



ALBERTA
AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

*Office of the Minister
MLA, Whitecourt-St. Anne*

SEP 24 2018

Ms. Shauna Feth, Chair
Mr. Ken Kobly, President and CEO
Alberta Chambers of Commerce
1808, 10025-102A Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5J 2Z2

Dear Ms. Feth and Mr. Kobly:

Thank you for your August 13, 2018, letter and attached policies. I appreciate the Alberta Chambers of Commerce's (ACC's) representation of its members, and your communication of their priorities to Alberta Agriculture and Forestry.

In this regard, please find enclosed our responses to the ACC policies related to Higher Standards for Animal Welfare, Genetically Engineered Alfalfa, and Support for Biotech in Agriculture.

If you have any questions or require further information, please feel free to contact my office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Oneil Carlier".

Oneil Carlier
Minister

Enclosure

cc: Honourable Deron Bilous, Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Andre Corbould, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry

Higher Standards for Animal Welfare

In the agricultural industry, when an animal succumbs to injury that deems the animal as unfit for transport under the legislation, the outcome is very limited and results in negative options to the farmer or rancher. It has been researched and addressed by various groups, organizations and industry that turning a blind eye to a problem is not a solution. Therefore, organizations like the Animal Farm Care Association (AFCA), along with industry, are in full support of an initiative to implement a provincial video inspection program as one way to address the issues, provide for greater access to options within the industry and reduce overall costs to the system.

Agriculture and Forestry Response

Agriculture and Forestry currently allows the inspection and sale of animals that are unfit for transport through the Appointed Vet program, which is legislated by Alberta's *Meat Inspection Act*. The Appointed Vet program allows a veterinarian to be authorized by the *Meat Inspection Act* to conduct ante-mortem inspection on farm and post-mortem inspection at a licensed abattoir. Your recommendation for video capture has the potential to provide an alternative approach for ante-mortem inspection of animals that are unfit for transport with the goal of improved outcomes for animal welfare and agriculture sector investment.

AF is committed to collaborating with industry operators and stakeholders to find a solution that provides the most benefit for the welfare of animals and increased business opportunities for industry, while ensuring food safety and the humane treatment of animals. Our Food Safety Branch will investigate the feasibility of video capture for ante-mortem inspection for animals that are unfit for transport. To discuss this further, Dr. Jeff Stewart, Executive Director, Food Safety Branch, can be reached at 780-641-9084.

Genetically Engineered Alfalfa

Genetically Engineered (GE) alfalfa has a high risk of cross contaminating conventional alfalfa crops due to seed escape and cross-pollination. Due to alfalfa's perennial nature, significant barriers exist to fully isolating alfalfa seeds. Key emerging markets maintain zero-tolerance policies towards the import of crops and seeds which are contaminated by GE alfalfa. This poses a serious threat to the province's forage seed exports and feed supplements.

Agriculture and Forestry Response

GM organisms are an important issue to many Albertans. A credible, science-based regulatory system is fundamental in effectively managing risks, reducing scientific uncertainty, and ensuring public confidence. In this regard, Alberta operates under federal legislation and regulations. The current national biotechnology regulatory system is designed to be robust and scientifically sound. The system ensures the benefits of agricultural biotechnology outweigh the risks. Alberta Agriculture and Forestry supports the federal government's science-based evaluation system, as well as its ongoing efforts in ensuring our food supply is safe.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Health Canada have approved certain GM alfalfa technologies as safe for food, feed, and the environment; however, AF recognizes there are concerns regarding potential market access implications, as GM crops are not universally accepted throughout the international market.

Forage Genetics International (FGI), a firm that holds GM alfalfa varietal registrations, has been working with the Canadian Seed Trade Association and the Alfalfa Seed Commission to commercialize the seed in Canada. In March 2016, the company announced it will offer commercial seed sales of HarvXtra™ alfalfa with Roundup Ready® Technology to farmers in Eastern Canada for hay production only. A January 2017 communique from FGI indicated that they have licensed the seed for sale and planting only in Eastern Canada, and that they would not license the seed to be grown in Western Canada. They have no plans to introduce seed production of GM alfalfa into eastern or western Canada at this time.

All seed production has taken place in the United States, with only commercial sales for hay production allowed in Eastern Canada. While we are not pursuing the legislative prevention of GM alfalfa growth in Alberta at this time, FGI is the only licensed distributor of the technology in Canada, and has publicly stated that they will not permit the sale of the seed in Western Canada.

Support Biotech in Agriculture

Advancements such as biotechnology and in particular Genetic Engineering have enabled farmers to provide a safe, reliable and economic source of food to Canadian consumers. This science has greatly increased crop yields, while dramatically decreasing the overall pesticide load associated with growing crops. It has also facilitated the widespread adoption of reduced or zero-tillage thereby significantly increased soil and water quality while reducing carbon dioxide emissions.

The message largely being transmitted by activist groups to the populace regarding Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) is of mistrust and fear and not at all backed by the scientific reality. This poses a significant threat to the agriculture industry and as a result, global food security. In fact, GMO technology is an invaluable tool for the agriculture industry with a myriad of associated benefits such as GMO Insulin and treatment for hemophilia. Despite strict regulatory oversight and innumerable studies verifying the safety of GMO foods, public perception is very poor and damaging the value of our world-class agriculture products.

Farmers, who represent less than 1% of Canadian population, have difficulty in making their voices heard in society. Urbanites and those removed from agriculture have difficulty gaining accurate information regarding how their food is grown and sufficient insight as to the vast complexities and technology advancements associated with modern agriculture. This has created a disconnect between the reality vs perception of modern agriculture, especially when it comes to GMO crops.

Thus, it is important that The Chamber of Commerce recognize how vital biotechnology is to farmers, to agriculture, to agribusiness, to consumers and to the Canadian economy.

Agriculture and Forestry Response

Agriculture and Forestry supports the research, development, and application of biotechnology in a safe and responsible manner for the benefit of the agri-food and agri-product sector and the broader public good.

The current national biotechnology regulatory system is designed to be robust and scientifically sound. The department supports the federal government's science-based evaluation system, as well as its ongoing efforts in ensuring our food supply is safe, including the approval of genetically modified organisms where appropriate.

Biotechnology is an important technology platform that provides powerful tools for direct economic gains and other broad societal benefits. More specifically, biotechnology offers great potential in:

- Achieving essential public good objectives in areas such as health and the environment;
- Strengthening the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of the agri-food and agri-product sector;
- Seizing opportunities to respond to changing global economic and environmental conditions; and
- Advancing knowledge and technology.