

Question of the Week

Do you have an opinion on any of the questions listed below? If so, we want to hear from you.

A letter to the editor is not necessary. Simply **CALL DAN** at **519-776-4268, ext. 13** to leave your response. You must provide your name and phone number.

You can also drop us an email at **essexfreepress@on.aibn.com** or **FAX** us at **519-776-4014**.

Please be brief – 25 to 40 words. Deadline for responses: Monday at 9 a.m.

Question 1: What features would you like to see included in the new arena design?

Question 2: What are some of the pressing issues facing local municipalities in the upcoming election?

Question 3: A decline in Bingo revenues has been reported by local non-profit organizations. What can be done to replace Bingo revenues?

The answers received will be edited for length, clarity, libel, taste or style and will appear in this column over the next few weeks.

Be heard on issues that affect you!

Farmers feel betrayed, forced to hold rally

On a recent Sunday afternoon in August, more than 300 farmers gathered at Denis DeBot's farm in Wallaceburg to rally and discuss the escalating farm crisis with invited guests that included agriculture critic Wayne Easter, local radio host and cash crop farmer Phil Shaw, former mayor of Wallaceburg and Liberal party candidate Jeff Wesley and myself, Susan Whelan.

It seems a bit bizarre that rallies are springing up around the country. It was only seven months ago that the last federal election campaign ended. There was a lot of focus on the problems with funding through the Canadian Agriculture Income Stabilization program, otherwise known as CAIS. There were also a lot of promises made that have not been kept.

All political parties agreed during the campaign that there was indeed a farm crisis that needed immediate attention. And all parties agreed that the \$755 million grains and oilseeds payment announced in the fall by the previous Liberal government would not be enough and committed to do more. Yet where are we today? The current government re-announced the same \$755 million payment for the grains and oilseeds sector from the previous government.

The impression was left during the campaign that there would be immediate cash for spring to deal with the crisis. That didn't happen, and the question that has not been answered is, why not?

Also the new Conservative budget for 2006 provided \$255 million



guest commentary

susan whelan

less than what the previous Liberal government allocated in 2005.

The return in the marketplace for the majority of commodities in the grains and oilseeds sector is well below the cost of production and far less than the returns enjoyed by U.S. farmers who are supported by the U.S. farm bill.

Now what? With the collapse of the WTO talks, the government

must immediately move to commodity-specific support or our farmers will not survive. We cannot expect them to compete with U.S. and European Union farmers who are receiving subsidies and driving the price down. And we cannot say that we can't afford to compete with the U.S. Treasury. The same U.S. Treasury that runs an annual deficit of more than \$200 billion can still find billions for their farmers. We have had eight surplus budgets in a row!

We all need to stop and think of a Canada without farmers. What will we be? Without our primary producers in Canada, we do not have a sovereign food supply and will be at the mercy of every other nation. We will not have the thousands of secondary food processing jobs that provide employment and support our local economies. Our rural communities will cease to exist, as we know them.

With the current struggles around the globe, there is not a more important time to stop and think about this and what it means to all of us. Canada needs a secure future, which means we need a sovereign and safe food supply, which means that we need our farmers. It is up to all of us to support our farmers.

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