



For Immediate Release

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Wheat Growers Applaud Minister Ritz for Plans to Move Forward on Barley

The Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association is pleased the federal government has signaled its intent to bring about a free market in barley by August 1, 2008.

“It is evident that Canadian malt barley sales are being lost under the current regime,” says Mike Bast, Chair of the Wheat Growers. “The inability of maltsters to contract directly with farmers means they cannot secure supplies to confidently book forward sales contracts.”

Bast made his comments following the meeting in Ottawa yesterday in which Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz met with the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB), the malting companies, the brewers, the grain handlers and producer groups. Bast attended the meeting along with the Wheat Growers Alberta Vice President Stephen Vandervalk.

The unworkability of the CWB’s new *CashPlus* program and its inability to fully transmit market signals creates needless uncertainty for farmers and other malt industry players. This price and delivery uncertainty means that acreage will continue to shift to those crops where farmers are in a position to contract directly with buyers.

“Moving to free up the barley market would increase barley acreage and increase the percentage of the crop sold into higher value malt markets,” says Vandervalk. “It would also spur greater investment in barley processing here on the prairies. More local market opportunities means more competition for our grain.”

In the meeting, the CWB representatives did indicate a willingness to refer the matter to the CWB Board of Directors, who will be holding a strategic planning session this week.

“Unless the CWB is prepared to provide farmers with real market choice on its own, the Minister has no choice but to take steps to give farmers barley marketing freedom by August 1, 2008,” says Bast. “Farmers will soon be finalizing planting decisions and need to know they can count on an open market once that crop is harvested.”

- 30 -

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