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SK Grain Roundtable

On Thursday August 18, 2016 the Federal Minister of Agriculture, Lawrence MacAulay, the Federal Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Ralph Goodale, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Kate Young, and the Saskatchewan Minister of Agriculture, Lyle Stewart, all attended a roundtable in Regina, SK that featured a number of agriculture industry representatives from Saskatchewan and Alberta.

The roundtable was focused on issues related to grain transportation and the review of the Canadian transportation system. It was a good opportunity for the agriculture sector in Saskatchewan to share their views. “We appreciate the Ministers taking the time to meet with agriculture representatives and allowing us to share our views. We were able to discuss possible measures such as halting closures of rail sidings and producer car loading facilities” said SARM President Ray Orb. Some of the key issues SARM discussed at the roundtable include the Maximum Revenue Entitlement (MRE), penalties, grain movement during the winter months and the Port of Churchill.

The MRE is the limit on the overall revenue that can be earned by the national railways for shipping regulated grain from origins within the Western Division. SARM’s membership recently passed a resolution calling for a review of the formula. This position was not unique for SARM, as the majority of participants in the roundtable shared this view. Participants also agreed that there needs to be stronger penalties on the railways for not meeting their obligations or providing acceptable service levels. “We cannot have a repeat of the 2013-14 railway performance so SARM stresses the importance of stiffer penalties as a way of enforcement.”

SARM is also lobbying for increased grain movement during the winter months as it reduces municipal road damage and is requesting that the railways demonstrate that their inventory, crews and locomotives are prepared for winter and that they have surge capacity. Another significant issue requiring action is the recent announcement that the Port of Churchill is no longer accepting grain shipments. The strategic importance of this port will increase once the Canada-European Trade Agreement comes into force as it provides a cost effective access point to international markets through the Hudson Bay.

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