



For Immediate Release

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Wheat Growers Seek Freer Trade in WTO Talks

The Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association urges the Canadian government to resist protectionist pressures and adopt a strong trade promotion stance at WTO negotiations in Geneva this week.

“In western Canada, over 90% of our ag sector is reliant on export trade,” says Mike Bast, Chair of the Wheat Growers and chair of its trade committee. “Canada should do all it can to ensure access to export markets is as open and distortion-free as possible.”

The Wheat Growers are concerned that a few special interests are promoting a protectionist stance at these negotiations, including Canada’s supply-managed industries and the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB).

“It is naïve to think that we can get significant cuts in the production-distorting subsidies of other countries or significant improvements in market access if we adopt a protectionist attitude,” says Rolf Penner, Manitoba Vice President of the Wheat Growers.

The Wheat Growers are urging the Canadian government to put the CWB monopoly on the negotiating table, in exchange for deeper cuts to U.S. and EU farm subsidy programs.

“Canada will pay a heavy price in these negotiations if we remain the only country in the world seeking special protection for state trading enterprises like the CWB,” says Bast. “The CWB subtracts value for most prairie farmers and so we have nothing to lose and lots to gain by putting the monopoly on the negotiating table.”

The Wheat Growers note that in recent days, Larry Hill, Chair of the CWB has falsely suggested the CWB is not trade-distorting.

“To suggest the CWB is not trade-distorting is absurd,” says Penner. “For the CWB’s statement to be true, it would mean that trade flows would be identical if the CWB monopoly did not exist. Surely no one, except the CWB, is willing to make that claim with a straight face.”

The Wheat Growers point out that the current monopoly prevents western Canadian farmers from freely trading their wheat and barley. Many prairie farmers routinely export canola, oats, peas, lentils, flax, sunflowers, canary seed and other crops, but are prevented by the CWB from exporting their wheat and barley due to prohibitively high buyback requirements. These buybacks effectively operate as an export tax (against farmers in only one region of Canada) and distort Canada’s trade in wheat and barley.

“It’s unfortunate that Mr. Hill is in Geneva spreading this false information and undermining Canada’s credibility,” says Bast. “The Wheat Growers are counting on the delegation from the Grain Growers of Canada and the Canadian Agri-Food Trade Alliance to uphold our credibility and reflect the real interests of prairie farmers.”

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