



APAS in Action Special Edition

October 2015

Federal Election 2015

The political arena has many sectors competing for the attention of decision makers. APAS works with representatives from all political parties to advance our work on behalf of Saskatchewan farmers and ranchers.

In September, APAS contacted the Federal political parties with a questionnaire about 6 key federal issues for Saskatchewan producers, and we were pleased to receive detailed responses from most. We also forwarded our "Election Asks" policy positions to the nominated candidates from the four parties in all 14 Saskatchewan federal constituencies, and received several individual responses. APAS also encouraged our members to raise important issues with their local candidates.

Attached for your information are the written responses from the Liberal Party to our questionnaire received on September 19, 2015.

Following the election of the Liberal Party on October 19th, APAS sent a letter to Honourable Ralph Goodale MP, asking the new government to take urgent actions on important issues. These include the future of the PFRA pastures and of the Indian Head Tree nursery.

We will also contact the new Federal Agriculture Minister when that appointment is announced on November 4th.

APAS would like to congratulate all candidates that let their names stand for election. And looks forward to working with all Members of Parliament in future. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the efforts of Gerry Ritz as federal Minister of Agriculture over the past 9 years.

If Member Councils have new suggestions or additions to APAS policies, please attend the AGM on December 1-3, 2015. The first 100 days of a new government provides APAS a chance to promote new or amended initiatives to provide farmers and ranchers with a more conducive business environment.

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Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan (APAS)

Transportation

1) *A review of the Canada Transportation Act has been initiated. Once the final report has been submitted, is your Party committed to act on the report's recommendations and how will producers be involved in those discussions?*

Canadian farmers and their products are world-class. They deserve a world-class handling and transportation system to deliver into global markets. They don't have that today.

In 2013-14, the western grain handling and transportation system—designed and structured by the Harper government—failed miserably, imposing costs and losses on prairie producers totalling some \$5-billion. The Conservatives were warned that they had created this huge vulnerability, but they persisted with a system dominated by a railway duopoly and a grain company oligopoly, in which producer interests are held captive with no commercial competitive alternatives and no practical recourse to legal or regulatory remedies..

An external review of the entire Canadian Transportation Act is underway and due to report by the end of this year. This opportunity must be seized to upgrade the deficient grain handling and transportation system.

As soon as the review report is available, the reaction and advice of grain producers needs to be sought on an urgent basis. The goal of a Trudeau-led Liberal government will be competent, forward-looking system that is competitive, transparent, accountable and geared for growth. Since producers always end up paying all the costs, their interests need to be effectively represented in the system's design and operation.

To meet the needs of shippers and their customers, the levels of service to be provided by the system and the means of measuring actual service delivery need to be more precisely defined. And when performance fails, there need to be effective financial remedies available to aggrieved parties in a timely and practical manner.

2) *The maximum revenue entitlement (MRE) has been established to ensure the railways receive a reasonable return of 20% and provide grain shippers with a level of assurance that freight rates will avoid excessive cost hikes. Is your Party committed to maintain the MRE on behalf of agricultural producers? AND*

3) *The last full costing review for the railways occurred in 1992. Since that time, technology, cost efficiencies and operational measures have changed substantially. Would your Party commit to undertaking a full costing review?*

COMBINED ANSWER, #2 and #3:

The last time a full railway costing review was conducted was in 1992. A lot has changed since then. So yes, after 23 years, it is time to update the arithmetic.

Certainly before any discussion about the MRE, a costing review would be an absolute must. While the railways and some farm organizations have argued for the MRE to be changed or eliminated, there is no compelling evidence to date that the MRE is causing inferior railway services. Indeed, service to shippers has been even more inferior in shipping corridors to which the MRE does not apply.


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Business Risk Management

4) *Many producers believe that the current business risk programs (AgriStability, AgriRecovery, AgriInvest and AgriInsurance) are inadequate. If your Party was to form government, what enhancements would be made to business risk management programs that would come into effect in 2018?*

Farmers are concerned about the under-funding of federal-provincial "business risk management" tools, as well as program design changes which make them less accessible and less useful. A new Liberal government will work with producers and provincial governments to assess whether the current suite of farm income safety nets is adequately meeting the needs of Canadian farmers when they are faced with serious challenges beyond their control.

Water Management

5) *As a country, we need to treat fresh water as a valuable resource to be managed effectively in times of surplus and drought. Collaboration and federal investment is required. How will your Government invest in water management to support agriculture?*

The frustrating and never-ending cycle of prairie floods and droughts will inevitably accelerate and grow more severe as a consequence of the impacts of Climate Change. Our precious water and soil resources will be at greater risk. That's why the Harper government has been so fundamentally wrong in its destruction of what used to be the highly respected and effective "Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration" (PFRA). It was the best agency in world on vital soil and water conservation and development issues.

In the spirit of PFRA, a new Liberal government will work with provinces, territories, municipalities, Aboriginal governments, academic and research institutions, NGOs and the private sector to develop a strong action plan to better predict, prepare for and respond to weather-related emergencies and long-term trends.

Climate change resilience will also be factored into new federal infrastructure investments. Water issues will be a priority.

Labour

6) *Agriculture's unique workforce challenges require a mix of human resource development and immigration policies designed specifically for the agricultural sector. The current system is not meeting the sector's needs. Please identify your Party's commitments to assist farmers and ranchers secure, train and maintain a workforce to build the agricultural sector.*

First and foremost, Canada needs to motivate and train more young Canadians for careers in agriculture.

With respect to foreign workers, the Conservatives badly mismanaged the Temporary Foreign Workers Program. After allowing a massive uncontrolled expansion, they tried to shut it down after media reports of abuse. From one extreme to the other, both wrong.

A new Liberal government will fix the program and ensure it is returned to its original purpose: filling jobs when qualified Canadians simply cannot be found. We need accurate labour market data, clear rules, strong enforcement and a credible pathway to citizenship for foreign workers. The agriculture sector has unique labour needs as a rural, seasonal industry producing perishable products, and our reforms will reflect that reality based on close consultation with farm organizations.