



CFFO's Letter Presented to Minister Steve Peters on April 7, 2005: List of Agricultural Items requiring Attention

Thank you for the recent telephone call asking for our advice on agricultural matters requiring attention from the provincial and/or federal governments. We welcome constructive dialogue aimed at seeking solutions to problems faced by Ontario farmers.

Many of our concerns deal with either fluctuation in farm income or regulatory burdens. We also see a need for targeted investments that will generate societal benefits in the overall health, education and prosperity of Ontario's farmers and other citizens. Finally, we see a need for certain legislative initiatives to maintain and enhance Ontario agriculture.

As requested, here is a listing of priorities from the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario.

1) Immediate financial aid for struggling farm families

As you are aware, many farmers are experiencing commodity prices that are tracking at 25-year lows. We believe financial assistance is required, but we also believe all support should be capped on a per family basis. Our members have also pointed out to us that the federal CAIS program needs to be improved in both speed of delivery and overall design.

2) An equal place for farmers in the food chain

While short-term financial assistance is warranted at the present time, we believe that the long-term answer to farm income problems is partly structural in nature. For example, farmers are increasingly choosing, or being pushed, into supply chain arrangements. These arrangements have the potential for delivering adequate financial returns for farmers – but only if the arrangements are structured in such a way that farmers are equal partners. We welcome adjustments to Ontario's farm product marketing legislation that allows the many benefits of this legislation to be applied within supply chain arrangements.

3) Environmental Payments to Farmers

The members of the CFFO have agreed that the province should consider establishing a small charge on the retail sale of food in Ontario to pay for environmental services and joint farmer/consumer initiatives. We see these funds being used to pay farmers annual environmental payments for identified societal benefits. Farmers are involved in either creating or preserving natural features that have societal benefits but which return little, if any, income. Annual environmental payments to farmers would help address this issue, while giving farmers additional income for the services they are already providing.

4) Local livestock processing and the development of local markets

The CFFO believes that the development of local livestock processing aids in the overall development of the rural economy and adds value to the products of Ontario farmers. In addition, we believe there is strong business potential for displacing many specialty products now imported for Ontario's ethnic markets. A particular request is that the provincial and federal governments grant the Canadian sheep meat sector financial and legislative support in establishing more federally inspected lamb kill space in Ontario. We also believe that a goal should be set of having a minimum of 25 per cent of Ontario lamb meat processed at federally inspected facilities by 2008.

5) New sources of income for rural municipalities

Many of our rural municipalities are caught in a cost squeeze. As a result, municipalities either look for additional tax income from farms and value-added businesses or find that the cost of providing services to some farms is too prohibitive. This does not serve the long-term interests of either farmers or the rural municipalities they live and work within. The CFFO welcomes dialogue on ways to provide new income opportunities to our rural municipalities.

6) Holding off on Supplemental Beef Import Imports

With a backlog of beef within Ontario and Canada, the CFFO favours a continuance of a stop on the granting of supplemental beef import permits. It makes little sense to continue importing offshore beef at a time when our own beef industry is struggling to restructure.

7) A repeal and replacement of the Nutrient Management Act

The CFFO believes that there is a simpler and more effective approach to both pollution prevention and the protection of public resources. We advocate the replacement of the Nutrient Management Act with a single framework for nutrient management, source water protection and environmental farm planning. Please refer to the attached document, *A Stewardship Framework for Agricultural-Environmental Regulation*, for more details on how we envision this framework developing.

8) Commitments needed to maintain and develop Ontario agriculture

The CFFO has committed itself to long-term thinking on the commitments government needs to make to create and maintain a prosperous agriculture that contributes to the health of the province's citizens. We have documented many of those commitments in *Closer to the Heart: A CFFO Vision for Farming*. They include:

- ❑ Moderate-scale family farming needs to be made the focus of all federal, provincial and municipal government legislation, policies and regulations.
- ❑ Governments need to remain committed to developing and maintaining the infrastructure that underlies Ontario agriculture. Key commitments include the preservation and enhancement of marketing legislation, well thought-out safety net programs, the protection of the province's best farmland, appropriate land-use tools at the municipal level and the maintenance and enhancement of social services to rural communities.
- ❑ Funding needs to be particularly maintained for basic research. The CFFO suggests that both federal and provincial governments adopt legislation that establishes funding for basic research for farming and environmental initiatives in the countryside at a fixed per cent of consumer dollars spent on food.
- ❑ All government policies, legislation and programs need to contain family-farm appropriate minimums and maximums. We need caps so that farmers receive a fair share of government programs, without taking more than they need.

9) Greater Protection of Farmland

The CFFO sees governments becoming more vigilant in their protection of farmland. Good land is one of the key ingredients for a long-term, prosperous agriculture.

Legislation and policies need to take a long-term view and protect good farmland. We have attached our latest perspectives on Ontario's newest Greenbelt to illustrate how our long-term critique compares with current legislation.

10) Continued support for Ontario's farm marketing legislation

The CFFO is very thankful for the wide range of marketing legislation available to Ontario farmers. We view the legislation as a list of options that can be utilized to further the aims of farmers involved in particular commodities. This legislation has enabled farmers to achieve collective goals while also helping to provide Ontario consumers with consistent, safe food at a reasonable price. We urge you to remain rock-solid in your support of this important legislation.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide our advice on issues of importance to Ontario farmers. We welcome the opportunity to discuss the many details accompanying these items in a meeting scheduled at your convenience.