



What's happened and what we're saying . . .

As many of you are aware, there have been a number of issues happening within the Holland Marsh – as well as a number of events that highlight the need for greater communication with those who would make decisions or with the general public as a whole. Within the Holland Marsh Growers' Association (HMGA), we are sincerely trying to navigate around some of these “situations” for the best benefit of our farmers.

To date, we have had three successfully attended tow-motor certification/licensing courses for our farmers. The reason for these – the why everyone should be looking at this – is:

OHSA SAFETY BLITZ

Part of MOL's enforcement of the Occupational Health and Safety Act are proactive visits. Farming is now being engaged on these safety blitzes or “heightened enforcement focus” in government speak. The first blitz was on forklift and other loading devices that included both greenhouses and mushroom farms and other farm operations – and will continue to do so. This “blitz” will be taking place until end of August 2010 – with the focus on workers, particularly young workers. No sector is exempt – but we are trying to assist.

Inspectors will look for proper orientation, training and supervision. Typical questions include:

1. Is the workplace prepared for new workers?
2. Are new workers ready for work?
3. Is there comprehensive safety orientation?
4. Is job-specific training done?
5. Are workers adequately supervised?
6. Who do workers report an injury to?

Farms targeted for the blitz will be primarily in the south western part of the province with a WSIB history of Lost Time Injury of young or new workers. Farm Safety consultants are available to assist growers upon request.

That being said, the next tow-motor course will be held on:

June 24, 2010

Bill Eek's Farm

8:30 (prompt) start in the morning until 4:30

Snacks provided – you bring your own lunch

Course is open to the first 20

Spanish interpretation is provided

Cost to farmers has been reduced: \$50 per person.

(Wherever possible, we continue to reduce the costs. Apologizes for earlier participants.)

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HMGGA News

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And passing on our message . . .

In the middle of May, the Ontario Provincial Liberals held a “think tank” session in Collingwood – and although the HMGGA was not represented at this function, we did have an opportunity to provide one of the speakers/delegates with some ideas of how the farming and food sector could be improved. Remember, these are just ideas and concepts – with nothing firmly rooted, but take note that some of these “solutions” would resolve some of the provincial regulatory problems the association has been dealing with over the past month or so. These were some quick offs for the government to chew on – we’ll see what happens. The speaker, who had only a limited amount of time, said the ideas from the association were excellent – and all could help the entire sector – not just from the Holland Marsh and area:

1. The Premier once challenged the farming and food sector to arrive at a solution to the increase in minimum wage - which, ironically, makes us the number one jurisdiction in North America and will likely remain so. Minimum wage is a social issue. The Premier’s new Green Energy Act has, as well, been turned into a social issue - rather than just about power generation, it is the conversion of an entire society into a “greener” mentality. And that is the link for farmers. Proposal: since green energy is now a social issue, counter the minimum wage under the guise of an energy deal. Put all farm operations (only) onto the smart meter system (at no cost to farmers). Set the established rate (since it is computerized) to 2.2 - 4.1 cents per kilowatt hour cost for farmers, year round, for five years to establish real guidelines as to energy usage. Conduct energy audits (at the cost of the government) to all farm operations. Only those farms with a farm operation number qualify. No main house. Power usage will also be monitored for all farm employee residents as well, since that is part of the farm operation as well. This is a fundamentally sound, no-cost program that can be run through Hydro One rather than the “municipalities”.

Cost to the province - negligible at best, perhaps under \$10-million all told because payment is still being made for hydro, etc. Green options are still available to those farmers wanting to do so but at their cost.

2. A clearly defined definition of farming and food (remove the word agriculture and agri-food since it is, by the context of consumer interest, gone). Currently, there are more than a dozen different definitions for the provincial government and its various ministries (and more at the federal level). The definition of farming and food will encompass everything from food production to biomass anything. Discussions surrounding production, like the one in Markham were, what appeared to be a relatively sane individual, stood up and said, “if those damn farmers would stop farming and grow food, we’d be better off!” would be eliminated. As well, a clear definition would resolve outstanding municipal discussions (what is a greenhouse?), value-added and value-retention should be included (storing an apple or carrot is the same as grain), and MPAC would no longer be able to pick at pieces of the property in the hopes of getting more money through taxation.

Cost to the province - nothing. It is the harmonizing of a multitude of definitions that exist in various ministries (MPAC/finance to OMAFRA to MNR or M of Energy/Environment)



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3. Raise the net value of a farm to something more workable for ALL of the province so that there is a clear reason for those who are farming and those who are “rural” in context. \$7,000 is no longer applicable, especially considering the fallout of recent announcements regarding federal debt on farms. If the dollar figure reflected something else, like the provincial standard for poverty (the poverty line for Ontarians was \$16,167), then it would more accurately portray those operations that are functional, and those that are merely taking the tax credit.

Cost to the province - actually, they would see an increase in revenue due to the removal of those “farmers” that are, at best, hobby operations. Selling a horse between property owners, as is done, for \$7,500 every year, doesn't make you a farmer when your main income is Bay Street and the wife's is somewhere else.

4. Development of a rural secretariat – an overriding body that reports directly to the Premier's office. This new office would ensure that legislation garnered at urbanites but having little or no real impact upon them are reviewed so that the best intentioned rules and regulations impacting the rural countryside is, at least, abated somewhat (*see situation below*). This secretariat would review each and every piece of legislation, removing the silo mentalities that exist in the predominantly territorial ministries, and ensure that the potentially destructive legislation is examined for the real world impact it will have. Think minimum wage, species at risk, greenbelt, pesticide bans, green energy act – and setbacks, minimum distant setbacks on water courses, enhanced powers to conservation authorities/MTO/any enforcement body. In addition, when there is legislation that could be a positive (think infrastructure dollars where no municipality in its right mind is going to send money destined for an arena or road to help farmers in its community leaving farmers out of the billions of dollars and/or the research investment in farming and food when the Premier's focus is solely on blackberries - and not the edible kind), this rural secretariat would be able to best direct the actions and perceived good as well.

Cost to the province - far less than the grief of finding out that they have developed legislation that contradicts each other. Estimated cost for set-up and running would be approximately \$5-million over two years – with commissioner, staff estimated at 5, office costs, etc.

5. Finally, either a lack of priority at the cabinet table (for one of four things that humans require for life – air, water, food, shelter) or lack of priority at the education end (it's removal has led to a decline of interest in farming, which most see in the context of “American Gothic” instead of the modernized sector it is). Take your pick. A priority must be put on education (and not the Foodland stuff, but a real take on it) because then you are developing, from youth, a lifelong consumer, eating healthy, following a regimen that will relieve our healthcare system – a proactive approach to what we do in farming. From the groundwork on the education side, then you would see the implementation of buy local policies within the institutions; greater interest in farming as a CAREER rather than a lifestyle (they are both); fundamental shifts in rural/urban planning (because more urbanites would see the merit and value of changing career paths from, say teaching [12,000 graduates for less than 5,000 positions], nursing [decreasing numbers, increasing graduates], etc, etc.).



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Cost to province – it is curriculum change. Whatever that cost is – the sex education problem was estimated to have cost more than \$18-million for consults, writing, etc. so there must be funding to make a change to this as well.

Again, these were just a couple of quick ideas on a few potential, minimal cost fixes to the system. Below, is a list for you, the farmer to mull over – and the association will be working to do what it can to make most (if not all) happen.

Priorities for you . . .

Now is the time to figure out what are priorities to you, the farming community. This will give you an opportunity to have input where it matters most: to you.

Rank your priorities, with one (1) being most important – and work your way through the list. Get it back to either Jamie or one of the HMGA board – or drop it off at Alex's shop.

- Chemicals – access, harmonization (what was promised under NAFTA), and usage as well as maintaining and ensuring that product availability. This also includes lowest dose (difference in U.S. registration) and timeliness of getting new chemistry out. Would also include emergency use program leading to unfairness.
- Marketing, Promotion, and Communication – for farmers, consumers, stakeholders
- Research and innovation – resistance issues included due to above mentioned lowest dosage.
- Rules and regulatory issues (and solutions)
- Food Safety
- Retailer, wholesale, food service markets
- Other (your decision)

HST and the farmer . . .

What does the HST (Harmonized Sales Tax) mean to you, the farmer? We're going to find out because the

HMGA is hosting an evening seminar about HST and its impact on farmers

Time: Wednesday, June 9 7 p.m. – 9 p.m.

Where: Bond Head Community Hall

What: Finding out from government the impact of the HST on farmers and what you can do to minimize that impact.

Bring your questions – and take the time to find out how this will either hit or help your operation. We encourage you all to attend because this will be for your benefit. Any questions call Jamie at 905-251-6786 or e-mail jreaume@rogers.com

Peaker Plant update . . .

Farmers should be aware that the Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure has, once again, changed the ground rules on this facility – but let it be known that the HMGA has not given up the fight. In fact, now the fight goes direct and we will continue to represent your best interests – and the interests of all within the area. After the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) hearing, it was thought that there would be time to await a decision. Now, the Ministry is moving to exempt the entire project from the Planning Act and its requirements – which means more work for those at the frontline trying to ensure that this project is moved from within the Holland Marsh proper. As always, we will keep you abreast of the situation.



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Workplace Violence and Harassment

More to know – and change, because there isn't enough paperwork for you, the farmer – but not to worry, this act is universal (provincial, in other words) for all. As of June 15, the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) will encompass workplace violence and harassment.

The “internal responsibility” principle of OHSA involves everyone in the workplace. A new plain language guide is available to explain minimum standards and sets out everyone rights and responsibilities. This act will support the work done through the Criminal

Code, policing activities and the Human Rights Code related to violent activities.

Violence is defined as the exercise of physical force by a person against a worker, in a workplace, that causes or could cause physical injury to the worker: and statements or behaviour that a worker could reasonably interpret as a threat to exercise physical forces that could cause physical injury.

Violence in the Workplace Obligations

Employer's must prepare and review at least annually a policy (examples are available) on workplace violence. If there are 6 or more regularly employed workers the policy must be posted. It may be a separate statement or it may form part other policy statements required under OHSA.

Employer must assess the risk of violence and develop procedures to control those risks. Procedures must include: measures to control risk, measures to summon assistance, measures to report incidents, how the employer will investigate and deal with incidents. An example of a Workplace Violence Program is available.

Workers should know how to summon assistance; how to report incidents; know how the employer will investigate and deal; carry out procedures in place to manage workplace violence.

Workers should receive information about persons with a history of violent behaviour, however only enough information to protect workers from danger.

Typically personal medical information is not necessary. Domestic violence may put a worker at risk. Workers should report potential danger to the employer who must investigate and develop reasonable precautions. Spouses may work for the same employer.

Work refusal regulations include risk of violence but do not include harassment.

When violence occurs, employers should notify the police or other emergency response needed. MOL should be notified and within 48 hours providing the detail behind the notice.

Harassment is defined as vexatious comment or conduct against a worker in a workplace—behaviour that is known or ought to be known to be unwelcome. It includes but not limited to making jokes, demeaning, ridicule, intimidate or offend, displaying offensive pictures or materials, bullying, inappropriate touching, advances or suggestions.

A policy (examples are available) must be prepared and posted with 6 or more workers in the workplace.

Workers should know how to report incidents and how the employer will investigate and deal with harassment. An example of a workplace harassment plan is available.



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For Information Only . . .

An Ottawa-based company has set up an investment fund to buy Canadian farmland. Bonnefield Canadian Farmland LP will buy and hold Canadian farmland. It will lease that land to what it calls progressive operators and work with those operators over the long-term to improve farm efficiency while preserving the integrity of the land. Similar programs exist like this one in the U.S. and Europe – and other countries, like Saudi Arabia and China, are buying up huge properties throughout most of Asia to ensure that there are fields to feed their own population. The fund has already acquired several farm properties in Saskatchewan and Ontario with several additional acquisitions pending in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Problem averted . . .

Sometimes a good idea for urban audiences often has away of backfiring for farmers. Case in point, there is going to be an exemption for farmers under a new proposed Consolidated Municipal Hazardous or Special Waste Program being run through Stewardship Ontario. What would have happened was that every 30 kg or less bag would have been levied a fee of \$0.41 per bag for waste disposal, or about \$10 per bag in addition to the cost. The HMGA did send a letter to the Minister of the Environment about this very urban issue, and it was left in the hands of the provincial organizations, primarily the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association. In the dying days of May, notification came that Stewardship Ontario will exempt farmers – so long as there is proof provided at the time of purchase, the proof being a valid Farm Business Registration number. The extra costs would have been staggering – so thanks should go to all those who participated in making sure that this levy (or tax) did not take place. Thanks, as well, to Stewardship Ontario for understanding the farmer viewpoint – but it goes without saying that we all need to be vigilant when it comes to “new and improved” legislation for the benefit of society.

Finally (t.g.) . . .

- There is no word yet as to the outcome for our proposed Lake Simcoe Clean-up Fund project – but, we'll let you know when it comes in, one way or another. There is a great amount of interest in it – so we'll hope for the best.
- Beginning in July, the canal reconstruction program gets underway in full gear. It is VERY IMPORTANT that you make sure that every farm property you own has a farm registration number so that you are eligible for the agricultural rebate accorded under the provisions of this project. If you do not have a farm registration number than get one ASAP to qualify. If not, you will be paying the full rate rather than the rebated levy.
- The Holland Marsh Growers' Association was a prize winner at the Bradford Board of Trade Gala on May 26. The association won the New Community Leader Development Award, which was accepted by Alex Makarenko, the HMGA Chair. In addition, Dingo Farms also won an award and Gwillimdale Farms was nominated in another category. Congratulations to all for a job well done in representing farming and food in this area. You are all to be commended on a job well done.

Did We Miss Something . . .

Then by all means, let us know. Go to our website at www.hollandmarshgold.com, find a board member you know – and give them a call. Or contact Jamie at 905-251-6786 and let him know what you need the association to do for you.