TEAM ALBERTA CROPS: ADVOCATING FOR FARMER TOOLS

By Reg Warkentin, Government Relations & Policy Manager, Team Alberta Crops

Changes to government policy affecting producers are not uncommon. Some are major disruptions like ending the monopoly of the Canada Wheat Board, the introduction of Bill 6 and its subsequent repeal and, of course, the carbon tax. Other changes like tweaks to trucking rules and trade agreements affect some, but mostly don't have the same earth-shattering effect on productivity and the bottom line.

One major disruption is our federal government's overt fixation on environmental objectives and the direct, and potentially devastating, impact policy changes designed to help achieve emission targets are likely to have on producers.

This, despite the Russian invasion on the 'bread basket of Europe', is wreaking havoc on global food security, energy supplies and supply chains. The European Commission estimates that up to 25 million tonnes of wheat would need to be substituted to meet worldwide food demands in the current and upcoming season. This is more than 2.5 times the 10-year average wheat produced in Alberta. Simultaneously, the cost of key inputs such as fuel and fertilizer have sky-rocketed while inflation is quickly raising the cost of everything, including the ability to borrow and invest in new land or equipment.

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Despite all this, our federal government has clearly indicated it is not interested in moving away from its current path and plans to continue its plan to reduce emissions from fertilizer by 30% (based on 2020 levels) by 2030. A report commissioned by Fertilizer Canada estimated this would reduce Canada's contribution to the global food supply by more than 14 million metric tonnes of wheat and canola.

The federal government also remains committed to the transformation of the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) with questions starting to arise about the erosion of transparency and science-based processes. This has created a level of concern and uncertainty about access to new or current crop protection chemicals going forward.

When a combination of staff and directors representing all eight Team Alberta members met with Nate Horner, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development, in April ahead of the Federal Provincial and Territorial (FPT) meeting, we shared our concerns on the above issues. We also covered the importance of the suite of business risk management programs and the critical nature of maintaining core programming such as crop insurance along with concerns about introducing environmental requirements into them.

Our group was thankful to see him so aligned on these issues of critical importance and for his advocacy at the FPT meetings. It was concerning to see some environmental requirements introduced into business risk management (BRM) programs as this is clearly the "thin side of the wedge," but overall positive to see the increase in funding and maintenance of core programming.

Throughout history the pillars of a stable society were based around security. The security of having a reliable source of food and energy while being safe from predators, hostile groups and the elements. Any sane and reasonable person would agree with the importance of responsible and sustainable environmental stewardship. They would also agree on the critical importance of food security and having a thriving agriculture industry that is capable of feeding the country they live in and others that rely on imports to feed their citizens.

Canadian agricultural producers are at risk of having the efficacy of several key tools severely hamstrung. A predictable and reliable PMRA, access to fertilizer and the environmental hoops and regulations to jump through for BRM programs. These are all key tools that have driven the success of modern agriculture.

While commissions and groups like Team Alberta Crops work to advocate to our political leaders, there remains a sharp and obvious divide and general lack of understanding and awareness surrounding modern agriculture, technology, best management practices and the leaps in productivity and efficiency that have resulted.

Canadian consumers, world agriculture, and Canadian producers need the best tools available to do the job. To maintain these tools, it is incumbent upon us as an industry to bridge the knowledge gap by sharing our successes that make us one of the most productive and environmentally responsible jurisdictions in the world. This is in addition to sharing the challenges we face as an industry and what it could mean for the public if we get our tools taken away. The world needs the security knowing Canada can do its utmost to feed the world and producers need the security of knowing they will be empowered to do so.

We have a lot of work to do.

FOUR OF ALBERTA'S CROP COMMISSIONS LAUNCH CROSSROADS – ALBERTA'S CROP CONFERENCE

Alberta Barley, Alberta Canola, Alberta Pulse Growers and the Alberta Wheat Commission are proud to be launching a new farmer focused event called CrossRoads. This new crop conference, presented by four of the host organizations behind the highly successful FarmTech conference, provides a stage for the intersection of people and ideas and will be hosted at the Edmonton Convention Centre on January 24 and 25, 2023.

CrossRoads, Alberta's Crop Conference, is an opportunity for over 700 farmers and industry members to connect and collaborate on thought-provoking topics including sustainability, policy, market development, and farm management. Along with more than 15 concurrent sessions, CrossRoads will also feature three high profile keynote speakers including Chris Koch, a local farm boy turned motivational speaker.

"The commissions are extremely proud to announce CrossRoads as a premier two-day crop conference for Alberta's vibrant agriculture community," said Todd Hames, the FarmTech Foundation of Alberta Chair. "CrossRoads marks an evolution in the event space for the FarmTech Foundation of Alberta, with a greater focus on discussing critical and challenging issues facing farmers."

CrossRoads is another commission-led collaborative effort with the goal to provide an opportunity for Alberta farmers to advance timely discussions related to issues affecting the crop sector.

"With the shifting agriculture event space in recent years, the FarmTech Foundation of Alberta decided to evolve the traditional FarmTech format and reinvent its premier winter farm show to CrossRoads," Hames said. "Our hope is that CrossRoads will better equip the Alberta crop community with information about issues that affect the farmgate."

Registration for CrossRoads will open in the early fall with single day and two-day tickets. For more information about the conference, agenda, speakers, and tickets, please visit: crossroadscropconference.ca