

OASC update



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OASC Platform - what we stand for

Ontario agriculture has reached a fork in the road. We either work constructively with government to find a way to restore farm equity and farm financial health, or Ontario will lose its farms and Ontarians their ability to buy locally grown and processed food. Ontarians will increasingly be forced to depend on other countries to feed them and we will give up the jobs and economic stability that food production and processing provide to our economy.

The Ontario Agriculture Sustainability Coalition (OASC) believes that current federal and provincial income support programs for farmers are badly in need of repair to better serve the majority of farmers. Programs like AgriStability were not designed to cope with the string of market shocks our commodities have experienced over the past several years and they must be reformed.

Ontario's grains and oilseeds producers participated in a very successful cost of production (COP)-based Risk Management Program pilot over the past three years but this program has not yet been renewed. Not only should this program be renewed, but it should also be extended to any non-supply managed commodity that wishes to participate.

OASC has been constructively working with Ontario's Minister of Agriculture, Hon. Carol Mitchell, to design and fund a Business Risk Management Program (BRMP, effective January, 2009) in Ontario and to support her efforts by informing all MPPs and Ontario MPs of the importance of effective income support programs for Ontario's farmers. OASC is also advocating for a federal government commitment to reform AgriStability and to make AgriFlex a national program, enabling Ontario's BRMP.

NEXT STEPS

The upcoming Agriculture Ministers' meeting is a critical juncture in our efforts for improved risk management programming.

We continue to push all Ministers for needed reforms to AgriStability and for adoption of an AgriFlex program enabling fully funded BRMP.

If Ministers do not recognize the urgency of our situation, we will take the messages to our politicians and our political leaders in a different and more direct way.

Elections are on the horizon for both the federal and Ontario governments.

OASC will advocate that all political parties build BRMP and AgriStability reform into their party election platforms.

OASC will also be pressing political candidates to stand up for agriculture and local food. Your participation and political action will be needed.

"Sustain our Farms" events in Stratford and at Queen's Park

On April 6, OASC held a "Sustain our Farms" forum in Stratford, attended by approximately 300 producers representing all OASC commodities. Speakers included the Hon. John Wilkinson and MP Gary Schellenberger, the federal and provincial government members for the area, as well as Dan Mathieson, Mayor of Stratford and Chris White, Mayor of the Township of Guelph/ Eramosa and Chair of the Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA).

Speakers reaffirmed the importance of primary agriculture and agribusiness to Ontario and noted that for the first time, agriculture is speaking with one voice.

On April 13, OASC was at Queen's Park to inform MPPs and cabinet ministers about the crisis in Ontario agriculture. OASC leaders met with a third of Ontario's MPPs, representing all political parties, as well as many cabinet ministers. OASC members were introduced in the legislature by the Hon. Carol Mitchell and the farm economic crisis became a significant focus of the daily Question period, led by Progressive Conservative Ag Critic, MPP Ernie Hardeman.

GET INVOLVED - HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO

Personally writing, phoning or e-mailing your MPP and MP is the #1 way you can show your support for OASC and its proposals to bring financial sustainability to Ontario farmers. Your views matter.

When writing your political representatives, copy your Ministers of Agriculture so they are aware of your concerns:

Minister Ritz: ritzg@parl.gc.ca
Minister Mitchell: minister.omafr@ontario.ca
For copies of our news releases, government submissions and backgrounders, or to contact one of the OASC members, visit www.OASC.ca.

BRMP - How it works with AgriStability

Currently, the only protection Ontario farmers have against a drop in profitability comes from the AgriStability program. While this margin support program has been helpful, it hasn't met the needs of Ontario's farmers who have lost \$330 million in the last year and may potentially lose a half billion or more this year (Agriculture Canada statistics).

OASC is proposing a cost of production-based BRMP to run as a companion to a reformed AgriStability program. The program would fund 100 percent of the difference between the average market price and a floor price that is calculated based on the cost of producing each commodity. Producers would pay premiums that would equate to 30 percent of the costs of the program. The federal and Ontario governments would split the remaining program cost using their traditional 60/40 cost share.

Producers would receive the BRMP payment as soon as the industry average prices were calculated and compared to the COP-based floor price. AgriStability benefits would be calculated when producer applications are submitted. If the AgriStability benefit is greater, the producer would receive the AgriStability payment less any BRMP payment already made. If the BRMP payment is higher, the producer would not receive an AgriStability payment. In most cases, the BRMP payment would be higher than AgriStability.

OASC calls upon Prime Minister and Premier to support agriculture

In recent letters to Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Premier Dalton McGuinty, OASC members called upon both government leaders to address the crisis in agriculture. In the letter OASC wrote:

"We need a strong federal and provincial investment to stabilize and sustain Ontario's family farms. Simply stated, the current suite of risk management programs were not designed and are not able to cope with the recent market outcomes across our sectors."

"Ontario farmers have developed revised and new instruments to address this crisis faced by our family farm businesses. Adoption of these changes at the July, 2010 Federal-Provincial-Territorial Agriculture Ministers' meeting is critical to ensure our family farm business remain viable for today and for the future".



Long-Term Thinking
for Today's Issues



ONTARIO PORK



Ontario Agriculture Sustainability Coalition