



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

**Canadian Association of Farm Advisors
(CAFA) Annual Alberta Conference**

**Wednesday, February 11, 2009
9 a.m.**

**Black Knight Inn
Red Deer**

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- Thank you Les for that introduction.
- I would like to bring greetings on behalf of Premier Stelmach, my colleagues from the legislature and the Government of Alberta....
- ...I always enjoy my trips to Red Deer... especially when it is for attending a conference such as this.
- This is always an informative and productive agricultural conference due to the expertise and knowledge of CAFA's members.
- I know everyone attending this conference has a deep appreciation and understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing Alberta farmers.
- As the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development...I know that our government shares that appreciation and understanding...
- ...And we do our best to enhance the opportunities for Alberta's family farms.

- The theme of this year's conference is **keeping agriculture healthy for the family and the farm.**
- An appropriate theme for the times...
- Everyone – whether they're from a rural community that's dependent on agriculture... or if they live in our cities – knows that farmers have had a rough ride these past several years...
- We are working closely with industry to increase return from the markets and better manage business risk.
- Farm advisors also have a tremendous role to play in this area...
- Your clients will depend on your services to guide them through the issues they might have personally or professionally.
- Today...The high cost of feed, fertilizer and fuel are challenges for even the most experienced farmer.

- While there are challenges... there are also many opportunities.
- For example... the development of renewable energy resources such as biofuels offers a great opportunity for Alberta's agriculture industry.
- Biofuels promote rural economic development by attracting new capital investment ...
- ... And provide a solution to some of the competitiveness issues facing the agriculture industry.
- Another issue facing the agriculture industry is the recent economic downturn...
- That is why access to global markets is so important.
- I have been actively pushing for open markets at the world trade talks...I visited Geneva twice last year as the negotiations reached a critical stage.

- Our message was clear – the World Trade Organization agreement is necessary to advance market access for the entire agriculture and agri-food industry...
- ...Not just in Alberta...But across Canada.
- This helps create jobs and promotes market growth.
- As a top exporting nation, we need to eliminate export subsidies and reduce trade-distorting farm supports from other countries.
- Open markets make it easier to distinguish and isolate products to meet specific market demands...open markets mean farmers would gain higher prices and greater efficiencies.
- In Alberta alone, the value of primary agriculture totals about \$8.7 billion.
- The value-added sector, contributes \$10.8 billion through food and beverage manufacturing.

- And, almost 74,000 people in Alberta were employed by the agriculture and food industry.
- Our agriculture and food sectors are big contributors to economic diversity....
- And our agriculture industry is at an important crossroad...
- ...But I believe our agriculture industry has the raw product, ideas and innovative spirit to remain a leader in this country.
- We must respond to the expectations of consumers and the global market in order to be competitive and create long-term sustainability.
- Last year, I announced the Alberta Livestock and Meat Strategy.
- The Strategy is designed to create an environment where industry can be successful and sustainable and take advantage of opportunities such as ...

- ... Marketing branded products in both traditional and newly opened world markets.
- Age verification and traceability are key elements of the Strategy ...and form the basis for a sound animal health and food safety system.
- These measures are being demanded by consumers and export markets around the world.
- A major change is needed at both government and industry levels to capture and create new opportunities.
- The Strategy will act as a catalyst to help revitalize this important industry ...
- ... But it leaves the business of producing cattle, processing meat and marketing where it belongs ... with industry.
- As part of that strategy, the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency, or ALMA, was created.

- ALMA's role is to work with industry and act as a catalyst to achieve an internationally respected, competitive and profitable livestock and meat industry.
- ALMA has formed a number of advisory committees with industry...
- ... These committees create a dialogue between the industry and producers.
- As farm advisors, you help bridge the gap between producers and the industry. You know the importance of two-way communication.
- As well as being the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, my connection to the agriculture industry extends much farther than my professional career...
- ... I have been raising cattle on my family farm in Blackie, Alberta for many years.

- As a member of a farm family myself, I understand the dedication of the families that work and live on farms...
- Also, as a member of a farm family... I know the importance of farm succession.
- Let's face it... none of us are getting any younger.
- Farmers need the peace of mind knowing that their farm or business passes to the next generation smoothly and cost effectively with family well-being as a top priority.
- Farm succession...is key to ensuring this important industry continues to prosper.
- Farming is a business ... but it is also a way of life...
- The traditional values of farm life have remained unchanged over the years...
- But the business of farming has seen many changes ... even over the span of a single generation.

- Farming is more specialized, farms are larger ... and the investment required is greater.
- The next generation of farmers need to be better educated ...
- ...Such as with a specialized education from an agricultural college or post-secondary institution.
- Innovations in science and technology have also made their way onto Alberta farms ...
- Genetics, automated feeding systems, embryo transplantation in livestock, electronic monitoring on farm equipment ...
- ...are just some of the many advances that have changed the way farmers operate.
- Today, technology has brought the global marketplace right to our doorstep.

- The success of future generations of farmers is vital, both for the agriculture industry as a whole and the social fabric of Alberta.
- ... It hasn't been a very easy year for producers.
- But our Government has been able to respond with initiatives such as the Alberta Farm Recovery Program ...
- ... But we've also asked industry to respond with programs of their own design...
- ...In order to be competitive, industry cannot rely on the government to survive.
- If old markets aren't responding ... then find new ones.
- If your business model is outdated ... then update it.
- That's always been the strength of this industry ...
- ... The ability to adapt and respond to change.

- Because in agriculture ... if there's one constant ...
- ... It's that there's always going to be another challenge...But challenges keep us sharp ...
- ... And push us to innovate ... to create ... and adapt.
- I'm proud to say that, in Alberta, we're doing a great job ...
- ... And the future looks bright.
- I look forward to continuing to work with you to help inform farmers on how to face the challenges ahead...
- ... To build on our successes ...
- ... And to make Alberta agriculture even more competitive on the global market.
- Alberta has always been on the leading edge of agriculture in Canada ...

- ... I don't expect that to change.
- As the Minister of Agriculture and as a rural Albertan I want nothing but the best for this industry and this province.
- Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to you and share my thoughts on our industry.
- I look forward to hearing your questions, concerns and the opportunities you see to advance our sector beyond what it is today.
- Thank you for all the hard work you do to help direct the agriculture industry to sustainability and growth.
- I will now open the floor up to questions.
- Thank you.