

Meeting with Minister Carlier, Agriculture and Forestry

Alberta Legislature, Room 512, Edmonton, AB

September 6, 2016

8:30 am

In attendance:

Minister Oneil Carlier, Agriculture and Forestry

Tony Clark, Minister's Chief of Staff, Agriculture and Forestry

John Brown, Assistant Deputy Minister, Agriculture and Forestry

Doug Macaulay, ASB Program Manager, Agriculture and Forestry

Patrick Gordeyko, Chair and Northeast Representative

Lloyd Giebelhaus, Vice Chair and Northwest Representative

Steve Wikkerink, South Representative

Jim Duncan, Central Representative

Corey Beck, Peace Representative

Soren Odegard, AAMDC Representative

Trent Keller, President, AAAF

Elden Kozak, Secretary and 1st Vice President, AAAF

Maureen Vadnais, Executive Assistant, ASB Provincial Committee

The meeting started at 8:35 am with introductions around the table.

Pat congratulated John Brown on his appointment to Assistant Deputy Minister and thanked the Minister and John for their support to get funding for the Executive Assistant position for the Committee.

Pat thanked the Minister for the timely responses to the 2016 resolutions from Agriculture and Forestry and expressed concern that responses had not been received from other Ministries. Pat requested assistance from the Minister to help the Committee develop their relationship with other Ministries, in particular Environment and Parks and Transportation, as many of the issues ASBs are currently facing also affect these departments. Minister said he would talk to his counterparts.

Jim discussed the need for additional funding for the ASB Grant Program. The Committee recognizes that provincial budgets are facing tough economic times but additional funding is requested as expenses continue to rise and municipalities are now paying 80% of the costs associated with ASB programs. Minister replied that budgets are challenging at this time. Pat replied that and it is timely to review funding levels as ASBs will be signing a new grant agreement in 2017.

Corey thanked the Minister for the opportunity to be part of one of the technical working groups reviewing Bill 6. He said there was a good cross section of people appointed to the working groups but felt that the process was slow and that the working group he was on may not be able to meet the December deadline. He expressed disappointment that members from the Association of Alberta Agricultural Fieldmen (AAAF) were not represented on any of the groups or invited to attend as guests as many AAAF members have technical knowledge that would benefit the discussions. The Minister replied that the working groups need to take the appropriate time to come up with the best

recommendations but that the groups also need to keep on task so that they meet the deadlines. Corey requested that once the recommendations are put forward and the code is written that AAAF members be consulted.

Soren asked the Minister about the *Agricultural Pests Act* and when ASBs would be consulted. Soren said ASBs understood the legislation would be going forward in 2017 or 2018 to the legislature. John replied that ASBs should have seen the initial policy document and that his department is currently working on a policy document that will be the basis for the consultation with ASBs. It is expected that initial consultations will start with ASBs within six months and further consultation will occur based on the feedback received. John expects that the legislation will go to the legislature in the spring or fall of 2018. Soren requested that Agriculture and Forestry provide better support so ASBs can properly enforce the Acts. John replied that AF is aware of the lack of support that has been provided in the past and is currently working to correct that situation.

Pat started the discussion for Resolution 1: Vegetation Management on Provincial Highways with the Minister. Pat brought up that this has been controversial throughout the province and requested help from the Minister to work with Transportation to find a solution that was acceptable to everyone. The Committee members highlighted to the Minister the importance of being proactive and to do long term planning for vegetation management. They told the Minister that a long term strategy with a focus on prevention would be less expensive, more effective and improve highway safety. The Committee members discussed the different messaging that municipalities are getting from the contractors in that some are being told to issue notices to have work completed while others are able to report problem areas and the contractors take care of it. The Committee members brought up that some Transportation contractors are sub-contracting vegetation management to municipalities and adding a 20% administration fee to the bill the contractors submit to Transportation. The Minister replied that funding is limited but he understands the importance of this issue as it has been raised every time he has met with a municipality.

Lloyd started the discussion for Resolution 2: Reinstate Provincial Funding for the BSE Surveillance Program. Lloyd mentioned that the response for the resolution did not address the request for additional funding to test animals. The Committee discussed that funding may not be the only solution to address this problem as the market has changed and cull cows are more valuable than the amount requested to do the testing. The Committee requested that the Minister work with his counterparts to lower the number of animals tested due to the changes in Alberta's cow herd. Cow herds are younger and there are significantly fewer cows in Alberta than when BSE was first found. It may be more reasonable to test a percentage of the overall herd rather than focus on a specific number of 30,000. The Committee suggested that packing plants could potentially be another option if the packers were given incentives to put in separate lines for testing animals. The Minister said that there was currently no funding available to provide incentives to producers or packers and agreed that the additional funding to producers would likely not be enough of an incentive to get their animals tested. He indicated that he would look into the option of decreasing the number of animals tested or basing it on a percentage of the current cow herd.

Steve started the discussion for Resolution 3: Agricultural Plastics Recycling. Steve mentioned that this has been an issue since 2006 and it is becoming an increasing problem. More producers are using grain bags but there are no good options for disposal or recycling. Most regional waste authorities won't

accept the plastic and recycling authorities are having issues with getting plastic that is clean enough to be accepted by recyclers. This has meant that more producers are burning the plastic in order to dispose of it. The Minister replied that he has had initial discussions with Environment and Parks to look at this issue. They have reviewed the pilot project in Saskatchewan but found that the pilot is having problems because they don't have an end market for the plastic. Jim said one potential solution would be to have all the manufacturers use the same type of plastic for all agricultural plastics products and to find a plastic that would be desirable for the recycling market. Steve mentioned that a deposit may be another incentive or to look at some of the new technologies coming on the market to produce electricity from burning the plastic. Tony replied that part of the problem is with the distribution of the product and that deposit systems rely on a concentration of the product. A deposit wouldn't be an economically viable option. Tony said that new technologies to burn plastic would need to be clean and not require public investment.

Corey discussed resolutions four and five with the Minister. Corey said that the response was accepted for resolution 4: AOF Funding because it answered the resolution. He stressed the importance and impact that the Agricultural Research Associations (ARAs) have on their communities since the provincial government downsized and research shifted over to the ARAs. ARAs' expenses continue to rise and many ARAs were put in a difficult situation when the funding from the Endowment Fund was cancelled previous government as they had already started to plan for the future with new equipment, staff and programs. ARAs primary source of funding is from the government and when they have to do work for private companies, the community suffers because the information gathered from that research can't be shared and it takes away time from projects that benefit the community. Minister replied that he understands research and wants to be able to maintain funding but increasing it is not currently a financial reality. The Minister also said that the federal government is looking to increase its' investment in agricultural research in Alberta and that he will be following up with his federal counterparts to ensure those research dollars reach Alberta. The Minister felt this could help the ARAs by relieving some of their workload and allowing them to focus on projects specific to their communities.

Corey requested that the Minister provide the ASB Provincial Committee with additional information regarding the number and locations of new weather stations that had been installed through the province as the response to resolution 5 indicated.

Pat discussed resolution 6: Coyote Depredation with the Minister. Pat requested that the Minister work with his counterpart at Environment and Parks to advocate that coyotes be added to the predation management program. Coyote predation continues to be an issue and needs to be added to the list of eligible species for predation compensation.

Pat also started the discussion for resolution 8: Species at Risk Act. Pat indicated to the Minister that the Committee would be happy to work with federal and provincial governments to review the Act when a committee is struck.

The Committee members expressed frustration with the lack of response from the provincial and federal environment ministers and requested assistance with developing a better relationship with these departments. The Committee informed the Minister that we had started to develop a good working relationship with Environment and Parks under the previous government and we are interested in working collaboratively with Environment on ASB issues. The Committee requested that the Minister

inform his counterparts that we are not an advocacy group and that our resolution process is separate from the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties (AAMDC) as the Committee members felt there may be some confusion there with resolutions that go through both organizations.

The Minister requested that the Committee keep him informed about problems encountered with enforcement of the *Weed Control Act* along provincial highways. The Minister was continuing to work on issues related to *Fusarium graminearum* and was starting to hear concerns about genetically modified alfalfa being grown in Canada. He asked the Committee if they had heard any concerns with CFIA allowing genetically modified alfalfa to be grown in Alberta and Corey replied that many of the seed growers in the Peace region are concerned about how to control it. The Committee and Minister discussed the importance of maintaining a positive image for genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and discussed the possibility of introducing some of this information into the education curriculum so urban people have a better understanding of agriculture and the technology used to produce safe, healthy food.

The Committee thanked the Minister for being open and responsive to the Committee and requested that the Minister and his senior staff attend the ASB Provincial Conference resolution session in January so they could hear the discussion on the resolutions and have a better understanding of the issues being brought forward. The Committee lastly requested the Minister invite his counterparts to attend the “bear pit” session for the Provincial Conference.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 am.