



Prairie farm leaders call for an extension on private grade crossings regulations

November 30, 2020 (Regina, SK) – With one year left before new mandatory grade crossing requirements must be met, the leaders of the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan (APAS), the Alberta Federation of Agriculture (AFA), and Keystone Agricultural Producers (KAP) have stepped up their call to transport minister Marc Garneau for an extension.

The Grade Crossings Regulations came into force in November 2014, with mandatory standards that must be met by November 28, 2021. Private landowners who fail to comply with the new regulations and standards will eventually have their grade crossings closed.

“A year seems like a long way away, but the railways have let six years lapse before starting to take action,” KAP president Bill Campbell said. “In Manitoba alone, CN has 735 public crossings and 215 private crossing along with 51 road authorities. CP has an even larger network in the province and only started contacting farmers with private rail crossings in March 2020.”

To ensure compliance with the new regulations, the railways will have to locate all crossing owners and enter into agreements with them. The owners, including farmers, may need to perform upgrades and take on ongoing maintenance costs.

AFA president Lynn Jacobson said that CP has started to contact farmers in southern Alberta as well. “From the bills that we have seen so far, farmers could be expected to pay tens of thousands of dollars depending on the work that has to be done,” Jacobson said. “That work and extra cost, especially during a pandemic, creates additional uncertainty and pressure with a looming deadline.”

It has traditionally been the responsibility of the railways to maintain and upgrade the rail network, including grade crossings as part of Canada’s heritage and settlement of the west.

“Many farmers cross rail lines on a daily basis to get to their homes or fields and they understand the need for safe crossings,” APAS president Todd Lewis said. “Their lives and livelihoods depend on it. But we believe that safe rail crossings should be maintained without affecting a farmer’s access to their land and without costs to farmers.”

The farm leaders call on the federal government to reconsider its decision for railway companies to impose grade crossings upgrade and maintenance costs on private landowners and request an extension of the 2021 deadline.

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