

Minister's Message



I recently took part in the annual Agriculture Ministers' Meeting in Whistler, British Columbia along with other Provincial, Federal and Territorial Ministers of Agriculture. The meeting's main goal was to establish the basis for a new Agricultural Policy Framework (APF), to take effect in 2008. The result from this meeting is an initiative called Growing Forward.

Evolving from the current APF, Growing Forward will guide governments with a common vision – a vision of a profitable and innovative industry that seizes opportunities in responding to market demands and contributes to the health and well-being of Canadians.

The initiative has built on the ideas put forward by producers and other stakeholders through extensive country-wide consultations. Overall, it means building on past strengths, and developing the programs and services necessary to serve all members of the agricultural community.

From a production standpoint, there are now four new business risk management programs available that are more responsive, predictable and bankable. They include:

AgriInvest, replacing the coverage currently provided under the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization (CAIS) program;

AgriStability, a margin-based program that provides income support when a producer experiences income losses of greater than 15 per cent;

AgriInsurance, includes existing crop insurance (now called production insurance) and other products and will expand to include other commodities; and

AgriRecovery, a disaster relief framework to provide rapid assistance when disasters hit producers, filling gaps not covered by existing government programming.

Overall, Saskatchewan is pleased with the general direction of the new APF, although some concerns still remain, especially with respect to the disaster relief framework.

The federal government has proposed that the disaster relief framework be funded on a 60:40 basis in the case of small disasters. This would continue the application of the unfair formula for national program funding, under which provinces like Saskatchewan – with large agriculture industries and small tax bases – bear a significantly higher per capita cost.

I am willing to work co-operatively with newly appointed Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz on these issues, and other challenges facing Saskatchewan's agriculture industry. I know the Minister believes in full federal funding for disaster assistance, a commitment he made at a candidates forum put on by APAS, the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan, during the last federal election. Mr. Ritz said "a separate stand alone disaster type program...it's got to be on an ad-hoc basis, we don't know what's coming out there...but 100 per cent funded by the federal government, no more 60:40...we will fund it 100 per cent."

Minister Ritz should understand that if agriculture programs do not work for Saskatchewan, they will not work for Canada.

After all, we represent more than 40 per cent of Canada's agriculture land base.

Our concerns must be addressed when provincial ministers meet with the federal government as scheduled in early September.

Sincerely,

Mark Wartman
Minister, Agriculture and Food

For more information on Growing Forward, visit www.agr.gc.ca/pol/grow-croiss/index_e.php.

FRCC lobby leads to freight savings



The Farmers' Rail Car Coalition (FRCC) is to be congratulated on the recent success of its lobby to reduce maintenance costs for railway hopper cars, says Agriculture and Food Minister Mark Wartman, vice-chair of the Saskatchewan Grain Car Corporation.

The lobby was part of the FRCC's effort to purchase the Government of Canada's hopper car fleet. While the FRCC met disappointment in that objective, the FRCC discovered during the development of its business plan that the railways were overcharging farmers for hopper car

maintenance and made a case to the federal government for a reduction in grain freight rates under the Grain Freight Rate Revenue Cap.

"This reduction in freight rates by \$67.5 million or \$2.41 per tonne will provide significant benefits to Western Canadian farmers long into the future," Wartman said. "The FRCC's work since 1995 and the Government of Saskatchewan's funding of over \$1 million to the FRCC have paid off for Saskatchewan producers. The FRCC deserves credit for bringing the issue of excessive maintenance costs to the public's attention and for leading the effort to have the federal government make immediate changes. I applaud the FRCC and all its member organizations."

The FRCC and its 17 member organizations represent over 90 per cent of the farmers in Western Canada.