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(Commission Secretary)

I would like to thank the commissioners for the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Ian Wishart, and together with my wife Leslie, we operate Agasea Farms north of Portage la Prairie. Our farm is 1,200 acres of specialty crops, including potatoes and beans, cereals and oilseeds. We also have 1,300 acres in hay and pasture, a 160 beef cow-calf operation plus a beef feedlot for 450 head. We are not hog producers, and although I understand that is your focus, precedents you set for that industry will become the industry standards for all.

Farmers are very aware of environmental issues, we live the impacts directly and see the results far more clearly than most Manitobans. We are, in fact, one of the groups that have taken action to deal with issues – some by regulation, some by voluntary efforts.

Let me give you an idea of the amount of reporting and documentation that we do on an ongoing basis.

Annually: Manure management plans are filed, in our case, for two locations.
Food safety manuals completed, which contain substantial environmental details, in our case, for both major processors.

Nutrient Management Plans – voluntary, but necessary to manage nutrients carefully. A substantial portion of our farm is located over a known aquifer.

Environmental Farm Plan – voluntary, and good for several years. The process has been worthwhile, but has generated a long list of activities that we would like to complete. Some of the actions we have already undertaken include a managed marshland to deal with feedlot runoff, well sealing, forage buffer strips and portable livestock shelters.

Earlier I mentioned Nutrient Management Planning. This is something we have been doing in a fairly formal manner for our own purposes for more than 10 years. It is very similar to the approach being taken by Water Stewardship to deal with nutrient losses from land. To make this work effectively, it must be done on a site specific basis and integrate good economic farm management practices that make sense to producers. This I believe can be accomplished, but it requires a learning process for both industry and government.

Government is often tempted into thinking they can get real change in landscape management simply by regulating. They also often believe that this is the most cost effective way. The real cost of regulation is a lot more than the cost of conservation officers or other forms of "environmental police". The real cost is the impact on the industry. The high start up costs that drive a young farmer out of business or influence them never to start. It is the cost of rural depopulation and loss of infrastructure and the cost of building that infrastructure somewhere else. As an industry we have lots of regulation but other jurisdictions have achieved better results by the proper use of incentives.

Programs like Alternative Land Use Services as an example. This is an innovative program that rewards farmers for the environmental benefits they provide for all Manitobans. Things like clean air, clean water, biodiversity and habitat - things that are not rewarded in the market place that we sell our food and fibre products into. These are things that all Manitobans want from those that manage the landscape and like education and health care, they are public benefits for all and should be funded accordingly.

Programs like the Riparian Tax Credit (Manitoba), although limited in scope certainly move in that direction. Even some of the Beneficial Management Practices through the Environmental Farm Plans touch on this, but leave the farmer to deal with ongoing costs. Ultimately however, it is incentive programs like these that will accomplish the necessary change in thinking on the part of both government and industry that is required to create the sustainable industry we all seek.

Part of your mandate is to look at how other jurisdictions have handled this issue. I encourage you to do this, but take the opportunity to learn of the shortcomings and strengths, not simply to copy. Our situation in Manitoba is unique and we need a unique solution. I believe the use of site specific Nutrient Management Plans is an excellent first step. Learning how to manage nutrients by crop removal is key to finding the solution. I would like to refer you to the European attempt to regulate nutrient use and application via the "check book" method. They strictly measured nutrients in and nutrients out on each farm for many years, only to find that they could not account for substantial "natural source"

occurrence in both nitrogen and phosphorus. This approach has now been abandoned in many areas in favour of the site specific approach.

Carbon, phosphorus and nitrogen, along with sunlight are the natural building blocks of life. The only way to achieve a sustainable industry for all of agriculture is to learn how to manage the resources for the benefit of all. Poorly designed policy will only limit the potential, not only for the hog industry, but ultimately, for all Manitobans.

Thank you.

Ian Wishart, P.Ag.