

The Importance of Strong Wheat Board Leadership

The Canadian Wheat Board's role is, has been and always should be to serve Western Canadian wheat and barley farmers. With that service is an expectation of effectiveness, accountability and transparency.

These are certainly the principles and standards we strive to work toward as farmer-elected directors of the Wheat Board. As farmers working for farmers, we know exactly how important it is for the Wheat Board to consistently deliver the best possible value for sales of Western Canadian wheat and barley.

Yet our constituents, our neighbours and fellow farmers, increasingly ask us, "Why isn't there more forward-thinking leadership at the Wheat Board?"

Farmers' frustration with the Wheat Board's leadership is reflected in the Wheat Board's own annual survey results. In 2010, the survey showed when given a choice just 48% of wheat producers and 34% of barley producers across western Canada favour only the Wheat Board marketing their grain. Support for the Wheat Board is not growing with farmers and young farmers are especially disillusioned with it. In fact, 77% of young farmers indicate that they want more marketing options.

In the 13 years the CWB has conducted producer surveys, it has not once reported majority support from barley producers.

Moving forward, we believe it is imperative for the Wheat Board to truly lead. To do so it must understand and adapt to the needs of today's farmers. That does not necessarily mean the Wheat Board has to be all things to all farmers. Western Canada (and Canada as a whole) has a number of producer and commodity organizations that speak for farmers on certain issues. What the CWB needs to do is focus on its core activity and something that's vital to farmers: market development and marketing of wheat and barley.

As Wheat Board directors committed to seeing wheat and barley as viable, profitable crops in Canadian agriculture, we believe it's time to do something different to meet farmers' needs. Like any competitive organization, the Wheat Board needs to look closely at how its business and farms have changed and then to respond to those changes.

That's really what strong leadership is about: responding with courage, conviction and vision to the world around you. It is not about doing what's always been done and failing to recognize how the world has changed.

Today's farmers are calling for greater transparency in the Wheat Board's decisions and greater options and simplicity in its programs. They especially want to know strong leaders at the Canadian Wheat Board are committed to doing exactly this for them.

We want to assure farmers that these are the views we are bringing to the Wheat Board table.

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