



*For Immediate Release*

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### **Wheat Growers Call on Parliament to End CN Rail Strike**

The Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association is calling on the federal government to immediately introduce back-to-work legislation to put an end to the CN rail strike. The Wheat Growers also urge all Parliamentarians to facilitate its speedy passage, and to allow for an arbitrated solution if the railway and its workers are unable to reach a negotiated settlement.

“In February, farmers witnessed the costly and crippling effects of a two-week rail strike,” says Cherilyn Jolly-Nagel, President of the Wheat Growers. “We don’t want to see that happen again.”

The Wheat Growers note the cost of strikes in the rail sector are borne primarily by third parties, including farmers, rather than the railways or workers themselves. While it is difficult to estimate the full cost of these service disruptions, the February strike significantly impacted farmers through lost grain sales, vessel demurrage costs on wheat shipments, lower canola prices and severe rail service disruptions in the pulse industry. It also caused delays in fertilizer shipments and likely contributed to higher fertilizer prices.

“Farmers suffer real financial losses every time there is a rail service disruption,” says Jolly-Nagel. “Where should we send the bill?”

In a letter to the Honourable Jean-Pierre Blackburn, the federal Minister of Labour, the Wheat Growers also call on the government to introduce legislation deeming railway operations to be an essential service, under which strikes and lockouts would be prohibited. Such a provision is already in place under the Canada Labour Code with respect to the loading of grain vessels by employers and employees in the longshoring industry.

“It’s unfortunate that it should come to this,” says Jolly-Nagel. “However Parliament cannot stand by and watch farmers and other wealth creators continue to suffer at the hands of railway companies and workers who show such little regard for the impact their actions have on their captive customers.”

The Wheat Growers also see an urgent need to reduce our dependency on offshore exports of grain, so that farmers aren’t forced to bear the brunt of rail service disruptions. Currently about 50% of western grain production is shipped by rail in raw form, with a further 10% shipped in processed form.

“We need federal policies that encourage more grain use on the prairies, whether that’s grain and oilseed processing, livestock, dairy, biofuels or any other activity that reduces our dependency on raw grain shipments,” says Jolly-Nagel.

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