

Time to vote based on farm issues.

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Ah, another election. All the same things to crab about, but it's worst this time. There's a sense of anger in the crowd. Just look around at the audience...

- The prairie hog farmers pushed into big time expansion by consultant-led bureaucrats, the same ones who are now pushing "farm financial management" and "debt-counselling" courses.
- The milk and feather farmers who've had their heads down for the last decade fighting for supply management only to look up and find that concentration at the supply and processing end have put farmers' margins up for capture — supply management notwithstanding.
- The grain farmers, who together with the dairy, chicken and egg boys, have been shocked to see a once-healthy infrastructure fall to tatters in a decade; local rail lines and grain facilities gone the way of shut-down processing plants and dairies. (You can truck for a while — putting one more margin between you and your bank account. Then the price of gas goes thru the roof, all hell brakes loose and reducing stress becomes the main priority: "Guess its the end of an era...")
- The vegetable farmers, whose contracts with large processors get tighter and less equitable each year, making sustainable farming impossible.
- Just to name a few...

And standing off to one side — surrounded by men in suits — is Canada's Agriculture Minister Lyle vanClief, telling the media and any farmers still listening that there are just too many darn farmers out there and some of them are going to have to leave the sector before things get any better...

Convenient... In response to the largest farm crisis in history, vanClief, who lost the family farm in the 1980's before entering politics and becoming Canada's agriculture minister (isn't that like putting an engineer whose bridges collapse in charge of transportation?) announces that what the industry needs is more farmers going out of business... Since when does one man's therapy justify the demise of a sector?

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

Ottawa has given up on farm policy. Farmers have gone from being the darlings of caucus to political pariahs (tree huggers have more clout) in one generation. From respected members of Canada's economic and social community under Gene Whelan to "surplus" under failed-farmer-cum-agricultural-minister Lyle vanClief.

Instead of making farm policy, Ottawa controls the purse strings. Regional farmer committees (sounds so democratic) struck by bureaucrats make the decisions. Good farmers get worn down or fed up and the ever-enduring bureaucrats oversee creative little models like BC Investment Agriculture Foundation's "consensus" process: one "no" vote kills a project.

What's wrong with this picture?

CRAFTING A FARM PLATFORM

Heading into this election, let's make the very profound concerns of Canadian farmers KNOWN to

politicians: globalization; elimination of farm subsidies and financial supports; dilution of crop disaster mechanisms; increased import competition from monoculture, factory farms; reduction in trade protection (CITT); increasing land and environmental compliance costs; the undermining of cooperatives; attacks on supply management; fundamental changes in market structure (highly concentrated suppliers and buyers; withdrawal of local processing capacity; large food conglomerates take over from independent processors, distributors, retailers); multinational contract integration of farm sector; dramatic fall in farm income (decapitalization); dramatic increase in farm debt and a loss of independence of Canada's farmers.

DON'T TAKE "GO" FOR AN ANSWER

Just a problem of too many farmers? C'mon, Lyle, you can do better than that... And if you can't, someone else deserves to try.

This election, make farming a priority. Ask the politicians what should be done to resolve the farm crisis. Question them on the problems facing Canada's farmers. Remind them that everyone eats for a living. Don't take "GO" for an answer. Tell them you want policy and economic respect for sustainable agriculture (there are plenty of models being developed in other OECD countries worth evaluating). Then vote based on FARM ISSUES.

And when the last ballot is counted and the winners' announced, treat yourself for all that hard work and come to Cuba with the Canada-Cuba Farmer to Farmer Project! Join farmers from across Canada (BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario) and experience a culture that respects farmers and offers very strategic partnership opportunities for Canada.

Why should farmer collaboration be restricted by geographics? Hitching together Canada's capital, processing, packaging, international marketing, sales and distribution capacity with Cuba's world leadership in organic production capacity, rich soils, ample water and beneficent climate just plain makes sense. Multinational co-ops can run rings around existing players because they are lighter and faster and can go where many of the multinationals cannot.

Improving Canada-Cuba farmer linkages also makes sense from the trade side. Canadian farmers have many products they would like to sell to Cuba, including specialty wines, cheeses, meats and vegetables for exclusive tourist resorts; grains and legumes; dairy cattle embryos; Cuba has many products they would like to sell to Canada, such as organic honey, fruits, juices, herbs and coffee. Building a new, cooperative trade box where exports are credits and imports are debits offers an interesting trade and economic strategy for Canada's farmers.

Sharing profits equitably and ethically between farmers in Canada and Cuba. Capturing back the margins from multinationals. Understanding and empowering sustainability.

Twenty to twenty five farmers per tour (five spaces per for Agrologists or related professionals). As we go to press, the November tour is sold out, the December tour has 6 seats, the January 15th tour is booking fast and the February 26th tour is almost closed. The February 5th tour is still fairly open.

Let's get moving... It's *All* about politics. The politics of empowerment.