

Disputed loan gets go-ahead

Page resigned over controversy

By DAVID JACKSON Provincial Reporter



The province will finally make the loan that led to a cabinet minister's resignation seven months ago.

Economic Development spokesman Tom Peck said Thursday that S&J Potato Farms has met the conditions for getting the \$250,000 forgivable loan the province approved in February.

The holdup was outstanding fees owed to the Nova Scotia Potato Marketing Board. Government staff wasn't aware of the fee issue when cabinet approved the loan.

"There was just a miscommunication, I guess we could say, with the marketing board between ourselves and them, but no, we got it all settled," S&J owner Steven Ellis said Thursday in a telephone interview.

"Like, there were some things that we both probably took for granted that weren't really the case so anyway, no, we got her all squared up and they're all fixed up and yeah, we're good.

"Anyway, I gotta go, so anyway, everything's good now, it seems, so that's about all I got to say on it."

Donna Crawford, the marketing board's administrative co-ordinator, wouldn't say how much S&J owed the board, nor when the settlement was reached.

She said the amount was private information and the timing of the settlement wasn't relevant.

Mr. Peck said his office became aware of the settlement about a month ago. He said staff is now waiting for receipts from S&J before disbursing the money, which could end up being less than \$250,000.

The final amount will depend on the cost of new trailers that Mr. Ellis is buying. He wanted the loan, which would be matched, to buy the trailers to help him comply with weight restrictions on local roads in the spring. S&J specializes in seed potatoes, which it had to ship in April and May.

The loan agreement requires S&J to keep at least 25 full- and part-time jobs in Nova Scotia, and the province will forgive \$50,000 annually.

In February, then-economic development minister Ernie Fage announced his resignation two days after his connection to S&J became public. S&J of Prince Edward Island leased land from the Fage family in Hastings, outside Amherst.

Mr. Fage appeared in March at the legislature's all-party public accounts committee, where he said he forgot to tell his cabinet colleagues about the connection.

Mr. Fage is now the human resources minister.

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