



“The Voice of Manitoba Farmers”

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Workplace Safety & Health

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BACKGROUND

Earlier this year, the Ministry of Labour and Immigration announced a six-point strategy that is aimed at strengthening education, prevention and enforcement efforts in the area of workplace safety and health in Manitoba. The strategy includes:

- Setting a target for workplace injury reduction of 15 percent over four years;
- Targeting young worker injury;
- Strengthening occupational disease prevention;
- Improving enforcement of current workplace legislation and codes;
- Improving agricultural safety and health; and
- Undertaking a legislative review of the Workplace Safety and Health Act.

The area of concern for Keystone Agricultural Producers is government's future role in improving agricultural safety and health. The Government's public discussion paper states that agriculture is a high-risk industry and almost half of all traumatic workplace fatalities are in the agricultural sector.

POSITION OF KEYSTONE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS

The family farm is a very unique workplace when compared to almost all other industries. The farm is not only the place where we work but also where we live and raise our families. Farmers are the owners, managers, and often the main worker on their operations; therefore they are usually working by themselves and during busy seasons will work twelve to sixteen hours per day. These conditions can sometimes lead to accidents.

Keystone Agricultural Producers believes that the best way to deal with farm safety and health issues is by continuing and expanding upon existing education programs. We also believe that government can play a more active role in creating an awareness of the existing programs. In some sectors of our industry, such as the hog sector, there is currently an education/awareness program in place. Safety programs should also start in the schools, educating our youth about the importance of machinery shields, staying away from moving machinery, and the proper way of working with tools. These programs should continue to provide information and education to producers as their operations grow and change.

We do not believe that inspections and fines on family farm operations will achieve anything but anger producers. Most family farms are struggling to survive the current tough financial times and do not need another layer of bureaucracy and regulations imposed on them.

KAP and its members are well aware of the high level of fatalities and injuries that occur on the farm and want to work with the government to reduce these injuries. However, we believe that the role of a 'farm safety officer' should be one of awareness and education. A farm safety officer could fill the gap of resource person/co-ordinator when a farm operator asks for assistance in implementing a farm safety plan/guidelines for their operation.

One of the great tragedies of farm life is that so many of the deaths and injuries that occur strike the very young and the very old. Because of the very tough financial conditions on the farm these days, farm wives often take off-farm jobs to help pay the bills. If they have children, this means that their spouses often have to watch the children while doing the daily chores because there is a lack of child care centres in rural Manitoba. The province should also look at developing programs that will encourage the development of affordable child care centres in rural areas to provide options for farm parents in busy seasons. This would reduce the potential risks to farm children.

The average age of farmers is increasing, but many producers do not want to believe that they can't do the same chores at sixty-five that they could at forty. This is a difficult problem and is again best dealt with through educational programs that can provide farmers with ideas on different and safer ways of doing chores. We need to remind them that everyone's reflexes slow down with age.

KAP also encourages the government to develop a self-assessment program of potential farm accident areas that can be used by the farm community, rather than going to a regulatory inspection system. We also believe that government can play a role in encouraging all farm employers to develop a farm safety policy plan that they review with their employees and follow strictly.

It has been stated that the Workers Compensation Commission (WCC) should be involved in the agricultural industry. If WCC was to be involved it would have to be on a strictly voluntarily basis and not compulsory. The WCC, in consultation with industry, should develop affordable programs that will meet the needs of farm owner/operator. By doing so, WCC would have available, on a volunteer basis, programs which farmers would want to buy into.

CONCLUSION

In closing, we will recap our recommendations that we request that the government give serious consideration to:

- The continuation and expansion of existing education programs;
- Playing a more active role in creating an awareness of the existing programs;
- Safety programs starting in the schools, educating our youth about the importance of safe operation of equipment;
- Recognition of the current income situation that would only be heightened by

inspections and fines;

- Reviewing more closely the statistical information and how it is gathered, filtering out those injuries that are not "farm" related although they do occur on a farm property;
- Investigating the possibility of developing programs that will encourage the placement of affordable child care centres in rural areas to provide options for farm parents in busy seasons;
- Developing a self-assessment program of potential farm accident areas that can be used by the farm community, rather than going to a regulatory inspection system;
- Recognizing the need that a farm safety officer's role should be one of awareness and education, not enforcement; and
- Playing a role in encouraging all farm employers to develop a farm safety policy plan that they review with their employees and follow strictly.

When consideration is given to the above recommendations it should be done so with a strong understanding of the unique situation facing the agricultural industry. Any action that will affect our industry should be carefully assessed and only implemented when done so in consultation with industry stakeholders. Keystone Agricultural Producers can not stress enough the importance of government taking a proactive approach through awareness and education.