



## **APAS Launches Rural Connectivity Task Force**

Group representing rural Saskatchewan residents works to close the digital divide

September 22, 2020 (Regina, SK) - The Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan (APAS) is launching a Rural Connectivity Task Force. From September 2020 to January 2021 the Task Force will investigate the barriers to and opportunities for better internet and cellular service in rural Saskatchewan.

The Rural Connectivity Task Force will be led by agricultural producers from across the province. This fall they will meet with industry experts, service providers, academics, and the public to find out why a digital divide exists in Saskatchewan and identify the necessary steps to ensure equal access in the future.

“For too long we have seen funding announcements and promises made by governments that would fix the issue, without seeing adequate results on the ground,” said Chair of the Task Force and farmer Jeremy Welter. Welter is an APAS Board member and Representative for the RM of Mariposa #350 (Kerrobert).

Welter will be joined on the Task Force by:

- APAS Vice President Ian Boxall – APAS Representative for RM of Connaught #457 (Tisdale).
- APAS Vice President Bill Prybylski – APAS Representative for RM of Garry #245 (Willowbrook).
- Bev Pirio – APAS Representative for RM of Laurier #38 (Radville).
- Paige Stewart – Co-Chair of the APAS Young Agricultural Producers Committee (Fillmore).

APAS has been working on the issue of rural connectivity since 2019, when the organization conducted a survey on rural internet and cell service that found a high level of dissatisfaction with, disruption to, and lack of investment in rural connectivity. These issues have only worsened during COVID-19, with 80% of respondents to the most recent APAS survey indicating that their internet and cell service has worsened since March.

“This is an important step towards addressing the digital divide in our province,” said Todd Lewis, farmer and APAS President. “Saskatchewan’s rural residents are losing out on opportunities because of a lack of service. Reliable internet is needed for rural communities to support their businesses, students, health services, and overall quality of life.”

The Rural Connectivity Task Force plans to release its preliminary findings by December 1, 2020, with a final report due out in early 2021.

APAS is encouraging rural residents to complete the Rural Connectivity Survey at [apas.ca/survey](https://apas.ca/survey), and to follow the work of the Task Force at [apas.ca/connectivity](https://apas.ca/connectivity).

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For more information, or to schedule an interview, please contact:

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**Background:** The Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan (APAS) gives a strong, unified voice to Saskatchewan's farmers and ranchers. Founded in 2000 by farmers, APAS is Saskatchewan's democratic, non-partisan, grassroots general farm organization that advocates for the province's agricultural producers. We tackle agriculture's most important problems and offer practical, forward-thinking solutions to provincial and national decision makers.