



For Immediate Release

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Wheat Growers Applaud CWB Value-added Initiatives

The Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association applauds the Canadian Wheat Board for announcing two programs designed to give farmers and investors a greater opportunity to process wheat and barley on the prairies.

“We are glad the Wheat Board has recognized that its monopoly is a barrier to value-added processing on the prairies and that it has moved to address this problem,” says Cherilyn Jolly-Nagel, President of the Wheat Growers. “These initiatives are small steps toward the marketing freedom we are seeking.”

The Wheat Growers were commenting on the CWB’s “Field to Plate” and “New Generation Co-op” programs which will give prairie farmers more opportunities to directly process their own wheat and barley. The Field to Plate initiative allows prairie-based processors to purchase up to 500 tonnes of wheat and barley direct from prairie farmers.

In some respects, the Field to Plate initiative is similar to Bill C-300, a private Member’s bill that was introduced by M.P. Gerry Ritz and defeated by Opposition members in October. Bill C-300 would have given prairie farmers the freedom to sell wheat and barley direct to farmer-owned processing facilities.

The Wheat Growers are pleased the CWB has taken this step to more marketing freedom and flexibility for farmers.

“Once again, the Wheat Growers have been successful in pushing for policy changes that give individual farmers greater opportunities to improve their profits,” says Jolly-Nagel. “Whether its pricing options, protein grading or many other reforms, the CWB often resists but eventually comes around to our point of view.”

While the Wheat Growers welcome these initiatives, the exemptions do not go anywhere near far enough. The Wheat Growers would like to see no restriction on the amount of wheat and barley that domestic flour millers and maltsters can purchase direct from farmers, as is now the case in Ontario and Australia.

The Wheat Growers also note these new programs confirm the CWB has been deceiving farmers with respect to changes to the CWB’s marketing powers. On several occasions, both CWB Chair Ken Ritter and CEO Adrian Measner have suggested that changes in the CWB’s marketing powers would require a vote among producers.

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The Wheat Growers recognize that under existing legislation, the CWB could have authorized processors to buy any quantity of wheat and barley direct from prairie farmers, instead of limiting the program to 500 tonnes per processor.

The Wheat Growers further note that under these new initiatives, prairie-based processors will be free to sell their products into either the domestic or export market without the payment of any fees to the CWB.

“These exemptions prove the CWB has the power on its own to provide full marketing freedom to prairie farmers,” says Jolly-Nagel. “The CWB can authorize the direct purchase and export of wheat and barley without any need for a producer plebiscite.”

The Wheat Growers also observe the federal government is completely within its authority to instruct the CWB to provide these exemptions. Section 18 of *The Canadian Wheat Board Act* allows the government to “direct the Corporation with respect to the manner in which any of its operations, powers and duties under this Act shall be conducted, exercised or performed.”

As discussed in a position paper released in March, the Wheat Growers maintain that these and other provisions give the federal government the ability to provide prairie farmers the same marketing freedom as now enjoyed by farmers elsewhere in Canada. The federal government simply needs to instruct the CWB to allow Canadian processors to purchase unlimited quantities of wheat and barley directly from prairie farmers, and to grant no-cost export licences to farmers or to any other exporter.

“If the CWB is within its authority to grant these marketing freedoms under the existing legislation, then so too is the federal government,” says Jolly-Nagel.

The Wheat Growers will be encouraging Minister Strahl to provide such instructions to the CWB if the Board is unwilling to prepare a business plan to allow the introduction of full marketing freedom for prairie farmers.

“The Wheat Growers have been saying all along that the authority to give prairie farmers marketing freedom is permitted under existing legislation,” says Jolly-Nagel. “We strongly encourage the CWB and the Minister to work together to bring this about.”

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For further comment, please contact:

Cherilyn Jolly-Nagel, President
Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association
Home: (306) 354-2517
Cell: (306) 354-7368