

Minister's Message



2009 was an interesting year in agriculture. Weather-wise, we had a cool spring and summer, followed by a warm September. October was a challenging month with rain and snowfall throughout the province. Fortunately, this was followed by a warm November that allowed most farmers to complete their harvest.

Despite the worldwide economic downturn, our government undertook a number of initiatives in 2009 to help producers. These initiatives include the largest education property tax reduction in the province's history, a \$53 million province-wide Farm and Ranch Water Infrastructure Program and a \$71 million Cattle and Hog Support Program.

Other new initiatives include the Gopher Control Rebate Program, the Voluntary Livestock Traceability Rebate, the Coyote Control Program, and the Agricultural Crown Land Sale Program.

I want to make it clear that the recent \$40.1 million in Ministry of Agriculture 2009-10 budget savings were a result of unused budgeted money from Crop Insurance, AgrilInvest and the Agricultural Crown Land Sale Program, among others. These savings will not result in cuts to any programs or services for producers.

Addressing the needs of farmers and ranchers was a priority for our government this past year, and we will continue to address these needs and improve programs as we move forward in 2010.

We are currently in the budget process for the upcoming 2010-11 fiscal year. While there are challenges, particularly with the unprecedented decline in potash sales, I want to assure farm and ranch families that agriculture remains a priority for our government.

One of our key agriculture commitments in the 2007 election campaign was to implement a long-term plan for education property tax over four years, and we will maintain that commitment. We implemented the first phase in the 2009-10 budget by reducing the mill rate on agricultural land to 7.09, province-wide. We remain committed to implementing the second phase of that plan in the future. Producers will continue to benefit from this education tax reduction, as well as from historic cuts to income tax, investments in infrastructure and provincial debt reduction.

Our government is committed to addressing the needs of farmers and ranchers, and we will continue to work to improve agriculture programs and the business environment in which we operate in 2010 and beyond.

Sincerely,

Bob Bjornerud

SASKATCHEWAN RECEIVES EMERGENCY-USE REGISTRATION FOR STRYCHNINE TO CONTROL RICHARDSON'S GROUND SQUIRREL



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The Pest Management Regulatory Agency has granted the emergency use registration of two-per-cent liquid strychnine concentrate for the management of Richardson's ground squirrels, commonly known on the Canadian Prairies as the "gopher."

Saskatchewan Agriculture applied for the registration to provide a control option for this pest. The registration expires on July 31, 2010.

The serious problems caused by Richardson's ground squirrels continue to negatively impact farmers and ranchers in Saskatchewan. In 2009, 203 rural municipalities were registered for the emergency use of two-per-cent liquid strychnine. The southwest region of the province has been particularly affected mainly due to dry conditions over the past few years. Other areas, such as the northwest and west-central regions, reported increased problems with ground squirrels associated with their dry conditions in 2009.

As part of the registration, the Pest Management Regulatory Agency requires the distribution of the two-per-cent liquid strychnine concentrate be restricted to designated rural municipalities. Each vendor must maintain a record of sales including the name, address and signature of the purchaser, along with the quantity of product purchased.

To purchase the product, farmers and ranchers must also provide a treatment plan indicating where they will apply the product, and agree to complete an evaluation form. Purchasers who do not follow these conditions jeopardize future access to the product.

Rodenticides are a key Richardson's ground squirrel control option and are most preferred by producers. However, it is important to remember that two-per-cent liquid strychnine concentrate must not be used in bait stations, and the potential risk to non-target animals is a concern whenever rodenticides are used.

A major research program is underway to study the efficacy of the rodenticides, and assess trapping devices and mortality of Richardson's ground squirrels from predators.