

News Release

Quebec farmers to stop snowmobiles in their tracks

LONGUEUIL, December 15, 2005 - Today, Gib Drury, president of the Quebec Farmers' Association (QFA), announced that his organization is joining farmers all across Quebec in a campaign to bring resolution to long-awaited reforms of the municipal tax process.

The government agrees with the farmers that the current system places an inequitable burden on agricultural producers. Farmers are taxed on their land and farm buildings at the same rate as residences to pay for municipal services such as police, sewage systems and water treatment. Add to this the fact that some municipalities are now billing extra for sports complexes, sidewalks and fire services.

To compensate farmers for these additional taxes, the provincial government has traditionally reimbursed up to 70 per cent of the bills through the agricultural budget. This reimbursement program is an administrative nightmare for farmers. "Each year it is taking an ever bigger chunk of the shrinking agricultural budget which means fewer staff and less program funding to work with farmers," says Drury.

"The solution is simple. The provincial government should compensate the municipalities directly for the downloaded services they want the municipalities to provide. They should also take this opportunity to change the basis on which the taxes are assessed. Instead of market value assessments, they should go to production potential assessment to get the real worth of the land."

"The problem has gone on too long." Quebec agricultural producers had a campaign this spring called, "we pay our taxes – our fair share", which highlighted the inequities in the current system. They paid the 28 per cent of the tax bill which was their share up front, and they paid the other 72 per cent when they received their reimbursement from the provincial government. Unfortunately, the protest only resulted in the reimbursements being made more expediently, with no other changes to the system.

In early December, Quebec's farmers decided to increase the pressure on the provincial government by denying access to snowmobilers and users of all terrain vehicles to cross their property. "For years snowmobilers have used the trails without paying anything to landowners. The entire provincial network of trails will be effectively shut down if farmers close access to the 30 per cent of Quebec's trails that pass over agricultural land. We regret that withdrawing this privilege may have a detrimental effect on the tourist industry but we are heartened to know that most snowmobile clubs in Quebec are behind this protest and are ready to pressure the government to reform the municipal tax system."

"We have given the government a mid-December deadline to announce changes to the system. If the government drags its heels past that date there will be an unexpected and unintended benefit; we will be taking a small step closer towards achieving our Kyoto obligations of greenhouse gas emissions because all skidoos and ATVs will remain idle this winter with no place to go."

Founded in 1957, the Quebec Farmers' Association represents the province's 2,100 English-speaking agricultural producers.

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