



Western Barley Growers Association

A STRONG VOICE FOR A VIBRANT, MARKET RESPONSIVE BARLEY INDUSTRY IN WESTERN CANADA

EMBRACING THE FUTURE

Another great convention has come and gone for the Western Barley Growers, and this 35th Annual WBGA Convention had a special feeling. Ever since the announcement of Bill C-18, grain meetings in Western Canada have had a different feeling to them. The whole value chain from farmers to processors at the Canada Grains Council annual meeting talked about the future opportunities that were opening up with the removal of the monopoly. Since then, in meeting after meeting as the Bill progressed to Royal Assent the industry has been focused on moving forward into the future.

Western Canada's wheat and barley has been under a dark cloud for decades, with farmers resigned to using their two best agronomical crops just for rotation but now the sun has finally broken through for us. Farmers have the same positive feeling when you talk to them now that I felt when I talked to people from Saskatchewan after the Saskatchewan Party was elected in 2007. It is a feeling that they can finally compete on their own terms - that success is in their own hands again, and anything is possible.

It's interesting how perception becomes reality. How a monopoly can overshadow investment and opportunity in ways we couldn't dream of. I was talking to Rob Saik of Agri-Trend at our convention and he related how a client of theirs who sells ag products into South Korea was approached by one of his customers to source oilseed and special crop products for him just recently. When the customer was asked "why now - you've always been able to buy these products from Canada?" He replied that since the passage of Bill C-18 he's heard that 'Canada is now open for business'.

At our convention, when President and CEO Ian White spoke about the future path of the new Canadian Wheat Board, many reporters including Lee Hart of Grainews were shocked to see Western Barley Grower members wearing CWB hats in support. Ian has known since he took the reins of the CWB, and from the many meetings we have had with him what we have always stood for. The Western Barley Growers has never been an opponent of the CWB, just monopoly control of the CWB that didn't allow farmers the choice to market to whomever and wherever they wanted. Ian White's presentation made it clear that the new CWB will not wither and die without the monopoly as some ex-Directors professed. It will carve out its place and do what we had always maintained; it will serve the needs of farmers as one of the marketing tools in their toolbox.

Farmers and the whole industry are looking forward, not back. There has been some market uncertainty caused by some small self-interested groups who would rather the whole cereals industry in Western Canada go down in flames than succeed without the monopoly. That marketing certainty is clearer now with the February 24 ruling by Justice Perlmutter that denied the injunction sought to prevent Bill C-18 from taking effect. This time a judge took a good, long look at what the law says, taking over a month to examine the case, not one day like we saw in December's ruling. That officially makes August 1, 2012 Marketing Freedom Day for Western Canada's grain farmers, just under 69 years after the monopoly was imposed during WWII. Thank you Conservative Party of Canada for that freedom.

Some people have asked me what the WBGA is going to do now. That's easy. The same thing we always have done - look for farmer-driven solutions to problems in our agriculture industry. With the monopoly gone there are still many things that need to work better for farmers. For instance, a few years ago we commissioned a study on how to manage the risk farmers and their customers face when making farm product sales, and found that the best way to "level the playing field" and ensure no one was taken advantage of, especially with unknown buyers and sellers, was with a Clearing House. That idea is now being considered seriously in our new open market situation. We just completed a study to determine what will be required for an Optimal Marketing Structure, which is also very applicable considering our new open market. We're also working with everyone in the barley industry to establish a National Council for Barley like Canola has used so successfully to advance canola interests for farmers. Our work goes on, and we need new members to help us continue to do it. Remember, we rely on farmer memberships, not check-off money to continue to get the job done.

Now that we have an open market for all our crops in Western Canada it's time that all farmers realize that there is no longer any excuse not to be involved in building a better agriculture industry. We need new faces and younger blood to step up and shape the future of our ag industry. The new Commissions and Councils for Wheat and Barley that will help groups like the WBGA ensure farmers' needs and concerns are met need your help to be successful. We're all busy people, but we can't be too busy to do this job. With freedom comes the responsibility to take control of your industry, and not hope that someone else will do it for you. Happy Freedom Day, everyone. The future is what we make of it.

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