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**PRINCIPLES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT
OF AN AGRICULTURAL POLICY**

**Presented by the Honourable George Braden
Minister of Economic Development and Tourism
To the Legislative Assembly
For Discussion**

March 1980

1. The Government of the Northwest Territories supports the development of commercial agriculture in the North for the economic and social benefit of Northern residents.

Emphasis is placed on the kind of agriculture that would yield the greatest benefit to Northern residents. It was felt that the Government should, under an agricultural policy, focus its support on commercial agriculture - in other words, farming for the traditional purpose of making a living. Other measures, such as the Market Gardening Policy, are already available to assist persons seeking to pursue part-time or hobby farming.

2. Land will be made available for commercial agriculture. No land will be made available for homesteading.

Homesteading is a method of land development under which government sets aside areas of land for settlement. Persons are then free to enter, claim and develop these unoccupied lands. Homesteading was originally used by the Federal Government to encourage large-scale immigration to Western Canada. It is not considered appropriate for the present conditions of the Northwest Territories.

3. The Government of the Northwest Territories will be responsible for the selection of land for agriculture.

Public control of land selection is essential, in view of outstanding native land claims. It is also desirable to prevent scattered and unplanned land development which could eventually produce major infrastructure costs to the Government.

Present demand for agricultural lands is centered on the Hay River Corridor; the Slave River Lowlands; the Mackenzie River Valley between Fort Providence and Fort Simpson; and the Liard Valley.

4. In order to maximize benefits to Northern residents, land selection will:

- be based on a process of full public consultation

Public consultation would include community meetings, and submissions to the Government from all interested Northern groups, associations, and individuals.

- not prejudice native land claims

Incidentally, the Federal Office of Native Claims has advised this Government of its intention to review every G.N.W.T. application for transfer of Federal land for agricultural use.

- minimize demand for public funds.

Approval of the agricultural policy principles will lead to the development of a policy proposal, which will outline specific land selection criteria to encourage agricultural land development close to existing infrastructure (for example, roads and power lines).

5. All initial dispositions of land for agricultural use will be made on a leasehold basis.

In addition to safeguarding public control of land development in the Northwest Territories, this provision would afford both the Government, and the person starting a commercial farm, a period of time to ascertain whether the enterprise would be successful in the long term.

6. Public funds required to make agricultural lands available will be recoverable, amortized over a reasonable period. The agricultural operator will be responsible for his own municipal-type services.

Under this principle, costs of land surveys, access roads, and power could qualify for public funding assistance on a cost-recoverable basis. Costs of municipal-type services, including water and sanitation, site development, and road maintenance, would not.

Tentative cost estimates, based on experience in the Hay River Corridor, place costs of basic land surveys at \$2,500 - \$3,000 per farm operation, and costs for construction of farm access roads at \$70,000 per kilometre.

7. Economically viable commercial farming proposals will be eligible for assistance under Government of the Northwest Territories business-assistance programs.

Commercial farming proposals with economic viability would be eligible for funding assistance under G.N.W.T. business-assistance programs. The Department of Economic Development and Tourism currently defines an economically viable commercial farm operation as one which covers all fixed and variable operating costs, including depreciation (capital cost allowance) with a return to the operator.

In view of the present financial constraints facing our Government, new money would not be made available expressly for commercial farming proposals. Such proposals would be required to compete with other kinds of business proposals for existing business-assistance funding.

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