



For Immediate Release

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Wheat Growers recommend a thorough review of fusarium-related regulations

In an appearance before the House of Commons Agriculture Committee in Ottawa yesterday, the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association recommended a thorough consultation process with industry before any new fusarium-related regulations are implemented.

Fusarium head blight is a fungal disease affecting the quality of Canadian grain, and is prevalent on the eastern prairies, central and Atlantic Canada. The Committee hearing was held in response to recent concerns and confusion over regulations and enforcement measures relating to fusarium-infected grain in Canada. Fusarium produces a vomitoxin, called deoxynivalenol (DON) in grain which poses health risks to humans and livestock if not carefully managed.

In its presentation the Wheat Growers commented on Canada's excellent food safety record in flour and other grain-based products and attributed this record to the ability of the industry to manage the risks related to fusarium-infected grain.

"Farmers, grain handlers and marketers, the Canadian Grain Commission and the milling industry have been successful in managing and mitigating the risks associated with fusarium-infected grain," testified Geoff Hewson, Saskatchewan Vice President of the Wheat Growers. "To our knowledge, there has not been a single human health incident arising from DON in Canadian flour or food products."

The Wheat Growers recommended that a comprehensive review process be undertaken to determine if any new standards or tolerances relating to DON or other mycotoxins should be implemented. In the meantime the Wheat Growers asked that existing Canadian Grain Commission grading standards on fusarium remain in place.

The Wheat Growers support a move toward a more objective DON-based grading system for fusarium-infected grain. Currently, grain that is delivered by farmers is graded on a visual basis, assessing the degree of fusarium-infected kernels. A more virulent strain of fusarium is making a visual assessment of fusarium a less reliable indicator of the actual level of DON in a wheat sample.

In its testimony, the Wheat Growers also called for a greater research effort on the development of new varieties that are more resistant to fusarium. The Wheat Growers noted too that biotechnology has the potential to play an important role in minimizing the effects of fusarium and enhancing food safety.

For further comment or to obtain a copy of the Wheat Growers presentation to the Committee, please contact:

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