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September 2011
QUESTIONS FOR PC LEADERSHIP CANDIDATES

It's Alberta's largest renewable resource and second largest industry, yet agriculture barely appears on the radar in the current PC leadership race.

In an effort to raise the profile of agriculture with our soon-to-be Premier, WRAP met with four of the leadership candidates in late August and early September to solicit their views on a few agricultural issues. Three of those candidates – Doug Horner, Gary Mar, and Alison Redford – subsequently made it through to the second vote scheduled for October 1. Congratulations to all!

During our meetings, we received firm commitments that the candidates would also provide written responses to the questions we posed so that we could then share that information with you, our readers. The responses from Alison Redford and Doug Horner are provided in the links below. Sadly, despite having promised to have something to us by September 5, and numerous reminders of that commitment, we're still waiting for Gary Mar's responses. We'll keep you posted if he gets back to us.

The following pages contain the responses from the candidates on the four subjects discussed:

- * CWB
- * Checkoff Support
- * Investment in Co-operatives
- * Access to Lands



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CWB

The government of Manitoba has called on the federal government to hold a producer vote on the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) single desk for wheat and barley. As leader of your party, are you in favor or opposed to a democratically held producer plebiscite to determine whether producers would like to continue with single desk marketing or have an open market and why? What is your position on the SM5 (supply managed commodities that include dairy, chickens, hatching eggs, table eggs, and turkeys)?

Alison Redford:

I support farmers' right to select how best to sell their produce and I will back the choice they ultimately make.

Supply-managed commodities fall within federal jurisdiction. I have a strong interest in ensuring that Ottawa treats Alberta's farmers fairly and respectfully and I will always be willing to go to bat for them in difficult circumstances. However, I feel that the federal government's leadership of supply-managed commodities works reasonably well and I have no immediate plans to push for change.

Doug Horner:

I am a solid supporter of choice – producers should be able to determine how they market their products. The CWB should be given the assistance they need to be a valuable and viable option for marketing and the infrastructure should be there to allow that to happen. The SM5 is working well and nothing needs to be done on that front.



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Checkoff support

General farm organizations (GFOs) work on behalf of all farmers and ranchers to address agricultural issues and needs that are not specific to any particular commodity. Alberta is one of the few jurisdictions in Canada that does not have a legislated stable funding mechanism (checkoff) in place for GFOs. The challenge of raising adequate funds to operate effectively under the existing voluntary membership system severely limits the ability for GFOs in this province to advocate for producers at the national level. This in turn places Alberta producers at a distinct disadvantage, with federal agricultural policy often being determined by strong farm organizations from every other province in Canada. As leader of your party, are you in favour or opposed to a checkoff for Alberta GFOs and why?

Alison Redford:

Bill 43 (The Marketing of Agricultural Products Amendment Act, 2009) made check-offs voluntary instead of mandatory and it did so with very specific objectives in mind. Before making any decision as to how check-offs should be administered, my government will study the bill's impact closely and consult with producers to see if the consequences match the intended outcomes.

Doug Horner:

I look forward to seeing a business plan regarding checkoff support for GFOs that includes an industry association perspective.



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Investment in co-operatives

Rural communities in Alberta continue to face immense challenges to their ongoing viability, including the loss of businesses and economic infrastructure. New co-operatives have demonstrated they have a significant role to play in mitigating economic decline in rural areas, however, barriers in their development processes have limited the number of new co-operatives being established. As leader of your party, would you support the creation of a more favourable policy, tax, and investment climate for co-operative development in Alberta?

Alison Redford:

One of the planks in my agricultural platform includes an incentive and reward system aimed at getting farmers to improve the way they operate and use energy. I think that co-ops are a realistic and potentially innovative option, especially for areas suffering from population decline and revenue loss. I will support their creation as part of my policy encouraging farmers to devise smarter, more efficient production methods. I have already pledged to make Alberta's agricultural regulatory framework more flexible to respond to changing market conditions and this includes easing the growth of co-ops.

Doug Horner:

I support the creation of tax incentives to facilitate investment in co-operatives, Alberta agriculture, and value added.



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Access to lands

Farmers and ranchers are the primary owners of land in the province and there is increasing demand for access to these lands. The provincial government has introduced and passed government bills that have put pressures on the rights of these landowners. Farmers and landowners feel they have been left out of the discussions that have led to the development and implementation of these initiatives. How would a government led by you address the issue of consultation on these land issues that affect all provincial landowners?

Alison Redford:

I will restore the agricultural sector's confidence in provincial land management with three Cs: consultation, compensation and the courts.

Consultation: My government will suspend implementation of the land use framework and reopen consultations between landowners, the province and industry. All stakeholders will come together for transparent discussions to air their opinions on the issue. Landowners will have the chance to hear about government and industry's plans, goals and intentions and publicly question them in open forums. I do not expect 100 percent agreement, but I am hoping for 100 percent participation.

Compensation: I will add provisions to the controversial legislation mandating that all land acquisitions must include market-value compensation under the existing expropriation statute — no exceptions. I will also include an amendment allowing landowners to trigger a sale under the terms of the expropriation statute at any time in the negotiating process, so they always have the initiative.

Courts: I will enshrine property owners' right to turn to the courts for fair and impartial redress if they are unhappy with the offered terms. The courts exist to protect property rights and Albertans will have every opportunity to use them to their advantage.

Doug Horner:

The Government of Alberta must help develop an enhanced suite of tools to ensure that private and public land managers are able to maximize both the economic and environmental benefits of AB's land base while respecting individual property rights. Discussions through this process need to be open and transparent.