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SURVEY

Consultations on farmland ownership now open

By Alison Squires

The details of consultations regarding the rules surrounding farmland ownership in Saskatchewan were released last week by Agriculture Minister Lyle Stewart.

“Consultations with the public will help us understand who should, or should not be, allowed to own farmland in Saskatchewan, specifically pension plans, investment trusts, pension plan administrators and foreign investors,” Stewart said. “I encourage all interested parties to participate in the consultations to help determine what is best for Saskatchewan.”

Currently only Canadian residents and 100-per-cent Canadian-owned entities can own more than 10 acres of farmland in the province. Regulations announced on April 13, 2015, clarified the existing legislation by placing a pause on the acquisition of land holdings by large non-family trusts, pension plans and administrators of pension plans while the review is being undertaken.

Controversy over land ownership was brought to the forefront when the Canadian Pension Plan purchased 115,000 acres of Saskatchewan farmland. Although the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board is the actual buyer of the land, it's considered a Canadian-owned corporation, which makes it eligible to purchase where other pension plans cannot under the current guidelines.

“The opinions of the farmers I have talked to vary,” said area agriculture real estate agent Ted Cawkwell. “Saskatchewan has the most strict laws for investment of any province. You have to be a Canadian citizen or resident to buy land here.”

Despite differences of opinions, says Cawkwell, most agree that investors are here to stay when it comes to land purchases.

“Some see (investors) as a great way to expand their farm without their own capital and a great option to sell to when they retire,” said Cawkwell. “Others see them as a threat.”

Although not without its critics, the consultation is be-

ing held only online.

“By only allowing the survey to be completed online, the government is neglecting a portion of the population who do not have access to the internet or who do not feel comfortable expressing their personal opinions online” stated PC Party Leader Rick Swenson. “There are older farm families who have strong feelings on this issue who will attend public meetings to listen to their neighbour's opinions and the opinions of government representatives, but will not take the time to sit in front of a computer answering predetermined government questions.”

A recent study completed by marketing agency AdWest

The consultation process runs until Aug. 10.

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