

## **Lobbying and Policy Activities: Agriculture**

### **Agriculture Activities**

SARM is mandated by its Act of Incorporation to be involved in agriculture. The SARM board takes this direction very seriously. In 2008, SARM was active in a number of different areas regarding agriculture.

### **Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Review**

Saskatchewan Minister of Agriculture Bob Bjornerud undertook a full review of the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Program in the summer/fall of 2008 and SARM was a full participant in this review. We submitted a list of 12 recommendations including requests for improvements in the following areas:

- Changes to how they calculate input costs when determining reseeding benefits
- We asked them to look at artificially mitigating the reduction of yield guarantees in areas of the province under duress.
- We asked them to take into account evaporation loss when calculating payments for weather based programs
- We requested that they reinstate spot loss hail coverage
- We requested 100% wildlife damage compensation

SARM submitted a report as well as had SARM staff and board members attend information sessions and provide direct feedback. We also encouraged our members to provide feedback directly into the process.

### **Level of Service Review – Rail**

The Canadian Transportation Agency announced on April 7, 2008 that they would be undertaking a review of railway service. The review is expected to take approximately 18 months and will be a three phase process. SARM participated in the first phase of this review which included submitting comments with regards to what items should be included in the terms of reference for the review.

SARM suggested through that submission that the review should lead to a full costing review of the current rail system and requested that issues with regards to rail sidings also be considered in the review.

SARM will participate in the all phases of this review as it proceeds over the next year.

### **Farm and Ranch Water Infrastructure Program**

The Government of Saskatchewan announced \$6 million dollars for the Farm and Ranch Water Infrastructure Program (FRWIP) in Oct. 2008. This emergency funding is a one-time measure to provide immediate assistance in areas of critical water shortage. Funds provide cost-sharing to Rural Municipalities (RMs) in designated drought areas to cover up to one-half of eligible project costs, to a maximum of \$10,000 per project.

Projects may include; pumps in reservoirs or other water supplies, temporary tank-loader facilities and alternate use of existing wells and other surface water initiatives.

SARM was a member of the committee who helped design this program and agreed to provide the administration. The program hired Roger Wolfe to provide field service assistance for implementation of the Provincial Farm and Ranch Water Infrastructure program in the drought designated areas in south west Saskatchewan.

### **Lobby for Assistance for the Livestock Industry**

In 2008 SARM delegates forwarded a resolution at the November Convention asking SARM to lobby the Provincial and Federal Governments to provide an immediate cash payment to the livestock industry to assist them with their financial crisis.

SARM followed up that resolution by writing letters and meeting with Saskatchewan Agriculture Minister Bjornerud and Federal Agriculture Minister Ritz asking that they consider both short term assistance and long term assistance for the hurting livestock sector.

In terms of short term assistance we requested a cash payment that would be immediate and could be funnelled through existing programs if needed. We then also requested that a focus on providing effective long term programming also be pursued. Livestock producers as well as grain producers have said that current long term programming isn't working. The way AgriStability is currently designed doesn't allow those with declining margins to trigger payments. If it isn't going to assist those in economic hardship such as the livestock sector then it needs to be redesigned so these producers can access funding.

### **Noxious Weeds Act Review**

SARM participated in the Noxious Weeds Act Review in December 2008. This review was intended to solicit feedback from stakeholders on proposed changes to the act to improve its effectiveness. Some of the comments SARM provided included the following: In general we thought most of the recommendations proposed were positive as it focused on raising fines for offenders and increasing the allowable costs that could be recovered by municipalities for taking measures to control weeds. The review also suggested a new way to categorize noxious weeds.

We raised some concerns about the new categorization just because weeds that may be a nuisance in one RM might not exist in another. We felt the categories had to be flexible to accommodate such differences.

The review also proposed new provision that would address the dumping of grain residues that contain weeds on roadsides. SARM felt this was of benefit but thought it would be difficult to enforce and control. We suggested that there be some sort of formal communication plan devised to advise commercial truckers and elevator companies on how they might assist in preventing the spread of noxious weeds.

We also sent the review document to all RMs to provide their comments directly.

### **Clubroot**

In 2008 Clubroot became a genuine concern for producers and land owners in Saskatchewan residing near the Alberta border. Clubroot is an easily transmitted spore that can decimate canola and some vegetable crops. Currently it has not been transmitted into Saskatchewan.

SARM had a resolution that stemmed from some of our June District meetings and was reaffirmed at our November Convention. It stated: Be It Resolved that SARM strongly urge the Provincial Government to add club root to the list of pests that are governed via the Pest Control Act in Saskatchewan and to devise and enact a Provincial Club root Management Plan so municipalities have the necessary regulations in place to enforce management and sanitation measures to prevent the spread of club root to soils in their area.

SARM has been pursuing this resolution through meetings with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food and have already made progress on an awareness campaign. A review of the Pest Control Act is now under way and there will likely be more actions to follow.

### **World Trade Organization**

In December 2008 Hill and Knowlton provided SARM with the opportunity to provide Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz with some points to consider as they were preparing their strategy for WTO negotiations. SARM raised the need to focus on reducing foreign subsidies, increasing market access and tariff reductions. This would ensure that our Canadian agriculture producers would be on a more level playing field with producers in competing markets.

We also encouraged them to launch a trade challenge against the US country of origin legislation (COOL) via the obligations outlined in agreements dictated by the WTO. COOL has created an artificial trade barrier between Canada and the US through legislation requiring US retailers to label food as to its country origin. As a result of COOL many US meat packers have restricted their intake of Canadian products.

Lastly we encouraged them to pressure the European Union (EU) to remove subsidies and tariffs on oats. Currently Sweden and Finland are receiving subsidies for their oats from the EU. These subsidies are impacting Canada's ability to access the United States market and others.

### **Wild Boar Pilot Program**

In September 2008 SARM met with the Provincial Ministry of Agriculture regarding one of the recurrent resolution topics at SARM Conventions and that is regarding the control of wild boar. One of the resolutions we discussed with them was one stating that SARM lobby the Provincial Government to engage and appoint pound keepers that possess the appropriate resources to restrain and contain wild boar and buffalo that would be made available province-wide to assist municipalities with the capture of these species.

They informed us that one of the initiatives the province is undertaking to manage wild boar populations in Saskatchewan is a Pilot Feral Wild Boar Control Program.

The Ministry of Agriculture has provided \$50,000 to the Saskatchewan Predation Program (SPP) to manage the pilot Feral Wild Boar Control Program. The program will run throughout 2007/2008 and 2008/2009

Both SARM and the Ministry of Agriculture have agreed to communicate and keep each other informed about the success of this pilot program and review at a later date how it might be applicable in other parts of the province.

### **Lobby Campaign Federal**

In early June 2008 SARM, with the assistance of our H&K, built a list of issues that we felt were of most importance to SARM and devised a strategy to make our Saskatchewan Federal Members of Parliament (MP) aware of them.

1. The need for a permanent disaster assistance program to assist land owners and agriculture producers who experience weather related disasters such as drought and flood.
2. The need to have the Navigable Waters Act reviewed and have wording changed so it doesn't cause the impediments to RM construction projects that are currently being experienced.
3. The need to have the voice of agriculture producers heard as part of the rail level of service review.
4. The need to minimize the amount of regulatory costs the Canadian Government is placing on agriculture producer that producers in competing markets aren't faced with.
5. The need to reinstate the emergency registration of 2% strychnine and to fund research to find an adequate alternative for the control of Richardson Ground Squirrel.

We took each issue and assigned two Saskatchewan MPs to each one. We then wrote them a letter with background information on the issue and requested a meeting with them to discuss it in more detail. Each issue was also assigned to two SARM Board Members. These board members were then designated to meet and brief the MPs on each issue. We were successful in our endeavours as all meetings that were requested occurred and we were able to raise some of SARM's key federal issues through that channel.

### **Federal Lobbyist**

In 2008 173 RMs participated in the SARM federal lobbyist fund. SARM worked closely with Hill and Knowlton (H&K) in 2008 in many different areas.

H&K staff are critical in helping us prepare materials and issue sheets for all Ottawa meetings and reviewing all materials to ensure we target the issues in the most effective manner.

They suggest lobby strategies such as letter campaigns, meeting strategies and help us draft news releases and letters. They also ensure that our letters reach their destination if it is a Minister's Office for example. They then follow up on responses if required.

They help make meeting arrangements with key federal officials both in Ottawa and otherwise. They also personally attend important meetings in Ottawa on SARM's behalf and provide us with notes on issues of importance to SARM.

Examples of some of the bigger items they assisted us with in 2008 include:

### **Building a Lobby Strategy**

In early June 2008 SARM with the assistance of our lobbyist built a list of issues that we felt were of most importance to SARM and devised a strategy to make our Saskatchewan Conservative Caucus aware of them. We focused on issues such as the need for disaster assistance funding, updating the Navigable Waters Act, the rail level of service review, regulatory costs impacting the agriculture industry and the need for continued access to 2% strychnine to control gophers.

We took each issue and assigned two Saskatchewan MPs to each one. We then wrote them a letter with background information on the issue and requested a meeting with them to discuss it in more detail. Each issue was also assigned to two SARM Board Members. These board members were then designated to meet and brief the MPs on each issue. We were successful in our endeavours as all meetings that were requested occurred and we were able to raise some of SARM's key federal issues through that channel.

### **Pre-Budget Presentation**

H&K was also instrumental in getting SARM an appearance before the federal Finance Committee for their pre-budget submission for 2008. They assisted us in finalizing our brief and made the arrangements for our appearance. Through this presentation SARM was able to raise the need for Federal infrastructure funding to build the rural road network.

### **World Trade Negotiations**

In December 2008 Hill and Knowlton provided SARM with the opportunity to provide Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz with some points to consider as they were preparing their strategy for WTO negotiations. This gave SARM the opportunity to raise issues such as the negative impacts foreign subsidies like those imposed on EU Oats and the US COOL legislation were having on Canadian producers.

### **Clearing the Path**

#### **Clearing the Path Committee**

The Clearing the Path (CTP) Committee of the Whole met on February 15th, 2008. This included both members from the Development and Transportation Subcommittees.

The committee took another look at the recommendations put forward back in March 2005 and plans to undertake some new tasks on both old and new projects.

The committee reviewed the Municipal Capacity Development Program (MCDP). The committee members indicated they had received positive feedback from RMs who had MCDP. The committee discussed the need to continue the MCDP program past 2009 and drafted a letter requesting that the program be funded through the interest earnings on the Federal Gas Tax Program.

Then the committee discussed transportation issues, specifically the CTP Primary Weight Corridor System. The committee discussed the need for the corridor system to include areas that were locked by water and land and needed primary weight access. They also felt there was a need to communicate to haulers that this network is available for them to use.

The committee also took the time to review any outstanding CTP Recommendations and identified action items such as letters to be written and meetings to be arranged and pursued those items through 2008.

### **CTP Primary Weight Corridor Update**

Phase 2 of the CTP Corridor System was designed and approved by the CTP Committee in 2008. Contribution agreements were sent out to RMs and urbans involved and they had to decide whether or not they wanted to implement the corridor suggested. ALL MUNICIPALITIES along an approved corridor must sign and return an agreement before the \$1000/km in maintenance funding could be allocated.

A total of 1300 kms were identified as part of phase 2 in May. This is in addition to the 5000 km of municipal roads added to the corridor in Phase 1.

On the construction side applications for construction on the CTP Corridor System were reviewed and considered by the committee on April 23rd. We received 45 applications and 22 projects were approved and a total of \$3.98 million in funding was allocated.

There was also another intake of applications for the 2009 construction program. These application forms were sent to RMs and the application deadline was August 31, 2008.

### **The Municipal Capacity Development Program**

The Municipal Capacity Development Program (MCDP) was created with the goal of promoting growth, cooperation and community development through inter-municipal partnership. MCDP although only in its first year and half of operation has proved to be a great benefit to those more than 150 municipalities who were utilizing the services the program was providing in 2008.

Their focus for 2008 was adapting their programs and services to better meet the needs of the working groups and municipalities it was serving. The MCDP program undertook a strategic planning session in 2008 which took into account the needs of the working groups as they evolved. They will be structuring resources accordingly for 2009. They launched a new website with more tools and information for municipalities to access [www.municipalcapacity.ca](http://www.municipalcapacity.ca)

They also focused efforts on acquiring funding past March 2009. MCDP applied for funding from the Federal Gas Tax program that would sustain the program for three more years. MCDP is fairly confident that money will be provided but if not MCDP, SARM, SUMA, the New North and Municipal Affairs will all be working on identifying other funding sources as needed.