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**Official Report
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(Hansard)**

Tuesday 7 April 2015

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mardi 7 avril 2015

**Standing Committee on
Finance and Economic Affairs**

Agriculture Insurance Act
(Amending the Crop Insurance
Act, 1996), 2015

**Comité permanent des finances
et des affaires économiques**

Loi de 2015 sur l'assurance
agricole (modifiant la Loi de 1996
sur l'assurance-récolte)

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES**

Tuesday 7 April 2015

Mardi 7 avril 2015

The committee met at 1301 in the Delta Guelph Hotel and Conference Centre, Guelph.

**AGRICULTURE INSURANCE ACT
(AMENDING THE CROP INSURANCE
ACT, 1996), 2015**

**LOI DE 2015 SUR L'ASSURANCE
AGRICOLE (MODIFIANT LA LOI DE 1996
SUR L'ASSURANCE-RÉCOLTE)**

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 40, An Act to amend the Crop Insurance Act (Ontario), 1996 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts / *Projet de loi 40, Loi modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur l'assurance-récolte (Ontario) et apportant des modifications corrélatives à d'autres lois.*

The Chair (Ms. Soo Wong): Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs. We are assembled here in Guelph this afternoon to hold public hearings on Bill 40, An Act to amend the Crop Insurance Act (Ontario), 1996 and to make consequential amendments to other Acts. As ordered by the committee, each witness will be offered five minutes for their presentation, followed by nine minutes of questioning from the committee members, or three minutes per party.

**CHRISTIAN FARMERS
FEDERATION OF ONTARIO**

The Chair (Ms. Soo Wong): Any questions from the committee members before we begin? Seeing none, at this point I'm going to call the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario. I believe we have Lorne Small, the president, here. Mr. Small, welcome. You can just sit right there in front of the microphone.

When you begin, Mr. Small, can you please identify yourself and your position with your organization for the purposes of Hansard? That would be great. Thank you and welcome.

Mr. Lorne Small: Good afternoon. I am Lorne Small, president of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario. It's a delight to be here to make a presentation to the standing committee. Welcome to Guelph. Usually when we make a presentation to you folks, we have to go to the big city, so this is quite a pleasant change. We're kind of

fond of Guelph here, and it's nice to see some of my friends and colleagues that I've worked with over the years here as well.

The Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario is an accredited general farm organization operating in the province of Ontario, representing the interests of over 4,100 farm families in the province. Our organization is in full support of the legislative changes proposed in Bill 40. For farmers who produce livestock and run uninsurable specialty crops the question is, why has this taken so long? For many years there have been indications from many legislators that this bill was on their to-do list, but it never happened until now. We would urge you to move it along as expediently as possible. This is an important new vehicle for farmers to manage risk. With better risk management tools, farm families can invest and grow their businesses and help Ontario prosper.

We realize that these proposed changes are only enabling legislation; however, it does allow for expanded risk management beyond the traditional insurable crops. It would be up to the farm community to make the case for the expanded insurance that this legislation will now permit. We fully expect that some of the ideas put forward in the future will not meet the criteria established by the minister, but other ideas will meet the threshold. Some ideas that do not meet the test today may, in fact, meet the test as conditions change in the future. This more inclusive legislation, at the very least, will open the door for intelligent discussion as to how farmers can best manage their risk exposure.

We have talked to a number of our members about expanding crop insurance and some potential ideas have emerged.

Insurance for the honeybee industry: In recent years, some beekeepers have experienced major losses of their colonies, while neighbouring apiaries have had no such experience. The province has provided some assistance on an ad hoc basis, but a consistent, longer-term insurance program would be much more bankable and provide more comfort to the creditors that farmers depend upon.

Insurance for catastrophic livestock diseases: The pork industry has been hit with a new catastrophic disease that we now know as PED. It's lethal to young pigs, killing thousands of piglets in the last 18 months in Canada and the United States. Governments have provided some assistance on an ad hoc basis to affected pork producers. However, an established, consistent insurance program

would be more bankable. The cattle and sheep industry has been hit with catastrophic disease incidents, notably BSE in 2003, that devastated the industry. Government did provide assistance on an ad hoc basis, which was sincerely appreciated, but here again, a stable, bankable program with clear outcomes would be preferred to ad hoc programs.

Insurance for catastrophic poultry diseases: The poultry industry is vulnerable to several bird diseases that can kill thousands of birds in just a few hours. Regardless of how rigorous the bio-security protocols in place are, outbreaks do occur. Currently, we see avian flu outbreaks in Montana, Dakota and, as of yesterday, Woodstock, Ontario. Compensation is already provided for “reportable diseases,” but not all poultry losses are classed as reportable. Insurance would provide a tool to reduce the risk that farmers face.

Insurance for predation: Sheep and beef cows calving on pasture are very vulnerable to coyote kills. The province has for many years compensated producers for wildlife deaths. Many other provinces do not provide compensation. Sometimes the compensation rates have been close to market values; sometimes they fall short. A few people have floated the idea that converting this program to an insurance program would allow compensation to be more predictable and might also reduce payments to producers who neglect to use industry-standard preventive practices.

Insurance for world exotic diseases invading Canada: Climate change is a big unknown for farmers. More extreme weather patterns may bring new diseases to our country. Our Canadian population now comes from all corners of the planet and frequently travel back to those regions, making Canadian farmers vulnerable. In the past, our harsh winter weather has prevented many tropical and world diseases from coming to Canada. That protective curtain is now threatened. We do not know what future disease mutations may be a challenge to our farms and food supply. We thought measles was eliminated from our human population. It is possible that animal diseases that we assume are conquered will make a comeback. Will we read names from the past, such as Newcastle disease, bluetongue, Q fever, blackleg etc. in the headlines of our newspapers? If so, insurance coverage would be preferred to begging governments for a new ad hoc program.

Insurance for the maple sugar industry: Maple syrup producers are very dependent on the weather. Climate change has the potential to enhance production and, in some years, to devastate production as well. Investment in the industry may depend on having risk management tools available to them.

There are two caveats we would like to add: The expansion of the program to include non-crop farm production will not reduce the financial support for existing insured crops, and, lastly, insurance coverage is not used as a crutch for management practices that do not meet modern standards.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our ideas and suggestions with you. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you very much, Mr. Small. We begin this round of questioning with the official opposition party: Mr. Arnott or Mr. Pettapiece.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Yes. Thank you, Chair. I’ve only got a couple of questions, and one has to do with the sheep business. Is scrapie a prevalent disease in sheep now, or has it pretty much been eliminated?

Mr. Lorne Small: As sheep producers, we like to think it has been eliminated. It’s still around and probably will be around forever. There’s a sophisticated management program out there. There are protocols to eliminate it from your flock, but it has just been around and it’s one of those ones that I don’t think is going to go away. It takes so long to incubate that it’s hard to—they get infected and it’s five or six years later before you know that they’re infected. Barring a massive search program to check every sheep in Ontario, it’s going to be with us. It’s not a catastrophic disease; it’s just a real ugly nuisance, but it has that link to BSE that people are uncomfortable with.

1310

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: And slaughter is still the only means of getting rid of it if you have it.

Mr. Lorne Small: Yes, and hopefully they don’t bury them on their own farm, because it lingers in the soil.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Okay. The next thing I’d like to talk about is coyotes. Have you seen the population of coyotes expanding and getting bigger than it was in a few previous years?

Mr. Lorne Small: I have a little different take than most people on coyotes. I believe they’re manageable. We have sheep and we have a den of coyotes living in the gravel pit in the farm behind us. I call them “my coyotes.” I try to leave almost a managed system. I leave fencerows so there are rabbits for them to eat in the wintertime. I would rather they learn to eat things other than my sheep.

I also fence for coyotes; everything is protected with an electric fence. In 25 years, I have not had a coyote strike, but we have neighbours who didn’t invest in the proper technology to prevent it, and they’re teaching my coyotes to eat lamb. I’m not happy about it. That’s why some of the comments in there—with a good insurance program, as we talked about here, the bad actors would not be eligible for compensation. Now they are.

The Chair (Ms. Soo Wong): I think Mr. Arnott has a question. There’s only one more minute left for your round.

Mr. Ted Arnott: No, you go.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Just one short question: On the bee issue, is that something that you would relate to beekeepers, that maybe sometimes it has been a management problem more than an insecticide problem?

Mr. Lorne Small: There are four problems for the bees. One of them may be insecticide. One of them is substandard management. Another is a tremendous

change in the crops that we grow—biodiversity. So there's more than one issue.

I have a lot of empathy with the beekeepers; I'm a beekeeper myself.

The Chair (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you very much. I'm going to go to Mr. Vanthof; sorry. Mr. Vanthof, you have questions?

Mr. John Vanthof: Yes, I do. Thank you very much for coming, Mr. Small. Hopefully we can make this a repeat performance of bringing the government to Guelph, to agriculture, as opposed to the other way around.

One thing I'd like to focus on is one of your caveats. As you know now, the crop insurance program under the current regime is 40% paid for by the private sector, the farmer; 26% by the province; and the remaining 34% by the feds, roughly. If you're going to increase the amount of products covered, the main question is: Where is the money going to come from, specifically at the provincial level? What are your comments if that money was to come from the Risk Management Program? Would that be a benefit or a net loss to agriculture?

Mr. Lorne Small: I look at it coming from the same risk management envelope, as crop insurance is part of the risk management system as well. I did make the comment in there that we didn't want the grains and oilseeds sector to suffer because we add bees and sheep to the equation. I was just hoping that as Ontario grows and prospers, there would be more money in the pot for everyone.

Mr. John Vanthof: I think you and I would be in agreement with that. That's one of the worries with this—we're fully in favour of this change. As you mentioned in your presentation—which was very comprehensive, by the way—it's high time this happened. But where the rubber is going to meet the road is: Who pays?

One thing you mentioned a couple of times is that it's predictable. I can remember when risk management was put together by the various stakeholders and the government. One of the things was that it was bankable and predictable. Then right after that, it was capped at \$100 million, and it no longer was—it's a good program, but it's no longer bankable or truly predictable. If the Risk Management Program is further weakened by transferring money to this, in our opinion it's a net loss to farmers.

Mr. Lorne Small: There is perhaps another avenue, and that is if the grains and oilseeds sector invest personally in their own risk management program and mitigate some of the losses so there isn't nearly the exposure. In fact, the number of claims that you need to meet that need is reduced.

I think that, with the warnings from global warming, there may be more diversification and other kinds of things in the grain and oilseeds sector that would reduce the demand for public support for some of those programs. That's a long shot, but I see a lot of changes coming. A lot of very good, professional folks in that industry were making great gains in having a more reliable

crop each and every year, and less crop disasters than we've experienced—

The Chair (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay, Mr. Small, I'm going to turn to the government side.

Mr. Baker, do you want to ask a question?

Mr. Yvan Baker: Thanks so much for coming in today. It's a thrill for us to be here. I'm from a riding called Etobicoke Centre, which is on the west side of the city of Toronto. It's a suburban riding. I'm thrilled to be here today. I know all my colleagues are, as well.

My question was—if you could just step back and share a little bit. You talked a little bit about the ad hoc support the industry has received from government over the past few years. You've got this bill. Are there other ways in which the government supports this sector, and which of those, if any, are important?

Mr. Lorne Small: I guess there are a lot of ways the government supports agriculture. And I'm very familiar with where Etobicoke is. I lived for many years in downtown Toronto, and the business we operated was in Scarborough, so welcome to the Scarborough MPPs. That's the place in the greater Toronto area where the work gets done. The thinkers and planners live in Toronto, but when you want to get the job done, you go to Scarborough.

The Chair (Ms. Soo Wong): I told you.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I think we have some thinkers and some doers in Etobicoke, too.

Mr. Lorne Small: My allegiance is to Scarborough.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I completely understand that. Soo and I have this discussion all the time.

Mr. Lorne Small: But Etobicoke comes—maybe after Toronto. It's third.

Mr. Yvan Baker: I won't hold that against you.

Could you just share, for those of us who aren't as familiar with the sector, a little bit about how the government supports the sector and what supports are the most important?

Mr. Lorne Small: Some of us remember, before crop insurance came into being, back in the early 1960s, where you had variations in weather, and all of a sudden the government was responsible for putting ad hoc programs together. I remember working in Northumberland county at the time. One township got coverage, and because the rain gauges weren't quite the same in Hastings county, they didn't get the money. It was a very nasty fight between two townships.

That's the kind of thing that encouraged people to put crop insurance in place: "These are the rules. Everyone follows the rules." You're not dealing with ad hoc programs all the time. I think farmers, as a general group, would prefer not to need government assistance for ad hoc programs. We'd prefer to build our businesses, which are resilient, and we need to get there. It's almost a follow-up to the comment I made to John. Let's build our businesses more resilient. I think all businesses are starting to look at that, and agriculture needs to get there as well.

This is one of those areas where we can, in fact, encourage people, through insurance, to plan ahead and preferably not claim insurance, ever. We insure our buildings, and the last thing you want to do is to have your house burn down so you can claim insurance. That's the strength, I think, of moving on the insurance route: Good operators can get insurance. If you're a sloppy operator, sorry; you don't qualify.

The Chair (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay, Mr. Small. Thank you very much for your presentation and for answering the questions.

GRAIN FARMERS OF ONTARIO

The Chair (Ms. Soo Wong): All right. The next group coming before us is the Grain Farmers of Ontario: Mr. Scott Persall, board member. Welcome. Can you sit right in front of where the microphone is lit?

Before you begin, can you identify yourself and your position with the Grain Farmers of Ontario? And if you have any handouts, you can give them to the Clerk as well. Okay?

Mr. Scott Persall: Yes.

The Chair (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. Welcome.

1320

Mr. Scott Persall: Thank you very much. My name is Scott Persall. I'm a farmer in Norfolk county and I am presently a member on the executive board with the Grain Farmers of Ontario.

I'd like to thank you for inviting the Grain Farmers of Ontario today to address the revisions of the Crop Insurance Act. I'd like to just start with that the Grain Farmers of Ontario represents over 28,000 farmers in Ontario. We represent the three major grain and oilseeds crops: corn, soybeans and wheat.

I'd like to just go on with my presentation here. Crop insurance is a very important tool for grain and oilseeds farmers. Crop insurance is part of the suite of risk management tools that grain and oilseeds farmers need to manage business and farming risks, to keep Ontario grain and oilseeds farmers competitive with other regions of the world that have similar programs, and to provide farmers with the confidence to reinvest in their own businesses.

Other risk management tools, like RMP and Agri-Stability, have seen massive cuts over the last couple of years. Crop insurance is one tool that needs to remain unchanged. It works for farmers, and the investment on the part of the province provides many dividends to Ontario's triple bottom line; it provides benefits for the people of Ontario, the economy in Ontario and Ontario's environment.

Today's crop insurance is primarily a grain and oilseeds program. There are over 90 crops that are covered by crop insurance, but 80% of the program is subscribed by grain and oilseeds producers. We believe that expanding risk management tools for other parts of agriculture is a sound idea, but it is important to recognize that the current crop insurance program was set up,

and has been delivered, to address the needs of crop farmers.

We urge the government to proceed with caution as changes are made to the act and the subsequent programs are designed: that throughout this process there are mechanisms in place to ensure the integrity of the current program and the benefits of the insurance programs to grain and oilseeds farmers remain intact before proceeding with any other changes.

Crop insurance is a good investment for the province, as it is a cost-shared program between the province with 24%, the federal at 36% and the farmer paying 40% of the costs. This insurance not only helps out farmers when the unexpected happens on their farm but gives farm businesses the confidence to reinvest in their farm.

These investments help achieve other policy objectives of the Ontario government, including farm investments and environmental practices such as no-till. The results of no-till are a lowering of greenhouse gas emissions on the farm and lower inputs, because the farmers have confidence to invest in precision agriculture equipment that targets input uses using GPS maps. It allows us to integrate pest management tools and also improve the efficiencies of fertilizer applications.

Last year, the Premier challenged agriculture to grow the sector. Programs like crop insurance provide farmers with the tools needed to help grow the sector. Without the insurance, farmers would not take the risk to build their businesses; they would need to focus their efforts on managing their risks.

Around the world, governments provide their farmers with programs to manage risks. The United States, for example, just passed a farm bill that provides farmers with a suite of support programs. They are more robust and, many say, less efficient than crop insurance in Ontario. Ontario farmers are not low-cost producers, and we have competitors just across the border that have more robust support programs.

But these are not the only risks farmers face when growing corn, wheat and soybeans. Grain farmers are constantly balancing risks from Mother Nature, including weather, insects, weeds, soil composition, water—will it rain enough or will it rain too much or not at the right time?—price fluctuations from commodity markets, influences from geopolitical activities, and fluctuations in supply and demand scenarios.

Farmers face a complex set of decision-making to ensure that the costs incurred to plant, bring a crop to harvest and market are covered, and money is made to build the business. Crop insurance has assisted a lot of farmers over the years to manage the complexities in their business.

As we look towards the future, weather remains a major concern, as we are seeing more volatile weather patterns and unpredictable growing seasons, making tools like crop insurance even more important to us.

Today's crop insurance is built upon actuarially sound principles and years of practical research and is data-driven. For instance, if a farmer doesn't make every

effort to avoid crop losses, then their coverage doesn't pay out. These data sets and best management practices need to be established for other agriculture products as the insurance is expanded, and the same rigour to scientific decisions and experience-based evidence needs to be employed because risk will be pooled in the program. If this rigour is not adhered to and the risk that is pooled with this program shows the co-payers—farmers and government—that the program is broken, then the program that has worked for so many years for grain and oilseeds crops will be impacted negatively.

We urge the government to exercise caution when creating the new insurance program for livestock or honeybees. These commodities face a different risk—

The Chair (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Persall, can you wrap up your presentation?

Mr. Scott Persall: Yes. About half a page.

The Chair (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you.

Mr. Scott Persall: These commodities face a different risk profile than those that have been traditionally covered by crop insurance. The rules cannot be easily transferred from crops to livestock. We collectively need to ensure that long-term results support the viability of the program and don't create questions about the program, or we may put funding from the federal government at risk and discourage farmers from buying the insurance.

In closing, we support the government's desire to provide risk-management tools to those in agriculture who require it, but we recommend extreme caution, especially given the trends towards reducing programs for farms. Farmers need more, not less, to compete in a global industry against every other developed country. We ask that you include the GFO earlier in the process as you develop plans and regulations, and that you adhere to science-based decisions, not precautionary principles.

Today, crop insurance provides the tools our farmer members need to remain competitive and to invest in innovation that is good for their businesses and good for the environment. We want to make sure that the changes going forward do not jeopardize this important tool for grain and oilseeds farmers.

The Chair (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. Mr. Vanthof, do you want to begin the questioning?

Mr. John Vanthof: Thanks for coming, Scott, and making a very comprehensive presentation. I think, if I could distill down what I heard, you're in favour, but you're worried that the program could be diluted if other commodities are included without due diligence. Is that a fair comment?

Mr. Scott Persall: Yes, that would be a fair comment. If we were to use some of our funds that we've actually put into the program now that are there, that would have a negative impact on grain and oilseeds.

Mr. John Vanthof: You mentioned the 26% that currently comes from the provincial government. Would it be detrimental to the suite of programs as a whole if money came for new commodities out of the old pot—

basically, if it came out of risk management or somewhere else that's currently within the ministry budget?

Mr. Scott Persall: Yes. For grain and oilseeds, the RMP program or crop insurance—any money that would come out of those programs would have a negative impact on grain and oilseeds producers.

Mr. John Vanthof: Okay. And my last question is going to be a little bit loaded. Fair warning.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Not like the other ones.

Mr. John Vanthof: No, but we've heard a lot about the neonics debate. Grain farmers have made it very clear that they're worried that, in some cases, their production will suffer if they don't have access to neonics. Do you feel that that should somehow be covered within the crop insurance suite of programs because it is a government decision that could reduce some of the crop yields?

Mr. Scott Persall: Yes. With the current regulation that's coming down, for my personal farm, it will impact my yields and will draw me down in actual yield. The way the program is set up now wouldn't likely trigger a payment because we can only get coverage up to 90% of a crop. I think I, as a grain farmer, would welcome a government program that would recognize the losses that I'm taking on my crops due to the elimination of certain tools I have in my tool chest.

Mr. John Vanthof: Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Potts?

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thanks, Scott. Thanks very much for coming here. I'm delighted to be here, too. This is the first chance I've had to come with a travelling committee. I'm sure that any other agricultural bill would come here to Guelph because this is the best place, obviously, to get to people in the industry. There was a lot of pressure for us to also go to Kemptville. Do you think we would have had greater participation than the two here and the three there on a bill that's so widely acclaimed, if we had gone to Kemptville? You don't have to answer that.

1330

Mr. Scott Persall: Grain Farmers would have come. I know that.

Mr. Arthur Potts: You would have come; no question about it.

Mr. Scott Persall: Yes.

Mr. Arthur Potts: You guys are the experts in this field. I'm delighted that you had a chance to give us a little more perspective on it.

I appreciate the cautionary note. Are you suggesting, though, that we not go ahead with the bill before we put other things in place, or are you okay with us passing this bill, passing these amendments now, moving forward and entering into those sectorial discussions on new commodities?

Mr. Scott Persall: Yes. Grain Farmers is comfortable with you proceeding with the bill. All we're asking is that you use caution when you're developing the programs for other sectors of agriculture, that it wouldn't negatively impact grain farmers by diluting our crop insurance—

or it has been suggested that we could take funding from our RMP program, which currently is capped and underfunded.

Mr. Arthur Potts: And underfunded; I appreciate that.

I don't think it's a loaded question to talk about neonics. I'm glad that we're all having discussions about it. I think that's really, really important. The government has, as you know, its aspirational targets and would be looking very closely at yields and the impacts. But can you maybe give a sense of how—let's talk about pollinators—an insurance program might assist them? The unintended consequences of some pesticide use—how you think that might fall into the discussion.

Mr. Scott Persall: I don't think I'm really in a position to speak for honeybees. I guess that if they're having production losses, then you should be able to develop a program for them to cover those losses if there's—

Mr. Arthur Potts: Fair enough. And also know that we all appreciate very much the work that's being done in waxing seeds and deflectors, and know that, as we move forward towards aspirational goals, we'll get it right. We're glad that the Grain Farmers are going to work with us on that.

Mr. Scott Persall: Yes, that's a great—with the deflectors. I think we've made great strides as grain farmers, since you've got on to this topic, to help with pollinator health. The problem is, we haven't actually assessed those changes we made last year before the regulations came in. We're moving quickly—

Mr. Arthur Potts: And this may not be the best year to make those assessments, given the cold, cold winter we had. All those are factors—

Mr. Scott Persall: Yes. Climate change seems to be always different every year, doesn't it?

The Chair (Ms. Soo Wong): Okay. This round of questioning is by Mr. Arnott.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I, first of all, want to express words of welcome to the committee members for coming to the Guelph and Wellington area. As we know, the leadership of agriculture and agri-business in the province of Ontario is largely in this area of the province. We're very proud of that, and we're very pleased to have the committee members here.

Scott, I want to thank you for your presentation on behalf of the Grain Farmers. It was very well done. It leads to a number of questions, obviously, from our side. Your main point, if I could characterize it as much, was the suggestion that the government should proceed with caution as it moves forward with this enabling legislation and then the resulting programs. Are you confident that the government will proceed with caution?

Mr. John Vanthof: Now that was a leading question.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Just say yes.

Mr. Scott Persall: Yes. I'm sure they realize that grain farmers account for 80% of this program, and it's

very important to us. I'm sure they can sit down and look at the other sectors and make it fit for them without negatively impacting grain farmers.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Has that number been stable over the years, that roughly 80% of the program is taken up by grain and oilseeds farmers—it doesn't fluctuate too much?

Mr. Scott Persall: I would say it's pretty constant, because our acreage doesn't change a whole lot. The split between the different commodities are—I don't really know the correct answer for that.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Is there an estimate of how many grain and oilseeds producers actually purchase crop insurance relative to those who choose not to? Have you ever seen an estimate?

Mr. Scott Persall: I have. I'm not really sure what that exact number is. I don't know. I have a colleague here who might be able to answer that—

Mr. Ted Arnott: But we would expect and assume that the majority do—the vast majority.

Mr. Scott Persall: Yes. More than half the producers participate; I do know that. I don't know the exact percentage.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Okay. When you broke down the numbers, you said that 24% of the current program, I think, is paid for by the province. Was it 24%?

Mr. Scott Persall: Yes.

Mr. Ted Arnott: And 36% by the feds, and 40% by the farmers themselves.

Mr. Scott Persall: Yes.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Do you have the dollar figures of what the program costs to go along with the percentages?

Mr. Scott Persall: No, I don't have the dollar figures with me. I think Agricorp could give you those numbers quite easily.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Maybe we could ask the Legislature's research staff to generate those numbers for us.

Lastly, I think I would share your concern. I think that it's important that you make your views known at this committee and within the Legislature to ensure that the existing programs for the farmers who currently benefit, and have sustained the crop insurance programs through the years, are, in fact, maintained and not diluted. I guess the question is: Has the government made a commitment that the support will not be diluted for the existing crop insurance participants? I haven't heard that they have.

Mr. Scott Persall: I haven't heard. I think that's a question for the other side of the table here.

Mr. Ted Arnott: But there hasn't been a private assurance or commitment to the grain farmers as far as you know.

Mr. Scott Persall: None that I'm aware of.

Mr. Ted Arnott: We would look to the government to clarify that when the bill is discussed in the Legislature at third reading. Thank you.

The Chair (Ms. Soo Wong): All right. Thank you very much, Mr. Persall, for coming here before the committee.

Before I adjourn the committee today, I have a couple of housekeeping things to remind the committee members of. First, the written submissions are due today at 6 p.m., so that's the drop-dead time, 6 p.m.

The deadline for filing amendments with the Clerk is Monday, April 13, at 5 p.m., if there are any amendments to the bill.

Next Thursday, we will be doing clause-by-clause consideration. That's scheduled for next Thursday, April 16, 9 a.m., at the Legislature.

Any more questions and comments for the staff or for myself? All right. I'm going to adjourn the committee. See you next week.

The committee adjourned at 1337.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 7 April 2015

Agriculture Insurance Act (Amending the Crop Insurance Act, 1996), 2015, Bill 40, Mr. Leal / Loi de 2015 sur l'assurance agricole (modifiant la Loi de 1996 sur l'assurance-récolte), projet de loi 40, M. Leal	F-477
Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario	F-477
Mr. Lorne Small	
Grain Farmers of Ontario	F-480
Mr. Scott Persall	

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