

Speaking Notes For Grain Growers and Canadian Young Farmers Forum – November 24, 2009

Human Resources, Skills and Social Development Parliamentary Standing Committee Bill C-56

Thank you Madame Chairperson and good afternoon Members of Parliament and guests.

My name is Richard Phillips.

My wife Sally and I are from a farm at Tisdale, Saskatchewan where we raised 4 sons.

Currently, I am the Executive Director of the Grain Growers of Canada and I would like to thank you for the opportunity to be here to speak on this legislation.

With me today is Kristin who is with the Canadian Young Farmers Forum, a member organization of the Grain Growers of Canada, and I will be sharing my time with her.

The Grain Growers represent approximately 80,000 grain, oilseed and pulse producers from across the country.

I would like to share some quick statistics with you and then comment on compassionate leave, while Kristin will talk about young farmers.

70% of all farms in Canada have off-farm income.

There are over 200,000 farms in Canada today.

If even 10% of them choose to take advantage of this program, this could help encourage another 20,000 young families to stay on the land.

One reality of life for all farmers, is that we are a rapidly aging demographic.

In fact, the average Canadian farmer is well over 50 years of age.

For many farm families today, caring for our parents is an increasing responsibility.

But, in many rural communities there may not be access to either homecare or long term care.

If there is any kind of crisis, we are often called upon to provide short term care either in our home, or in theirs.

In many cases this may not be in the same community.

This can be very taxing to a family farm as with one partner away, the other has to carry the workload of two, not just on the farm, but in looking after the children as well.

At this time, Kristin will share her thoughts from the perspective of the Young Farmers.

Thank you Richard. Good afternoon Members of Parliament and guests.

My name is Kristin Ego MacPhail and I would like to thank you for the opportunity to be here to share our thoughts on this legislation.

The mission of the Canadian Young Farmers Forum is to promote the exchange of ideas and to foster collaboration between the young and future farmers of Canada.

One focus of our organization is to identify the problems encountered by young people looking to become established in agriculture.

My husband (Gary) and I are young farmers from the Barrie area where we operate a greenhouse, nursery and farm market.

We have 2 young children, Sadie who is 3 years old and Ewan who is 3 ½ months.

Gary and I are both fully self-employed on our farm.

I feel strongly that the extension of EI benefits like parental and compassionate leaves is a step in the right direction to improving the quality of life for all farm families.

Many young people have and continue to move away from agriculture as a profession.

One of the things my husband and I considered when deciding if we wanted to farm or not, was what supports might be available to us.

Gary left his job to join our farm full time.

At that point, we had to give up access to EI benefits.

This was a choice we had to make.

We now look at our friends who are employed in other jobs and when they started their families they had the opportunity to take time off work when their children were born.

On our farm, this program could allow one or both of us to take some time off and hire someone to replace us, even if it is just for a short term.

Maybe not all young farming families would take advantage of this but at least they would have the opportunity to participate if they chose.

Thanks you again for the chance to be here, and I look forward to your questions.