a lot of different parties. This is par for the course, and many people take these commitments with a grain of salt. What is unusual is when all three of Manitoba's major provincial parties make the *same* promise.

As odd as it may seem, that was the case in the last provincial election. Every single party and the leader committed to pursue the implementation of a program that would recognize “environmental services.” For those of us in the farming community, we know that to mean our proposal for Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS), a farmer-directed approach to conservation that recognizes and rewards our stewardship activities. ALUS uses incentives, is locally-focused, and is a completely new approach for Canadian agriculture and conservation policy.

It made sense that all parties were on side. It's a win-win situation: ALUS creates environmental benefits while creating a new revenue stream for farmers. It helps that Manitoba is the birthplace of the ALUS concept, and we already have a successful pilot project up and running.

What is different about ALUS is that it focuses on the “carrot” instead of the “stick.” Lately, it seems like a lot of sticks have been applied squarely in the direction of agriculture. New nutrient management regulations will limit fertilizer use and will also require mandatory buffer strips along many waterways. This means most farmers will be losing land to environmental considerations.

We also have new manure management and mortalities regulations that add increasing costs to existing livestock enterprises that simply cannot bear any more. And, we have also been subjected to an indefinite hog moratorium across much of the province, despite the findings of the Clean Environment Commission.

Keystone Agricultural Producers and commodity organizations have worked together and with government throughout this entire process to make recommendations that would help to protect and improve the environment, but would also be achievable

and reasonable for farmers. We've had a few wins, but it really feels like the "stick" has been over-applied time and time again.

Throughout this whole process, we have also been promised by ministers of many provincial departments that there would be a package to help industry adapt to these new environmental expectations and regulations.

Well, now is the time to follow through on these promises. It is time to dig down deep and fulfill that election promise. This is a particularly timely opportunity for government to meet its commitment to environmental issues by engaging farmers as partners and leaders in stewardship, and to recognize the good works that we are doing and can do. It's also an opportunity to invest in the environmental and economic sustainability of our livestock sector during an extremely difficult time.

ALUS is the answer for the environment and for agriculture, and it's something that every party can agree on. It's time to follow through.