



# Western Barley Growers Association

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

## Leadership after the Single Desk

For years the Western Barley Growers Association (WBGA) and other producer groups have been working towards the day when producers in Western Canada would have marketing freedom for their wheat and barley sales. This finally came to fruition this past year and as of August 1, 2012 we are in a whole new world of marketing all the crops we grow on the Prairies. This debate is over – now the future is upon us, and the success of our farms and our industry is finally back in our own hands.

We have been asked many times since December's Bill C-18 received Royal Assent "What is the WBGA going to do now that this fight has been won?". The fight to return the CWB back to Voluntary status involved reining in a government entity that far exceeded its mandate and branched out into areas it felt it needed to control like transportation, car allocation, varieties and classes of cereals, and farmer advocacy. It has been a long and an all-encompassing fight, and everything in the grain-farming arena seemed to be touched by the single desk. Now that the new CWB is concentrating on its real mandate - the selling of grain, we at the WBGA can concentrate on all the other things that affect farmers. It's not that the WBGA hasn't been active in these other areas in the past, it's just that they were overshadowed by enormity of the monopoly. The WBGA was formed 35 years ago to help farmers reduce their costs and represent themselves in matters that affect them in their grain industry. Over the years we have punched far above our weight when it came to taking farmer's ideas and opinions to the politicians that affect our industry. As one of our members is fond of saying, "you need skin in the game to understand what is best for your industry", and farmers who are dealing with the system on a day to day basis, making their living from agriculture, are the ultimate ones affected by both good and bad programs that politicians come up with.

Our first concern in this new market reality has been to come up with a structure that better represents the barley industry, with the producers' needs and input at its' core. Along with the Alberta Barley Commission, we are well down the road to a national barley organization called the Barley Council of Canada (BCC) that is similar to the successful Canola Council model already in place. It puts Canada-wide producers, researchers, buyers, end users and customers at the table developing and promoting barley and the barley industry. It recognizes that barley is a unique and under-represented grain whose interests cannot be served by being lumped in with all other cereals for the purpose of convenience. It does not mean that the Council won't be cooperating with other cereal groups such as the new Wheat Commissions and the WCWGA or the Canada Grains Council on issues that affect all grains. It just means that we refuse to let barley get lost in the shuffle as the industry scrambles to adapt to the new realities of the Canadian grain market. We are very supportive of a stronger and better-funded Canada Grains Council now that we can talk freely at the table with all the participants without them having to watch what they say for fear of angering the former monopoly CWB.

When the monopoly disappeared, a number of organizations who were funded by producers' money indirectly needed a new way of funding, and that will be accomplished by visible check-offs now so farmers can see where their money goes and how much it is. It puts more pressure on organizations like the WGRF, CIGI, etc. to deliver what farmers want for their investment, and that's a good thing. The WBGA will continue to make sure farmers get their money's worth.

Detractors of the WBGA in the past have tried to make the case that because we were not in favor of the single desk, that meant we were shills for the big elevator companies. That is ironic since the WBGA started as a group of farmers who showed other farmers how to load their own rail cars and properly fill out the paperwork to save handling and elevation fees, and took a lot of flak from grain companies for levelling the playing field. We will continue to fight for farmers' interests first and foremost in agriculture. Everyone in the system has to make money, or the value chain will fail, but if something doesn't work for farmers, who are the most important link in the chain, then it doesn't work; period. The WBGA will continue to advocate for farmers, which is our primary priority, just as we always have done.

This includes things like Risk Management programs, both for Crop Insurance, and Business Risk Management. With the new Growing Forward II program coming into force there are challenges for farmers in covering identifiable risks as the government struggles to cut their budget across the board. Farmers should not be punished for being successful - that is a positive thing for the agriculture industry and the more we can do to encourage growth and profit in agriculture the better. That said, farmers know that Mother Nature can be brutal and arbitrary, and we need a way to better cover risk that comes with premiums that fairly reflect the value of what they cover. In the past the WBGA has been a leader in helping to develop innovative and useful programs that work for farmers, and we will continue to do that.

This year is an evolutionary year, and there will be a learning and adaption curve we will all have to go through as an industry. The WBGA commissioned a study last year that has now been presented to the Federal and Provincial Ag Ministers which identified areas where there could be some gaps that industry will not be able or willing to fill that would improve the grain industry as a whole and make it work better for everyone such as mandatory reporting of export sales, as happens in the U.S.. It also identified opportunities for the industry that will help us compete better in the future. We intend to press all levels of government and the industry to adopt these useful recommendations.

There is as big a need for the WBGA as ever, even without a monopoly to fight. The important battle is to encourage and foster an environment in agriculture that allows farmers to be successful. That is a battle the WBGA will continue to fight.

### MARK YOUR CALENDAR

**WBGA 36th Annual Convention – February 13, 14 & 15, 2013, Calgary, AB @ the Deerfoot Inn & Casino**

**Agriculture Centre, 97 East Lake Ramp N.E., Airdrie, AB T4A 0C3**

**Website: [www.wbga.org](http://www.wbga.org) • E-mail: [wbga@wbga.org](mailto:wbga@wbga.org)**

**AIRDRIE OFFICE  
Phone: (403) 912-3998**

**PRESIDENT – Doug Robertson  
Phone: (403) 337-2077**