

# Lobbying and Policy Activities

Lobbying and advocacy on behalf of its members are primary activities of SARM. SARM regularly meets with elected and departmental officials, from both the provincial and federal governments and is active on a number of policy issues. Some of the initiatives, activities, and accomplishments from 2005 are contained in the following report.

## Education tax

Without a doubt, the biggest issue for SARM in 2005 was education tax on property.

SARM started the year off by urging the Premier to correct the injustice of the inequity of education tax on farmland. The 2005-06 provincial budget contained a two year, \$110 million property tax credit, but the credit was not targeted to agricultural property as SARM had suggested.

It should be noted that the \$110 million used for the tax credit came from an adjustment to provincial equalization. SARM helped lobby the federal government for this change with the understanding that a portion of the funding would go towards education tax relief. SARM was extremely disappointed that the inequity of education tax on agricultural property went unaddressed despite the fact that the Premier has publicly acknowledged that indeed an inequity exists.

Investigation into the implementation of a large media campaign on education tax determined that the cost of such a campaign would be substantial. A survey of members was conducted to determine how many would be willing to contribute \$500 to help fund the media campaign. Just over 60% of rural municipalities responded favourably. In the Board's opinion, this was not sufficient support to proceed. However, to educate the public about the inequity, SARM wrote a series of four articles in the spring and submitted them to weekly newspapers. These articles were picked up by papers around the province. They were also emailed to all RM offices. However, when delegates at the June District Meetings were asked if they had seen the articles, there was very low response.

The afternoon session of the June District Meetings was dedicated to discussing education tax on property. The majority of the meetings gave the SARM board direction to work on reducing education tax on all property so that a broader base of support could be built to put additional pressure on the government.

In August, SARM, SUMA, the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, the Provincial Association of Resort Communities of Saskatchewan, and the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, formed a coalition to lobby for an overall reduction in education tax. The Saskatchewan Real Estate Association joined the Coalition in November.

The Coalition held a press conference in September calling for an increase to education funding to at least 60 per cent in the next three years, building on the two-year tax credit that began this year. The province should increase funding to a level of at least 50 per cent in 2006, 55 per cent in 2007 and 60 per cent in 2008, beginning in the 2006 budget. By 2008, property should fund no more than 40 per cent of the total cost of education.

The Coalition met with the Ministers of Government Relations and Learning early in the new year. The ministers said they would share a list of possible solutions to the problem.

## Clearing the Path

In April 2004, the Clearing the Path (CTP) committee made up of rural and urban municipal leaders was formed to take a look at the municipal structure and related regulations that have been cited by various people as an impediment to economic development in Saskatchewan. The findings of this committee were that, by and large, municipalities are not the biggest roadblock to economic development in Saskatchewan. However, the committee did identify some areas that can be improved upon such as the rural transportation infrastructure and the need to

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encourage more municipalities to plan for and embrace development.

The CTP final report that included 11 recommendations was presented and approved by the SARM delegation at the March 2005 Annual Convention. The recommendations of this committee have formed the basis for the Clearing the Path (CTP) concept. The two CTP subcommittees (Development and Transportation) continue to move forward with facilitating implementation of the recommendations.

In September 2005, SUMA officially joined SARM as a full partner in CTP. Getting this support was critical to the success of CTP, and we are pleased to be working with SUMA on this initiative.

One of the CTP recommendations demonstrated the need to upgrade a corridor system of municipal roads to carry primary weights. The Transportation Committee is working with the Department of Highways on designing the haul corridor. It is expected to be available for review by all municipalities in June of 2006.

The CTP Development Committee identified a need to hold province wide workshops to share the CTP concept with all municipalities. A series of eight development workshops are planned for March and April 2006.

## Municipal Issues

**The Municipalities Act** - SARM was a partner in the Municipalities Act Preparedness (MAP) Committee, along with RMAA, SUMA, PARCS, UMAAS and the Department of Government Relations. The mandate of the committee was to help prepare municipal officials for *The Municipalities Act*, which was implemented on January 1, 2006. The committee developed a number of information documents including:

- Implementation & Transition Checklist
- Sample Public Notice Bylaw
- Sample Nuisance Bylaw
- Public Notice Obligations
- Cross Reference List
- Fact Sheets: (1) Natural Person Powers; (2) Areas of Jurisdiction; (3) Public Notice & Public Notice Policy; (4) Nuisances.

Presentations on the Act were made at the Annual Convention and at the district meetings. As well, six training sessions for administrators and council members were held across the province.

**Municipal Forum** - The Municipal Forum met four times in 2005. Partners in the forum are SARM, SUMA and the Department of Government Relations. The Municipal Forum is a planning and decision-making forum on matters of importance to Saskatchewan municipalities. Some of the issues discussed in 2005 included education tax on property, revenue sharing, the Clearing the Path initiative, the federal New Deal funding program, *The Planning*

*and Development Act* review and the Municipalities Act Preparedness Committee.

**Rural Revenue Sharing** - In 2005, the rural revenue sharing pool funding received from the Province remained the same as 2004. A committee was formed with representation from SARM, SUMA and the Department of Government Relations staff to review the Revenue Sharing program in order to provide support for increased provincial funding. The committee's work was presented to the Municipal Forum and used by the Department of Government Relations in preparing their submission to the Treasury Board.

**Assessment Revaluation** - Property owners experienced another assessment revaluation in 2005. For the revaluation, individual agricultural properties were assessed using productivity. However, a provincial factor was then applied to all agricultural properties to bring the total assessment of agricultural land in the province up to what it would be under a market value system. Therefore, we ended up with productivity being used to reflect the difference between agricultural properties and market value being used to reflect the difference between agriculture and other property classes. This resulted in major shifts of assessments around the province. The SARM Board met with SAMA officials regarding the shifts and a brief was presented to SAMA's Revaluation Regional Consultations outlining SARM's concerns. SARM continues to participate on SAMA's Rural Advisory Committee and their Agricultural Land Review Committee.

**Policing** - SARM participates on the Province's Task Force on Policing and the Administration of Justice, along with SUMA. This committee was instrumental in initiating the process of developing Detachment Advisory Committees. On December 8<sup>th</sup> the Minister of Justice, the RCMP, SUMA and SARM signed a framework agreement for Detachment Advisory Committees. The committees are to consist of elected officials representing the municipalities within a detachment area. They are to meet on a regular basis with the RCMP to discuss police service delivery. The objective is to discuss and develop meaningful priorities and work together to ensure the best use of policing resources.

Two issues of great concern to rural municipalities are the increases in the per capita rate for RCMP services paid to the Province and the decrease of service in rural areas. SARM lobbied against the closure of a number of RCMP detachments in the south west part of the province.

**New Deal Funding** - The New Deal Working Committee, with representation from the Department of Government Relations, SARM and SUMA was formed shortly after the 2005 Federal Budget to look at how the announced new funding for municipalities could be distributed in Saskatchewan. On August 23<sup>rd</sup> Minister John Godfrey of Infrastructure Canada and Government Relations Minister Len Taylor signed the agreement that will see \$147.5 million transferred from the federal government to Saskatchewan municipalities over five years. SARM successfully lobbied for

municipal shortline railways to be eligible for funding under the program.

**Transportation and Environment Committee (TEC)** - SARM sits on the TEC committee along with representation from various other transportation and environment stakeholders including the Saskatchewan Road Builders Association, the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, the Provincial Departments of Environment and Highways and Transportation and the Federal Departments of Fisheries and Oceans and Transport. The committee is working to find ways to speed up the necessary legislated review processes that are triggered by road construction projects.

**Control of Richardson Ground Squirrels** - The Pesticide Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) released their "Re-evaluation of Strychnine" report in September. It identified the current use of strychnine to control ground squirrels as an environmental concern. However, it proposed that the use of strychnine to control Richardson ground squirrels be maintained in the short term and reviewed in three years. They based their decision in consideration of the ongoing work by the national stakeholder group working to develop and promote an integrated pest management strategy for the control of Richardson ground squirrels, the lack of a practical alternative at this time and the additional mitigation measures they were proposing. SARM submitted a letter to PMRA in support of the continued use of strychnine. SARM is a participant in the national stakeholder group. The group is seeking funding to conduct four studies including: economic impact; population dynamics; behaviour and biology; and toxicant evaluation and optimization.

**Exploring Saskatchewan's Nuclear Future** - SARM partnered with SUMA and the University of Regina to host a public discussion forum on the nuclear industry. The "Exploring Saskatchewan's Nuclear Future" conference was organized in 2005 and held on January 16-18, 2006, in Regina. The decision to hold the forum came from the 2004 SARM resolution to work with the nuclear industry and the University of Regina's spring, 2005 energy conference. The Forum brought provincial, national and international experts in all aspects of the nuclear industry together to discuss potential opportunities for Saskatchewan. Attendees heard from over 20 speakers in four different areas of the industry, being mining, value-added processing, power generation and waste disposal. After each group of speakers there was an open discussion on the topic. The highlight of the forum was the presentation by Dr. Patrick Moore. Dr. Moore is a co-founder of Greenpeace who now believes that nuclear energy is the only practical way to deal with the global warming issue. SARM will continue to work on this issue to help Saskatchewan take advantage of its opportunities.

## Agricultural Activities

SARM is mandated by its Act of Incorporation to be involved in agriculture. The SARM board takes this direction very seriously. In 2005, SARM was active in a number of different areas regarding agriculture.

**Meetings with Federal Elected Officials** - SARM met with Agriculture Ministers Speller and then Mitchell, Agriculture Parliamentary Secretary Wayne Easter, and Deputy Minister Len Edwards throughout the course of the year. Among the issues raised were the need for financial assistance for grains and oilseed producers, and ways to improve conditions for cattle producers still feeling the effects of the border closer due to BSE, including the removal of interprovincial trade barriers. SARM also asked the federal government to remove the import restrictions surrounding anaplasmosis and blue tongue in an effort to improve trade relations with the United States.

**Interprovincial trade barriers on meat products** - Under current Canadian legislation, meat and meat products must come from a federally inspected plant if it is to be traded inter-provincially. SARM examined the issue of removing inter-provincial trade barriers with the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts & Counties (AAMD&C) and the Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM), which make up the Prairie Association of Rural Municipalities (PARM). SARM also attended consultations on provincial meat inspection regulations, and provided written comments on the issue of what Saskatchewan should do to address the varying levels of inspection within our own provincial borders.

**CAIS** - President Hardy was appointed to the National CAIS Committee. The role of the Committee is to make recommendations on proposed changes to CAIS, advise the CAIS administration on operational issues, and manage the process of hearing requests for a review from program participants who feel that program policies have not been correctly applied in the verification of their form.

**Set-aside proposal** - Early in 2005, it was apparent that producers' needed cash flow for spring seeding. In discussions with senators in Ottawa, it was felt that a set aside program might have acceptance at the political level. We sent a letter to Federal Agriculture Minister Mitchell regarding the proposed set aside program and the critical situation in the agricultural sector. On March 29, 2005, the federal government announced a \$1 billion emergency payout to producers. SARM felt the federal government would not be able to fund both the set aside and the emergency payout, so the set aside was shelved for the time being.

**Producer car loading manuals** - SARM initiated a committee of grain industry representatives to put together a best practices manual for loading producer cars. In June 2005, the manual was released. The manual was very well received and 75% of

production was sold by the end of the year. In addition to having representatives on the steering committee, SARM contributed financial resources towards development of the manual, and SARM staff served as the project coordinator.

**Own Use Import Permits** - President Neal Hardy and Vice President David Marit met with senior officials from the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) in Ottawa in late November regarding the Own Use Importation (OUI) Permits for glyphosate. The PMRA had questions and had heard concern from the pesticide industry about the collection of imported chemical containers. They were encouraged to hear that it is very likely that the OUI program will be continued for glyphosate in 2006. SARM's position is that the program should be continued so producers continue to have access to lower priced chemicals. SARM made a presentation to the OUI Task Force in early 2006. SARM also met with the Farmers of North America and understands that they are working towards implementing a container recycling program to appease the concerns raised by the pesticide industry.

**Farmer Rail Car Coalition** - 2005 brought good news to the Farmer Rail Car Coalition. The federal government announced that it would transfer the federal fleet of hopper cars to the FRCC. SARM has been an active member of the FRCC since it was formed in 1996. Former SARM President Sinclair Harrison, now President of the FRCC, and current SARM Director Jim Hallick have been members of the FRCC Board of Directors from the beginning, and have put a lot of hard work into the effort to get the cars.

**Seed Sector Review and National Forum on Seed** - SARM paid close attention to the Seed Sector Review's successor, the National Forum on Seed. Director Jim Hallick is a member of the Forum's working group on variety registration and attends general Forum meetings. SARM's key concerns with the process are: the lack of representation by Western Canadian grain producers; their recommendations will make it more costly to grow common seed, as they suggest collecting royalties on common seed and they tie the use of pedigreed seed to market access. Farmers must maintain their right to save and re use their common seed. Farmers have been growing their own seed for centuries; what is being proposed will only force farmers to be reliant on the seed companies.

**Rat control** - SARM kept the issue of raising and selling rats as pets with Agriculture Minister Wartman and with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food official throughout the year. SARM stressed the need for province-wide regulations on this issue.

## Federal Lobbyist

In 2005, 162 (55%) RMs participated in the SARM federal lobbyist fund. Highlights of Hill & Knowlton's (H&K) activities in 2005 are as follows:

They made the contacts and arrangements for Wayne Easter, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture to come to the Midterm convention in November. It is very important for politicians to get out of Ottawa and meet the people they are supposed to represent.

When SARM went to Ottawa in late November, H & K set up a meeting with the Pesticide Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) to discuss the Own Use Import (OUI) permit program on glyphosate. From this meeting, SARM was able to have further input on the issue before the OUI Task Force, which is looking into ways to address concerns about the program.

H & K alerted SARM that the federal Finance Committee was making a stop in Saskatoon for their pre-budget consultations. As a result, we had contact with the Committee and got on their agenda early on in the process. H & K also reviewed our brief to provide tips on how best to present our case to the Committee, which is also one of their regular functions. At the hearing, SARM pressed for a continuation of an infrastructure program like PGRP to build rural roads to help economic development. SARM was also the first group the Committee had heard from who raised the agriculture crisis faced by producers in Saskatchewan.

Because H & K alerted SARM to Environment Canada's intention to include the plains bison as a "threatened" species under the *Species at Risk Act*, SARM was able to make early contact with influential people within government and voiced opposition to this. A subsequent decision from Environment Canada agreed that the plains bison would not be listed.

On several occasions in 2005, H & K notified SARM of consultations or events with Wayne Easter and Agriculture Minister Andy Mitchell. SARM was able to prepare for and attend the events.

The SARM Board of Directors has a monthly conference call with our representatives from Hill & Knowlton. They give an update on issues SARM monitors such as developments in Agriculture, Species at Risk compensation regulations, strychnine, Transport Canada and Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and Cruelty to Animals legislation.

They also provide SARM with insight and information on what's going on in Ottawa, including any upcoming visits by Federal politicians to Saskatchewan and help SARM arrange meetings to take advantage of their time in the province.

H & K provides networking opportunities with politicians and departmental staff. Getting to know people in informal situations can go a long ways towards building relationships.

Following the change of government in early 2006, Hill & Knowlton's advice and assistance will be valuable in building relationships with members of the new federal cabinet.