

OPINION ARTICLE

The proposed August 2012 removal of the monopoly of the CWB has everything to do with property rights, and Allen Oberg, CWB chairman, should know this. In his letter in the August 31st Lethbridge Herald, he avoids dealing with the issue by trying to equate the CWB with supply management marketing boards for dairy and poultry. Not only have the Conservatives specifically stated for the past 5 years that supply management is not on the table, but comparing the CWB to supply management is like comparing apples to oranges.

In his letter, Mr. Oberg stated that "if a majority of producers in any agriculture sector want to market their production in an orderly fashion-through a quota system or a single desk selling agent-they have the right to set up such a system and compel all producers within the sector to abide by it." Excuse me? In the Canada I know, you need legislation which carries the threat of legal consequences to force farmers to market this way.

Western Canadian farmers never asked for the monopoly. In 1935, a voluntary CWB was established by government and existed side by side with the open market. However, by 1943, in the midst of WWII, the Federal government "had for more than a year pegged the ceiling price for wheat at 77 3/8 cents per bushel for wheat used in the baking industry for domestic purposes, and when open market prices rose to \$1.20 per bushel, they decided the cost to taxpayers was too great". (Calgary Herald, Sept 29th, 1943) On September 28th, 1943, the federal government shut down the open market for wheat and made all sales of wheat to the CWB mandatory, forcing farmers to take a lower price.

My grandfather told me farmers at the time understood it was their contributions to the war effort. He then would roar that the "war has been over for over 50 years and farmers are still paying for it!"

When Mr. Goodale changed the CWB Act in 1998 to have some farmer-elected directors govern the organization, it had nothing to do with democracy. If it had, he would have allowed farmers to elect all the positions for director. However, he kept 5 government-appointed positions, because the CWB is, was, and always will be, the creation of the Government of Canada. This created another layer of bureaucracy in the way of any succeeding government that might try to remove the monopoly of the CWB. Requiring farmer plebiscites and making it look like farmers run things (when we all know they don't) are great stalling tactics to any changes that anyone might try to make.

And running a plebiscite to decide the future of mandatory marketing is not democratic. It's allowing some farmers to tell other farmers how to manage the marketing of their own wheat and barley; in other words, how to deal with their own property. This power, and the power of the monopoly, is only possible because of legislation; it can only be corrected by legislation.

The world has changed since September 28, 1943. Everywhere else in Canada except in the Designated Area farmers can adapt to those changes with their wheat and barley, but for some reason we are expected to be happy with a 68 year old monopoly. It's time we changed. The essence of democracy is individual choice. It's my grain and I choose to market it myself.

Mr. Harper - I'm waiting for August 1, 2012. It can't come soon enough.

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and Grain Producer
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