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NEWSLETTER

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Rod Stork Joins OFPMC as New Chair

The Ontario Farm Products Marketing Commission has a new Chair. Rod Stork was appointed to this position just before Christmas. The following is an open letter from Rod Stork.

First and foremost, I am looking forward to speaking with you in the days and weeks ahead. It's my ambition to work with all stakeholders in Ontario's regulated commodities. Today's marketplace is complex. We will no doubt find ourselves reacting and adjusting to some of the forces we cannot influence. At the same time I feel that working together in a frank and open manner can make us better able to address these challenges and manage others so they do not become problems.

While I am new to the Commission, I have twenty-nine year's experience in Ontario's agri-food sector. Most recently, I have been the Director of Economic Development in the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs with additional geographic responsibilities for the ministry's field services to Northern Ontario clients.

My background contains a lot of field experience and contact with producers and agri-business. This has given me considerable exposure to farm and commodity organizations and their issues.

When I moved from Saskatchewan to work with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs in 1970, I became an assistant agricultural representative in Durham County. Since that time I

enjoyed being an ag. rep. in the Niagara area and went on to become a regional manager in eastern Ontario for the Agricultural Representatives Branch. I also worked as the Director of Kemptville College of Agricultural Technology for a time. All this means that I have worked across the province in a variety of capacities but with the same goal of helping Ontario's agri-food sector realize its potential. A goal I feel continues with the new work I am looking forward to at the Commission.

The role for a knowledgeable third party like the Ontario Farm Products Marketing Commission is essential to a regulated system. I think we are fortunate that this regulatory body is concerned with more than rules. It seems to me that this Commission is made up of your peers who want to see you succeed while overseeing a system that has contributed to stability and reliability in the marketing of food. The Commission's Vision Statement says it wants to contribute to a "dynamic, competitive agri-food sector". I completely agree and hope to tangibly contribute to this statement.

Best wishes to you in this new year."

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Opposing Biotechnology Viewpoints Meet At OFPMC Seminar

"Open debate, not closed as in Europe, is the key to a rational resolution over GM" according to Family Tradition Foods' president, John Omstead speaking at OFPMC's annual fall seminar. This was also the Commission's approach when it invited Greenpeace Canada executive director, Peter Tabuns and Ontario Agri-Food Technologies' president, Gord Surgeoner to make presentations at the seminar.

While representing Greenpeace, Mr. Tabuns stressed that they are not alone in their concerns. Wary of the tendency of critics to label their data as junk science, Mr. Tabuns quoted the British Medical Association; Canada's Environment Commissioner, and the head of the Canadian Wheat Board to support concerns over biotechnology.

The main concerns of Greenpeace deal with what they believe is biotechnology's irreversibility and unpredictability. In Mr. Tabuns' words, "So we have a situation where you have products that are qualitatively new, whose release is irreversible and whose long term effects are unpredictable. Why would you take a risk on something whose effects we won't understand for many years nor whose negative effects are containable?"

Mr. Tabuns summarized the position of the British Medical Association as follows. "While there is some future utility for GM foods, they should be banned unless segregation of all GM foods is instituted and labeling occurs."

In this closing remarks, Mr. Tabuns took on the popular argument that no one has ever died from eating GM foods. He said that, "we don't monitor for the health impacts of these foods. We don't segregate. We don't label. So we wouldn't know if some sort of long term illness arose because we literally aren't looking for it."

In the spirit of the seminar, Mr. Surgeoner prefaced his remarks saying, "I agree with Mr. Tabuns on

some things and on others, I disagree. But that is what I think we need for a healthy debate."

Mr. Surgeoner echoed the sentiment that biotechnology, "is a powerful, new technology. It is not just simply an extension." With biotechnology we can move genetic information from bacteria into plants and from plant to plant between species. "It is also closely regulated. The safety of foods, and the high standards that Canadians expect are all part and parcel of what is taking place at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency" according to Mr. Surgeoner.

Mr. Surgeoner submits that for every report from organizations like the British Medical Association there are others like the American Medical Association who disagree.

Mr. Surgeoner feels that labeling would be misleading to consumers rather than illuminating. At the same time, the cost of a mandatory labeling system with audit and enforcement would add substantial costs to consumers' shopping carts. KPMG studied this in Australia and estimated food costs would rise three to six percent.

Speaking of consumer fear of the unknown, Mr. Surgeoner said that is normal and it's healthy. By analogy, people feared ice cubes made in the first refrigerators and restaurants set up separate rooms for microwave ovens when they first appeared. It's a normal reaction to new technology, but Mr. Surgeoner is pleased with polling he says shows two out of every three Canadians feel some biotechnology risk is OK.

As important as it is to have an opinion on this issue, it is equally important to have your ears open to the opinions of others. With this part of the seminar, the Commission made this opportunity available to marketing boards and buyer/processors.

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OFPMC January Update:

Chicken Allocation:

Representatives from Ontario's chicken industry met with the Commission on December 8th to review the Commission's decision regarding a new live chicken allocation system for the province. The Commission's 13-point decision resulted from an industry hearing during the week of September 27, 1999. During the hearing, stakeholders outlined the systemic problems they encounter and offered solutions.

According to former Commission Chair, Don Taylor, "The decision is comprehensive while also trying to remain straightforward, transparent and flexible. We want Ontario's chicken industry to be in a solid position to work co-operatively and prosper."

Once changes are in place, Ontario's live chicken supply will be based on the sum of independent processor requests submitted confidentially to Chicken Farmers of Ontario (CFO). At present, CFO determines this based on recommendations from the Association of Ontario Chicken Processors, which

represents many but not all processors.

The allocation process still involves the Chicken Farmers of Canada (CFC) who set provincial chicken allocations and must review Ontario's request.

In determining how live chicken is to be allocated to primary processors in Ontario, related questions concerning pricing, new entrants, exports, and category sizing were addressed. OFPMC is directing CFO to work with industry partners to develop a formula-based approach to live chicken pricing based on feed cost, chick cost and a producer margin. The feed and chick costs will be based on published industry prices, while the producer margin will be negotiated between CFO and processors. Live chicken pricing is to be available to primary processors in advance of their allocation requests.

The Commission's decision also addresses how new entrants in the processing sector will have access to chicken.

Details of implementation are being worked out by Chicken Farmers of Ontario who have a 60-day window to complete this next step.

Complete details of the Commission's decision are available on our website which can be found at www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/farmproducts/index.html.

Dairy Product Packaging

Dairy Farmers of Ontario and the Ontario Dairy Council met collectively with the Commission to request and discuss changes to regulated package sizes for milk. This is a progressive step aimed at facilitating the competitiveness of Ontario's milk industry vis-à-vis other single serving beverages in the marketplace. It is expected that these changes will increase milk sales in this part of the market.

Regulatory changes still need to be made, but no obstacles are foreseeable at this time.

Use of Producer Funds

The Commission will be releasing its revised guidelines for the use of producer funds by marketing boards early in the new year. Regulatory changes were required to accommodate requests from marketing boards for more flexibility in reporting requirements. Also, recent changes to the provincial Trustee Act also impact on the situation boards find themselves in when investing surplus funds. Each marketing board will receive a copy of these guidelines.

Advanced ADR Training

Multi-party negotiation skills are the focus of an advanced Alternative Dispute Resolution training course that will be led by the legal firm, Stitt Feld Handy Houston on February 1st and 2nd. The Commission is co-ordinating participation from marketing boards and buyer/processors and in so doing, manages to negotiate a significant tuition discount for participants. To be eligible, participants must have completed the introductory ADR course. Contact Graham Howe at (519) 826-3404 for details.

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