



Time for Agricorp audit

By Geri Kamenz, President, Ontario Federation of Agriculture

Effective management of a business, large or small, requires access to current financial reports and the latest details affecting the business. Ontario farms and farm operators fall into this situation the same as other business operators and managers.

For many months, farmers and their organizations have been calling on officials of Agricorp, the province's agency that administers programs and services to the farming community, to provide them with better service. It has reached the point of a number of commodity organizations demanding that OMAFRA Minister Dombrowsky mandate a value-for-money audit of Agricorp.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture considered such a call late last year, but delayed an official vote on the resolution until its March board meeting. We were hopeful changes could be made at Agricorp that would improve the service without going to the expense of an

audit. Now, OFA is calling on Minister Dombrowsky and the Hon. Norman Sterling, chair of the standing committee on public accounts at Queen's Park, to request the Provincial Auditor General to undertake a special assignment to perform this audit.

The resolution approved at the March meeting references Agricorp's deficiencies in dealing with crop insurance issues, as well as its less-than-efficient administration of the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization (CAIS) program. A number of farmers have provided details of their personal experiences with Agricorp and its CAIS dealings – they say their cash flow position has been adversely affected by processing errors.

Farmers also complain about Agricorp's tardy administration of other government support programs. In the letter to Minister Dombrowsky, I point out the matter of her promises to

deliver by a stated deadline being broken because of Agricorp's inefficiencies.

The Minister told a crowd at the 2006 International Plowing Match that CAIS Inventory Transition program payments for the 2003 program year would be mailed to farmers by October, 2006 and the payments for the 2004 program year would be in the mail by November, 2006. That didn't happen! Just recently I received my statement for the 2003 CAIS program year.

This approach to providing service to the province's farmers is not acceptable. We can't plan and manage our businesses with such ineffective delivery of government programs and services.

An audit of Agricorp's operations in 2000 reviewed whether adequate procedures were in place to ensure com-

pliance with legislation and corporate procedures; to ensure that resources were managed with due regard for economy and efficiency; and to measure and report on the corporation's effectiveness in fulfilling its legislated responsibilities.

As president of Ontario's largest general farm organization, Minister, I don't find Agricorp is performing the job Ontario farmers want and need, nor is it living up to the mandate provided by government. There is an obvious lack of focus by Agricorp on client services, and Ontario farmers need and deserve better.

Farmers operate complex businesses and when such a critical link between government and the management of these businesses fails, it jeopardizes our hope for success in the global economy.

Green energy options for farmers

Jake DeBruyn, the New Technology Integration Engineer for the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, will be speaking on green energy options for farms at the annual dinner of

the Essex County Christian Farmers Association to be held April 21 at Wagner Orchards and Estate Winery. For more information, contact president John Barnett at 519-965-2320.

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