

SARM Policy Update

By Laurel Feltin, Director of Policy - SARM





1. Rail LOS Legislation
2. Growing Forward 2
3. *Species at Risk Act*
4. Update on Employment Insurance
5. Update on Wildfire Act

Items for discussion



- Proposed amendments to CTA were announced on Dec. 11th to legislate rail level of service.
- Because we are a land locked province competitive rail rates are very important.
- SARM thanked government and urged them to pass the legislation as soon as possible to minimize additional harm to shippers.

Rail LOS...



- SARM reviewed the *Fair Rail Freight Service Act*
- Comments on Key Amendments to Transport Committee:
 - Railways will have to enter into a service agreement with an interested shipper within 30 days
 - Shippers can now request arbitration if railways default on service agreements
 - Fines will be imposed on railways who default

Rail LOS...



- Concerns with amendments:
 - Max. penalty of \$100,000; is it high enough?
 - Arbitrator's decision should be commercially fair to both parties; need definition.
 - Shippers and railways have to share equally in the cost of arbitration; ability of a small shipper to pay?

Rail LOS...



- New amendments SARM is suggesting:
 - Transparent reporting by railways;
 - Shortline railways and Producer Car Loading Facilities – same rights as shippers;
 - Legislate required hopper car maintenance; and
 - Protect rural rail sidings from being suddenly closed.

Rail LOS...



- SARM continues to follow the development of Growing Forward 2 programs.
- In January SARM attended Saskatchewan Agriculture's Growing Forward 2 Consultation regarding Strategic Initiatives.
- 8 priorities for funding under GF2 they are considering:

Growing Forward 2



- Ag Research and Innovation – more funding for forage research and to build Extension Services.
- Value Added Business Development – more funding for small/medium processors.
- Farm Business Management – Need an “Ag Operator Training Program,” outreach to schools...

Growing Forward 2



- Food Safety, Plant/Animal Health – develop premise ID system for livestock and funding to help control ag. pests.
- Agriculture Awareness – Brand new initiative – funding to help promote the ag industry! Provide funding to small producer associations with promotion, leadership training, etc.

Growing Forward 2



- Trade and Market Dev't – more funding – reach more markets
- Environment– update BMP's, and the way AEGP's are funded.
- Rural Water Infrastructure – Continue FRWIP; allow intensive ag and ag value added to apply.

Growing Forward 2



- We were happy to see more funding for ag pests, FRWIP, trade, market development, etc...
- Overall SARM was happy with these priorities.
- We wanted to comment specifically regarding BMPs.....

Growing Forward 2



- SARM reviewed BMPs being offered in other provinces – SK needs to recognize farm energy audits and on-farm energy conservation activities (they do it BC and Ontario).

Growing Forward 2



- Can't get rid of current BMPs – all have environmental value.
- GPS Technology – more control over chemicals being applied = less environmental impact
- Portable shelter belts – environmental benefits and disease prevention, health, etc...

Growing Forward 2



- New BMP – Producers who pilot new “environmentally friendly” technologies....
- Premier’s Growth Plan – increase crop production by 10 million tonnes by 2020 and significant growth in livestock...
- Need to encourage producers to embrace innovation to meet these targets...

Growing Forward 2



- SARA is doing another consultation on terrestrial species to be added to the list...
- Saskatchewan species of concern include:
 - Black Tailed Prairie Dog – Threatened
 - Baird's Sparrow, Buff-breasted Sandpiper and Grizzly Bear – Special Concern

Species at Risk Act (SARA)



- SARM commented on Feb. 26
- Normal ag activities can unintentionally threaten SAR. Necessary activities = livelihood.
- SARM recommends that normal ag_ activities be made a permanent exemption.
- Most producers are willing to help preserve but it comes with a cost...
- Adequate compensation for protection of a public good.

Species at Risk Act



- Consultation: SARA's impact on agriculture
- SARA = \$250,000 fine or prison term actions
- No teeth in the legislation to date.
- The review could either result in more teeth or loosen the regulations.
- SARM will push for exemption for ag_ and adequate compensation.

Species at Risk Act



Proposed changes to EI – Implemented Jan.

- Seasonal employees will be classed as frequent claimants.
- Have to apply for and accept a job that is similar, within 1 hour, pays 80% of previous wage.
- SARM had a follow up call to get clarification what this means for an RM employee... example

Employment Insurance



- A person living in a rural community and works for the RM maintaining roads from April until November.
- In November the person is laid off by the RM then they would go on regular EI benefits.
- The person has to at the very minimum look at job postings for employment and if they were to find a job at Home Depot for the Christmas Holidays the employee should take the job because they would be making more than they were on EI.

Employment Insurance



- Nothing prevents the employee from quitting Home Depot to go back to the RM in April because they likely quit for just cause which is defined by if the RM work is higher paying, better conditions, closer to home, (as long as going back to the RM job is improving your overall situation).
- Time frames would be considered - it might not be acceptable for someone to quit Home Depot a month before going to work back for the RM.

Employment Insurance



- Quitting a job to return to seasonal work will not impact an individual's ability to access EI benefits – so long as they are able to accumulate sufficient insurable hours from their seasonal work (which in Saskatchewan would be 700 hours).

Employment Insurance



- Can person be cut off after 3 years of applying?
 - If you live in a region with 6% or less employment rate then you have to work 700 hours to qualify.
 - As long as you are accumulating those 700 hours to qualify then there is no reason you would be cut off after 3 years.

Employment Insurance



- RM seasonal employees often work more than 40 hours a week – do those extra hours count towards hours required to claim?
 - Every hour counts (as long as employer indicates it on the record of employment).

Employment Insurance



- Other important points for RMs:
 - Signing up for Job Alert isn't mandatory
 - Reasonable job search will be common sense; small town with few opportunities vs big city.
 - Within one hour commute again will be based on reason and not firmly set at 100 km.

Employment Insurance



- SARM met with MOE in December.
- Reiterated our concerns:
 - Lack of consultation;
 - Removal of the 4.5 km buffer zone; and
 - Uncertainty of costs of asking the province for assistance in fighting a fire.

Wildfire Act



What we heard:

- They are done formal consultations
- Ministry staff are still making minor amendments but plan to submit it for approval in 2013.
- Aren't planning to remove the 4.5 km buffer
- Justice will email the Act to SARM and we will email it to RMs.

Wildfire Act



Next steps:

- SARM is preparing a letter to go to Minister reaffirming concerns.
- Meeting with AANDC, Government Relations and Environment to discuss protection processes, mutual aid, First Nations funding agreements and TLE issues.

Wildfire Act



1. The Provincial Water Strategy
2. *The Saskatchewan Employment Act*
3. *The National Building Code*
4. *Building Inspection*
5. *The Municipalities Act*
6. *Etc...*

Let us know if you have comments to share...

Other work...



Thank you!

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**Saskatchewan
Association of
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