

MEDIA RELEASE

Wheat Growers Dissatisfied with Rejection of Wheat Variety

March 31, 2003: "It is frustrating to see that Alsen wheat has been rejected for further field trials," said Rick Metzger, chair of the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Regulatory Issues Committee.

Metzger was commenting on the decision of the Prairie Registration Recommending Committee on Grain (PRRCG) to discontinue interim registration of the Alsen wheat variety.

"Farmers in Manitoba and other areas suffering from heavy fusarium infestation need a variety that is resistant to the disease", says Metzger. "The experience of the Manitoba farmers who grew Alsen this past year, as well as the experience of wheat farmers in North Dakota, shows that the variety does extremely well under heavy fusarium pressure. The rejection of this wheat variety is a completely unacceptable outcome of our variety selection process."

Alsen was rejected by the PRRCG because of its low falling number, a measure of the milling strength of the wheat. According to Metzger, the real problem lies with a fixation in western Canada on the high quality, high protein milling market and the reliance on kernel visual distinguishability (KVD).

"The current system seems to work well if all we want to produce is a visually identifiable high quality milling wheat," says Metzger. "This is the market focus of the Canadian Wheat Board and the Canadian Grain Commission but most of the world does not want high quality milling wheat and many customers are learning to how to use medium quality milling wheat varieties. The needs of farmers and the marketplace are being ignored."

Metzger pointed out that there are plenty of milling quality wheat varieties but none that provide the fusarium resistance of Alsen that farmers need to continue to grow wheat in the eastern prairies where fusarium is causing serious economic harm. He added that Alsen has been well accepted by American milling companies who simply accommodate any deficiency in falling number by paying a lower price.

"Alsen is a variety that works for farmers, apparently works for the milling industry, and could work for other lower quality markets as well. However, it doesn't fit into the inflexible registration system in Western Canada," says Metzger, "and that is simply unacceptable."

Metzger said that the Wheat Growers will be writing to Agriculture Minister Lyle Vanclief suggesting changes to the current registration system. The association will be recommending a more market-oriented approach to registration that allows varieties to be judged on their economic merits.

"We will set ourselves up to fail if we do not begin to adapt to a changing marketplace," says Metzger.

The Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association is a progressive, responsible organization dedicated to a self-reliant and profitable agriculture industry

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Contact:

Rick Metzger Phone: (306) 646-4540

Art Enns Phone: (204) 746-5037 or (204) 746-8522