



**Honourable George Groeneveld
Minister
Agriculture and Rural Development**

AgChoices Conference

**‘Taking the Lead –
Innovation and Leadership in changing times’**

**Wednesday, February 11, 2009
10:50 a.m.**

**Capri Centre Hotel, Convention & Trade Centre
Red Deer, Alberta**

Check against delivery

Introduction: Leadership

- Good morning.
- It is a pleasure to join you for the 2009 AgChoices conference.
- It is also an honour to extend greetings on behalf of Premier Stelmach and my government colleagues.
- As elected officials we fully understand the responsibility of leadership. However, we recognize that leadership is not strictly tied to a title or position.
- Leadership is about having vision...the ability to imagine a different or better way of doing things...the confidence to take a bold step...and the commitment to see it through.
- I know that by your attendance today, each of you is a leader in your own right.
- You are bringing to our agriculture industry the greatest commodities of all – ‘*innovation*’ and ‘*leadership*’ in changing times.

Changes and challenges

- Like all economic sectors, the agriculture industry continues to evolve and change.
- In a globally competitive industry it is critical that Alberta's producers and agri-businesses change with the times.
- I know that earlier Art Froehlich talked to you about how changing global markets are impacting and influencing the agriculture sector worldwide.
- Art was chair of our *Competitiveness Initiative* which did an excellent job of looking at challenges and opportunities and providing recommendations.
- As you know, we continue to face tremendous challenges:
 - high input costs...the fluctuating Canadian dollar,
 - the lingering effects of the BSE crisis,
 - international competitors that are gaining market share,

- as well as trade barriers with our largest trading partner.
- The thickening of the US border due to protectionist rules and mandatory country of origin labeling are threatening our integrated North American market.
- So...what do we do?
- How can we make our agriculture industry more competitive and profitable?
- There is a lot we can do.
- But let me be clear – I firmly believe that in order to achieve our potential, we cannot just continue doing what has been done in the past.
- The status quo is no longer an option. We need to increase our efficiency, add value, differentiate, enhance our environmental integration, and more.
- It's been said *“It's easy to come up with new ideas, the hard part is letting go of what worked for you two years ago, because it will soon be out of date”*.

ALMS

- Well, when it comes to the beef industry we know we've got some catching up to do.
- On my first mission to Asia, I heard loud and clear what those industries and consumers want from their livestock and meat products.
- They want high-quality food products that are safe... and traceability measures that support and demonstrate that safety.
- And I can tell you – if we don't step up to the plate, our competitors will be more than happy to.
- That is why we introduced the *Alberta Livestock and Meat Strategy*.
- The strategy outlines a number of priorities including a comprehensive livestock information system, traceability and age verification.

- I know some producers have concerns with age verification, but we have heard time and time again from government and industry officials in Asia...
- ...traceability, including age verification, is **not negotiable** with them.
- We must have it if we want to expand current markets and create new ones – and succeed in our priority markets such as Asia.
- This strategy has the ability to fundamentally strengthen our livestock sector – and I am very proud of how things are moving along.
- We provided significant financial support that is the envy of many other provinces – \$300 million in transitional funding.
- We also created the *Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency (ALMA)*.

- The Agency Board has a panel of ten world-class experts ...ranging from a NAFTA negotiator to a livestock producer with international experience.
- Under their leadership the agency will work closely with government and industry to implement the strategy.
- Industry advisory groups have been formed, as well as a sub-committee on Market Access led by board member Dr. Kee Jim.
- Dr. Jim represented Alberta's interests when he joined the federal agriculture Minister, Gerry Ritz on a recent Canadian trade mission to Asia.

COLLABORATION & NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

- Collaborating with our federal government is key to advancing market access.
- This is not simply an 'Alberta issue' ...92 percent of Canada's agriculture industry depends on exports.

- Alberta's efforts...our agriculture trade missions to Asia, and our close working relationship with the Canadian government has paid off.
- I am extremely pleased by the breakthrough agreement Minister Ritz secured with Hong Kong – it will expand market access for all commercially significant Canadian beef exports.

ALBERTA'S LEADERSHIP

- It takes a spirit of leadership to achieve...and make no mistake, other provinces are looking at what we're doing, and they are impressed.
- The *Livestock and Meat Strategy* could be adapted on a national level...some producers and industry leaders in other provinces have actually asked their own government to take similar action.
- I have believed for some time that Alberta's agriculture industry has incredible potential that has yet to be tapped...
- We all know change is not easy...

- ...it will take a long-term strategic approach to make a difference.
- We must be willing to adapt and innovate – set short and long term goals.
- Evaluate what is and isn't working for your current ag business...identify ways to enhance what you are already doing...and be open to 'the big idea'.

GREENING OUR GROWTH

- John Oliver spoke earlier about environmental issues impacting and shaping this industry.
- We must be prepared to respond to those issues.
- However, it is important to recognize that we don't have to sacrifice economic growth for environmental stewardship.
- That is why *Alberta's Institute for Agriculture, Forestry and the Environment* is so important.

- It brings a new business-focused approach to environmental stewardship.
- Consumers and businesses are actively seeking products and services that are more environmentally friendly.
- They are ready and willing to support companies that are demonstrating an environmental conscience.
- Knowing that, we are confident industry will embrace solutions that are a smart investment in their own future.
- Based on the Institute's work, our government looks forward to developing a framework of policies and measures that will bring profound benefits.
- Although the work of government is often very big picture, we know it has a real effect on your everyday business development and success.

GROWING FORWARD

- For example, the new national agriculture agreement between the Canadian government, provinces and territories will offer programs to support your needs.
- We are currently finalizing the details of Alberta's bi-lateral agreement – and we are confident you will find the new program model a very strategic approach to supporting your business development.
- We expect to launch Alberta's *Growing Forward* program in early spring.

Conclusion: INNOVATION AND LEADERSHIP

- Later today you will hear some great success stories from our farmer panel... everyday producers who took their big idea to the next step.
- I know that our Best Practices Awards winners will look forward to sharing their own tales of success in the future.
- I am very proud of this awards program.

- The *Best Practices Awards* encourage producers to be pioneers of the modern age of agriculture...
- In a minute I will have the privilege of recognizing our winners...
- ...but I also want to congratulate the many producers who are embracing the challenge of renewal in their business.
- Agriculture demands a lot from those who choose to make it their living – however, with commitment, passion, innovation and leadership it can be highly rewarding.
- To everyone here today – **thank you** – your vision, enthusiasm and hard work are making our industry stronger.
- And thank you to the organizers of the AgChoices conference for giving me this opportunity to speak to you today.

- Today's event, and your attendance, is proof that we are prepared to achieve through '*innovation and leadership in changing times*'.
- Enjoy the rest of the conference. Thank you.

[Minister remains on stage to participate in the presentation of the Best Practices Awards]