

## **Editorial**

### **New markets need new strategies**

Standing still never got anyone anywhere, and the same holds true for farmers and their marketing programs and policies. So why is it that orderly marketing systems and farm support programs developed in the past 30 years are continually being defended at almost any cost? They should, instead, be updated to meet the demands of the new global economy with its vanishing borders and associated environmental and social concerns.

Farmers are justified in their efforts to defend what took them years to establish. And while there is no argument against these forward-thinking policies or programs introduced years ago that helped develop agriculture into a more prosperous business today, serious questions need to be addressed concerning the long term interest of the farm community. As it stands now, farm lobbies are spending too much effort in trying to avoid changes rather than simply managing for changes in the marketplace.

For instance, in terms of introducing new markets (energy, paper products, etc.) into the agriculture sector, current crop-based farm income support programs are one of the major barriers slowing down industry progress. How can farmers be interested in producing switchgrass for ethanol when the crop is not eligible under any farm program? How can any rational decision-maker invest in the potential of a future market opportunity when growing conventional cash crops is, in comparison, nearly risk-proof?

Current farm income support programs are making farmers increasingly vulnerable to change rather than allowing them to profit from changes in the marketplace.

Instead of supporting farmers at any cost, a new policy framework that will allow organic agriculture and non-food markets to be treated on an equal level with conventional crops

needs to be developed. For example, supporting net incomes in a different fashion than under the current NISA program would be the first step in the right direction. Once such a system has been established, producers will be able to consider *all* market opportunities and will pick the most profitable for their particular farm and region. A domino effect of unique market and environmental opportunities are guaranteed to follow, and public spending in the agricultural sector will decrease in the long term as the well-being of farmers is improved.

Current farm programs brought agriculture to where it is now, and producers have a right to be proud. But the development of new strategies must be an ongoing process, or else the next generation of farmers will be paying the price as other countries commercialize new agricultural technologies and Canada is left floundering without any opportunities or advantages in the global marketplace.

Copyright © 1994 *REAP Canada*