



MFGA BOARD of DIRECTORS

DROUGHT 2021 COMMENTS & FEEDBACK

Prepared for: Hon. Ralph Eichler, Manitoba Minister Agriculture and Resource Development (MARD)

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July 21, 2021

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Staff: Duncan Morrison, MFGA Executive Director

Overview: MFGA Board of Directors met on July 19, 2021 via Zoom and dedicated a large amount of the two-hour-plus-meeting to Drought 2021 discussion as requested by MARD and MASC. Rather than a deep dive on program by program (AgrilInsurance, Business Risk Management), MFGA producers brought forward feedback and solutions on key areas around the producer ability to buffer the drought/save the livestock herd as priority areas based on their experiences, knowledge and situations. It is in this context that the following feedback is provided. MFGA anticipates that the recipients of this feedback will be able to take the actions, suggestions and feedback and align with the appropriate programming categories. There is also some specific program feedback within the categories listed.

From MFGA's viewpoint, drought management – primarily around forages and water – needs to be very proactive and better understood. In fact, a planning window of three years ahead seems to be necessary for most producers to deal with these harsh times. MFGA strongly supports and recommends more proactive programming around planning around the potential for drought, especially in these times of increased climatic extremes that are forecast for the Prairies. It is also important to note that to a person, the group absolutely agreed that the number one priority and issue from their own positions across the board was helping those that need it most in areas most affected:

- **Governments need to help producers in need and that need help the most. All newly-developed and existing programs need to be focused to areas where producers are struggling with drought.**
- **MFGA feels the drought has hit hardest in regional pockets and anecdotally, that the majority of Manitoba producers are for the most part okay. MFGA suggests to put aid toward the areas that need it, and make funding available for areas that need it most.**

- **Governments need to put financial resources, urgent programming and priority attention at affected areas and should set up system to identify these areas such as Interlake and Ste. Rose/Parkland.**

MFGA BOARD: MARD AND MASC PROGRAM SUGGESTIONS

1. IT MAKES MORE SENSE TO GET CATTLE TO FEED THAN FEED TO CATTLE

- Corn silage economics are decent, create program deal with feed, get cattle to corn silage areas for cattle where nothing currently available
- Pay for freight move cows to feed rather than feed to cows. Shortage of grain will be issue.
- We need to move livestock to the feed whether government assistance or producers own, getting off the land before they wreck the forage resource, set the land up so that when rain comes back, pastures ready.
- Transportation subsidies help

2. WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE FARMER-BASED SOLUTIONS

- Incentivize grain farmers that go above and beyond and let crop go livestock feed. Try and get any type chaff helpful in long run.
- Incentivize crop residual grazing. Can't make more hay, make more residue available.
- A grain crop into feed is going to cost a lot of money in these markets. Better off to harvest the feed grain and use the straw.
- Realistically, alternative feed via wheat is a no-go, prices are set in February. Payment from crop insurance, even with no harvest will make more money. Oats and barley are the only play as prices are more in-line with what alternative feed crop payout might offer a farmer
- It's a challenge getting grain guys to drop straw. When they do agree, they want it off, timely manner, livestock producers that broker these agreements need to get in there and bale behind combine. In the past, livestock producers have burned bridges this way by being late or lacking urgency to get straw off as agreed to, which grain farmers do not appreciate.
- Like idea of moving to where the forage is, takes a lot of management and facilities.
- Can the beef cow herd pay for the feed to take away from the grain industry, hard time making the numbers work

3. LONGER TERM TAX DEFERRAL

- Tax deferral five years not one, take pressure off.
- Tax deferral is good area for discussion.

4. MOTIVATE HERD MANAGEMENT DECISIONS

- If we do not get rain, we will need to cut herd in half.
- will the forages we have support the status quo herd, I see the current herd having to drop 15-25% to match existing forages
- Example: Australia drought: those that sold off early, bought back early, planned ahead and de-stocked early enough. Forages were ready for rain and return of livestock.
- Some form of assistance to rebuild herd after herd reduction.
- People that have to sell part of herd or flock, paid a decent price regardless of market saturation, need to get a decent price for the culled animals.
- De-stocking was coming over period of time, quicker you start, less got to do during these times.

5. WATER SOURCES: INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES NEED ATTENTION

- Accessing water resources and sources, serious point. Design program to get Deep water lines to get water to pasture. 6 feet deep.
- BMP 503: apply get money, do the work, need environmental farm plan before get paid. As long as pipeline underground, can be paid. Why put pipeline in if reduce herd, no cows. May not have enough cows. Long-term: 503 is good, short term: not so good.
- Environmental Farm Program should be waived during these times so no one excluded.
- Stop pushing/clearing bush that is where snow capture happens.
- Dugouts we normally use are dry; hauling water takes time, fuel.
- Water, infrastructure necessary all times, never more important than droughts
- Water table dropped ten feet over ten years in Interlake. Need get pumps down far.
- Can't fence every dugout, it's not feasible, there's slow uptake, and it doesn't work.

6. PROMOTE MENTAL HEALTH

- Keep talking to government officials; we all need to be mindful of mental health.
- be mindful mental health, talk about a lot among producers and the resources
- Design and continue to fund new and existing programs to get help for those that need it the most

GENERAL COMMENTS: SUMMER 2021 SITUATIONS & CONVERSATIONS

- Grazing 101: You can't and shouldn't plan for drought in drought.
- Producers seem luke-warm on freight assistance in some areas; instead seem to be looking for where to find a supply of straw.
- Some have heard of MBP proposing set dollar amount for cows to slaughter and seem keen on that happening.
- Feeling that even if 2021 drought relief done perfectly, nothing will save this year. WE ALL just need rain.
- Push and develop stronger relationships grain and cattle producers, including water sources and issues as well as feed.
- MARD/MASC facilitate programs and work closely with ag groups
- Crown Lands opening up, yet there are struggles to get into crown land via administrative tangles i.e. staff vacations has been a barrier recently experienced by some crown land leases.

FUTURE CONCERNS

- Grasshoppers are bad now and will be bad –maybe even worse -next year
- Dairy farmers like to have carry-forward, a year ahead of corn silage, and gets really expensive go shopping dairy hay on emergency basis. This may be big factor next year.
- Cross-fencing, water infrastructure need to be looked at harder for future.
- Crown lands: with the increased rent on crown lands, there is no money to put back. Producers not willing invest in crown lands as don't get it back due to possible transfer.
- Producers that lease crown lands are hurting bad, rent increases marginal land, way more than worth, and now grasshoppers, paid 3X what should have already.
- Challenges with new programs, very frequently the trade-off on quick programs is loopholes that some will take advantage of rather than those that really need it.
- How long will this drought last, nobody knows it is all best guess but as MB forage reps we must think about the forage and plan for how much of it is needed for the livestock herd (beef, bison and sheep)