



For Immediate Release

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Wheat Growers Disagree in Principle with Decision to Hold Barley Vote

The Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association is disappointed with Tuesday's announcement by the federal government that it intends to hold a plebiscite among farmers on how barley is marketed in Canada.

"On principle, the Wheat Growers cannot accept this notion that decisions over the sale of private property should be decided on the basis of majority rule," says Cheryl Jolly-Nagel, President of the Wheat Growers. "We believe individual farmers should be free to sell their grain on their own or in co-operation with others."

"If you accept the argument that how I market my grain should be decided by the wishes of the majority, then what you are saying is that individual farmers should not enjoy the same property rights that almost all other Canadians take for granted," says Jolly-Nagel.

Despite this position, the Wheat Growers will encourage farmers to participate in the plebiscite, assuming it is structured as an "Expression of Opinion" and does not restrict the federal government's ability to honour its campaign commitment to implement marketing choice for western farmers.

The Wheat Growers contend that any vote on barley marketing must ensure that only bona fide farmers are allowed to vote. The Wheat Growers suggest voter eligibility be based on a minimum level of grain production or minimum acreage base. Ballots should also be weighted to some degree to reflect each farmer's economic stake.

"We want to ensure the results of the vote are not skewed by retired or hobby farmers," says Jolly-Nagel. "Only those who are active farmers and who have a reasonable economic stake in grain production should be allowed to vote."

The Wheat Growers believe the vote on barley marketing should allow for a clear expression of opinion, and suggest the straightforward question used in the CWB-commissioned survey released in May provides a reasonable basis for gauging farmers' opinion. In that survey, farmers were asked: "If you had to choose between three different approaches to marketing barley, which of the following would you prefer." In that survey 29.0% of respondents supported the existing CWB monopoly, 45.7% wanted marketing choice, 18.7% wanted no CWB marketing of barley at all and 6.6% didn't know or did not respond.

The Wheat Growers maintain the question must include the third option (i.e. no CWB marketing of barley at all) as that represents the view of a sizable group of farmers. The CWB survey was only conducted among permit book holders, so it excluded many barley growers. Many farmers who grow barley, particularly those in Alberta, do not have permit books as their barley is often sold only into the domestic feed market.

"Regardless of the outcome, I'm sure there will be concerns raised regarding the legitimacy of the process," says Jolly-Nagel. "Disagreement over voter eligibility, minimum thresholds, and the wording of the question are all reasons why business matters such as these should not be decided on the basis of a collective vote."

The WCWGA, an independent producer organization, has spent 36 years bringing forth innovative farmer-driven solutions and will continue to lobby on behalf of forward thinking, progressive producers in an effort to make farming sustainable and profitable.

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The attached backgrounder gives the Wheat Growers' specific views on the parameters of any vote

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Innovative, farmer-driven solutions.

Backgrounder to WCWGA Media Release Dated November 2, 2006

The Wheat Growers provide the following preliminary views on how a producer plebiscite on barley should be structured:

Expression of Opinion

Any vote among producers should be construed as an “expression of opinion” and should not be the sole basis for establishing federal grain marketing policy. The Wheat Growers note that such expressions of opinion are used in Ontario to help guide decisions on marketing regulations of farm products in that province. The following is an excerpt from the 2004/05 annual report of the Ontario Farm Products Marketing Commission:

“The Commission reviewed and reaffirmed its policy concerning "Producer Expression of Opinion Votes" which it uses to gauge the level of producer support necessary for proposals dealing with establishing, retaining or significantly altering the marketing of regulated farm products. In 1999, the Commission made a significant change to its policy. To have the best possible information available from such votes, the Commission believed it was diligent to scrutinize both the number of producers supporting a proposal and the cumulative level of production they represent. This policy has worked well in each subsequent plebiscite and the Commission reaffirmed its appropriateness for future votes.”

The Wheat Growers also note that a super-majority is often a requirement in democracies when depriving citizens of fundamental personal or economic freedoms. For example in Quebec, the imposition of a marketing board must be approved by at least two-thirds of the producers who vote, with at least one-half of the affected producers participating in the vote. The Wheat Growers go further and maintain that individual property rights should not be decided by plebiscite, and so this vote on barley should be viewed merely as a means by which the federal government can gauge farmer opinion on its decision to provide farmers with marketing choice.

Voter Eligibility and the Weighting of Ballots

- All farmers who have produced a minimum level of grain (e.g. 1000 tonnes) over the past two years should be eligible to vote. Alternatively, farms operating a minimum of 320 acres should be eligible to vote. Such minimum thresholds would help ensure the vote is conducted primarily among those who depend on farming for their livelihood and reduces the risk that hobby or retired farmers will skew the results.
- Ballots should be weighted on the basis of production (e.g. one extra vote for every 500 tonnes) or on the basis of acreage (e.g. one extra vote for every 500 acres).
- The plebiscite should be conducted across western Canada, broken down by province, so all western farmers have an opportunity to express their opinion as to whether they wish to have their barley marketed by the Canadian Wheat Board (on either a voluntary or compulsory basis) or not marketed by the CWB at all.
- CAIS (Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization) records should be used if production is the basis for determining voter eligibility and the weighting of votes. CAIS forms currently require farmers to declare grain tonnage produced and sold. Provincial crop insurance records should be used if acreage is the basis for determining voter eligibility and the weighting. In either case, any farmer not enrolled in CAIS or crop insurance who meets the minimum production or acreage threshold should be allowed to add his or her name to the voters list by statutory declaration.

Plebiscite Question

- The Wheat Growers recommend the question be worded as follows: If you had to choose between three different approaches to marketing barley, which of the following would you prefer:
 - Option One: That barley marketing, for export or domestic human consumption, remain the sole responsibility of the Canadian Wheat Board.
 - Option Two: The marketing choice option where private companies and a voluntary CWB would compete for the purchase and sale of each farmer’s barley in the domestic and export market.
 - Option Three: That there be a totally open market for barley without the Canadian Wheat Board.
- The above question is identical to the survey question posed by the Innovative Research Group (and released by the CWB in May), except that Option Two reflects the marketing choice option outlined by the Task Force report released on October 30.