

van zanten greenhouses

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January 8, 2015

Ms. Kirsten Walli, Board Secretary
Ontario Energy Board
P.O. Box 2319
2300 Yonge Street, 27th Floor
Toronto, ON M4P 1E4

**Re: Consultation on the Effectiveness of Part II of the *Energy Consumer Protection Act*, 2010,
Board File No.: EB-2014-0158**

Dear Ms. Walli:

I am writing this letter as the leader and proprietor of VanZanten Greenhouses, a member of Ag Energy Co-operative Ltd. and former Director of the Board of Ag Energy Co-operative. As a floral producer in the Niagara region, our operation has chosen to support Ag Energy over the years as it has been the best solution for us based upon our risk tolerance, energy spend and the by-products of the Co-op's membership – meaning an active voice in its governance by being elected as a Director, the ability to vote on the efforts of the organization and also the financial rewards in terms of patronage distribution, dividends or enhanced retained earnings in profitable years. Furthermore, VanZanten Greenhouses benefitted from the Co-op by natural gas transportation savings due to our territory and also the ability to provide balancing between member pools and the overall Co-op's services.

I have had the opportunity to meet MANY energy retailers who knock on our doors. Some have not been forthright with their offerings and have used high pressure tactics. I am an aware member-consumer and appreciate all Ag Energy does for our organization as well as our peer members. One issue I have with the current ECPA level of expectations is that the administrative burden it provides for a member-owned entity appears to be unreasonable and handcuffs my organization for procuring electricity, if I chose to do so from the co-op. Our operation is a small electricity user as is our residence. Given that Ag Energy is a co-operative whose genesis came from deregulation and opportunity for the greenhouse sector to save valuable dollars through the aggregation of their spend and collaboration of their efforts, I see no reason why I should be precluded from doing so, if I choose to own and participate in the Co-op.

I participated on the Board at the time of transition to the ECPA and as a Co-op, it was decided that for the additional administration required to successfully participate, it was not affordable to maintain this segment of service – both for natural gas and electricity. As such, a number of members who joined the co-op for the purposes identified earlier, no longer have the option for that service from their co-op.

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I believe that there would be a number of elements that the OEB could consider for improving the ECPA.

- 1) To uniquely identify that all energy co-operatives are member-owned entities and are different than other energy retail businesses. If a small consuming member of an energy co-operative wishes to procure their energy via their co-op, whether it is Ag Energy or another, they should be allowed to exercise their choice. A way to ensure that this is done is via a waiver similar to an "Accredited Investor" or perhaps another similar tool. Of course, this is assuming that the consumer is a member of the Co-operative and not merely a non-member, user of its services.
- 2) Consolidate the meters by entity or business. There is NO REASON why each individual meter is handled uniquely. This is a waste of time for all stakeholders in the process, whether it is the consumer, the marketing retailer, the utility or the OEB or any other entity.
- 3) Lastly, if a consumer is deemed a high volume consumer of either gas or electricity, a co-op should be able to market both gas and electricity to that consumer without falling under the parameters of the ECPA. This is for pragmatic purposes as the individual is already a "savvy consumer".

If the above considerations were put in place, there would be decent improvements and also the spirit and intention of the protection provided by the Energy Consumer Protection Act is continued. I wholeheartedly support the elimination and abuse by unethical participants in the market.

Ag Energy Co-operative Ltd. is a consumer-member owned, member-controlled co-operative. It has weathered the economic ups and downs for 26 years and has served its members as desired and needed. It provides electricity and natural gas to its membership. It provides communication, education, internal and independent resources so its membership can make the best decision for them. Staff exists to support membership and communicate to the members. The member is the heart of the Co-op's efforts. If service levels were poor and uncompetitive, the Co-op would lose its value and its membership as it is a self-governed, member-centric model.

Working with a co-operative is a choice made by the member or potential member. A fee is paid to join; an application is completed and accepted by the Board when the criteria are fulfilled for membership. Belonging to a co-operative is a choice and members bear the responsibility of working collectively in order for the co-op to thrive. The success of any co-operative is to provide competitive services and additional benefits while operating in an ethical and transparent manner. Trusted advice that works with the member's needs and what is best for them is at the heart of the

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Co-op. Ag Energy provides a unique alternative to other energy retailers – one that allows for ownership and financial participation in a year where profits are generated.

As the Ontario Energy Board, I urge you to continue your efforts to eliminate unfair business practices for small consumers. At the same time, I encourage the OEB to widen its perspective to support the benefit, choice and control that energy co-operatives provide as they strengthen the local economy, create employment and provide community collaboration by the co-op model.

Small energy consumers who wish additional choice of energy procurement as an energy co-op member-owner should be given options. Sincerest thanks for any support you provide to Ag Energy and other co-operatives in Ontario.

Sincerely,



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