

⚡ WEATHER ALERT

Governments work to boost AgriStability

By: Tyler Clarke

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Additional funding is being freed up to help farmers weather the ebbs and flows synonymous with their industry.

Last week, the federal and provincial governments announced the elimination of reference margin limits in the AgriStability program.

The change affects how eligibility and benefits for the risk management tool are calculated, but ultimate means "there's a better chance of triggering a payment."

So described Keystone Agricultural Producers president Bill Campbell, who while fuzzy on the program's nuances knows it's a win for farmers.

Federal Agriculture Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau clarified via tweet that it amounts to approximately \$95 million more per year in farmers' pockets, and will be backdated retroactively to include 2020.

"Hopefully it will be beneficial to those who need it and have dealt with COVID and market disruption," Campbell said, adding while he considers the announcement a win, it wasn't as great a victory as farmers were striving toward.

In addition to eliminating the reference margin limit, farmers advocated for a compensation rate increase to 80 per cent from the current 70 per cent.

Although the federal government was on board, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta failed to reach an agreement.

The program's expenses are cost-shared, with the federal government covering 60 per cent and the provinces handling the 40 per cent balance.

The nature of input costs and how reference margin limits were calculated disproportionately affected cow/calf operations, which is why Carson Callum said last

week's news offered a boost to the industry.

The Manitoba Beef Producers general manager said the change makes the program "more equitable and responsive to poor production years where you take a margin hit," and requires a less drastic financial hit before the program is triggered.

"Prices are so volatile with the impacts of the overall market," he said, "especially with COVID ... It's kind of all over the place, but the overall production year in 2020 was better than the previous few before."

Market volatility is an ongoing concern.

"I don't have that crystal ball in front of me, but COVID and other things in the market are still making prices fluctuate quite a bit," he said.

"The main worry is always moisture in the ag sector, and right now we have too little of it. We're still a few good rains from getting into better shape, but right now it's looking pretty dry out there."

Campbell shared a similar sentiment — that moisture remains an ongoing concern in Westman.

"We've probably got four weeks to make sure we have adequate moisture to get forage establishment and the grass growing," he said, adding farmers will need timely rains after that.

Although he said Keystone Agricultural Producers has their eyes trained on a number of regulatory changes coming down the pike, a silver lining to come out of the pandemic and the food shortages that came during its earliest days is that people are becoming more intentional about where their food comes from.

"There's a bit more awareness of it, but I think it's been taken for granted in the last generation," he said.

"We need to ensure we have that food security and producers producing food because I think most of the world's revolutions and wars have been more about religion and food than anything else."

The deadline to enrol in the AgriStability has been extended two months to June 30.

A Manitoba Beef Producers release issued last week encouraged farmers to "evaluate this business risk management option to best determine how it fits into their operations in terms of mitigating against risk."

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