



KEYSTONE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS

February 5, 2026

Rural Development Action Plan – Consultation

Keystone Agricultural Producers (KAP) is Manitoba's general farm policy organization, providing a unified voice for farmers on issues that affect agriculture. KAP represents and promotes the interests of all Manitoba farmers and 19 commodity associations.

Farming represents a key component of rural Manitoba and supports the province's food security, export capacity, and economic stability. Farming drives rural Manitoba. Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting represent the second largest industry behind health care and social services. The interconnectedness between farming and other rural businesses is vast (e.g., grain elevators, equipment dealerships, auction marts, service technicians, and lending institutions). But farming success also depends on government programs and policies that work for farmers. Given the significant influence farmers have on the social, economic, and cultural aspects of rural Manitoba, KAP is pleased to respond to the Rural Development Action Plan consultation.

Rural Connectivity

Adequate rural connectivity is key part of any rural development action plan. Two main reasons exist for adequate rural connectivity: (1) economics and (2) health and well-being. Farmers have become more reliant on technology that requires connectivity. But rural connectivity in Manitoba remains either sporadic or non-existent leading to increased frustration, increased down-time, decreased productivity, and lost earnings. Working in rural areas also means that farmers require reliable wireless service not only for business and personal use but also in an emergency. While federal programs offer funding, results have been limited. E.g., only one Manitoba municipality has received funding under the Universal Broadband Fund. And no Manitoba community has benefited from rural connectivity funding under the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program. Funding must focus on both infrastructure development and long-term maintenance to ensure sustained, reliable connectivity and reduce excessive reporting requirements that discourage participation.

Rural Infrastructure

Manitoba farmers produce high-quality products sought by local and global buyers. But delivering these products require a reliable infrastructure network. Unfortunately, investments in infrastructure have declined over time relative to Canada's GDP, resulting in aging roads, bridges, and transportation networks. Improvements cost money. And farmers often express frustration when they pay more each year in taxes and shipping costs but perceive little change in infrastructure quality or reliability. Government has an important decision to make: What does future infrastructure funding look like? The status quo is inadequate. A patchwork of solutions or quick fixes will not advance rural infrastructure. Upgrading and expanding is preferable to maintaining and replacing. Investments must be strategic, future-focused, and growth oriented if farmers wish to expand into new markets, increase business development and investment, and maintain shipping reliability. Improvements encompass addressing municipal road capacity, bridge load limits, and seasonal transportation restrictions that directly affect agricultural competitiveness.

Immigration and Population

A dramatic shift has occurred in rural areas over the past century with a steady decline in the proportion of people living in rural communities. A declining population has consequences—often negative. The tax base shrinks; programs and services decline; infrastructure decays; and taxes increase. As more individuals move to urban areas, farmers struggle to find an adequate labor supply. Immigration programs such as the provincial nominee program and the temporary foreign worker program have provided some relief to an ongoing challenge. But a larger challenge remains unsolved: How to reverse a declining rural population and ensure residents remain in rural areas? A rural development action plan must address rural population retention as well as attraction, and immigration strategies must be supported to encourage newcomers to remain in rural communities.

Community Safety

Farmers have become increasingly vocal about community safety—and for good reason. Crime statistics show that some rural Manitoba areas have higher crime rates than urban centers. Grain, livestock, machinery, tools, and vehicles are all subject to theft. Farmers' rural remoteness means that emergency services may be delayed, increasing their vulnerability. While farmers have adopted proactive approaches in deterring rural crime (e.g., installing locks, video cameras, and security systems), government plays a critical role in crime prevention and community safety. Rural safety and urban safety are not the same. Improving rural safety must suit the communities' needs, assets, and priorities. Not only adequate funding but also an effective action plan that has community buy-in improve the odds of effectively addressing rural crime.

Program Delivery and Action

An action plan requires action. And farmers want to see positive change in rural communities. But a large challenge involves not only finding adequate funding sources but also having effective resources for implementation. No one-size-fits-all approach works. Rural communities have unique features and will have differences in capacity, development, and needs. Government programming and policies must be tailored to rural needs. Any rural plan must see the interconnectedness between programming, policies, and human resources. Government must ensure that new programs align with existing policies, and that departments and funding bodies coordinate their efforts. Currently, overlapping programs with limited collaboration result in inefficient use of resources and outcomes that do not deliver meaningful rural development benefits. The risk is creating a framework that is ineffective or at worst irrelevant. KAP encourages governments to work across departments, industries, and organizations to ensure rural development programming is practical, coordinated, and responsive to local capacity

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Rural Development Action Plan. KAP welcomes continued engagement to ensure rural development policies support resilient rural communities across Manitoba. If you have any questions regarding this submission, please contact KAP policy manager, Neil Van Overloop, at neil.vanoverloop@kap.ca.

Sincerely,



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