

# Final Trip Report

Mission to the Western Association of State  
Departments of Agriculture (WASDA)  
Whitefish, Montana  
Dates: July 12-15, 2010

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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## **Purpose of travel:**

To attend the annual WASDA meeting.

## **Overview:**

WASDA is a multi-state regional organization under the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA). WASDA brings together the western United States (US) state departments of agriculture Secretaries, Commissioners, and Directors to discuss agriculture interests and concerns. Membership includes: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. Alberta and British Columbia are invited to participate with their US state counterparts as affiliate members.

Alberta's attendance at the WASDA meeting provides Alberta with the opportunity to meet with key agriculture decision makers and policy influencers from the western US. The meeting provides a forum to advance Alberta's agriculture and agri-food interests, find areas of collaboration, exchange information on key agriculture policy areas and address any priority issues. It also provides Alberta a perspective on state priorities and their potential impact to our agriculture industry. The WASDA meeting was hosted by Montana's Director of Agriculture, Ron De Yong.

Alberta was represented at WASDA by Len Mitzel, MLA, Cypress-Medicine Hat.

## **Objectives:**

- Exchange information with counterparts on key agriculture issues;
- Enhance Alberta's profile and relationships with key US state decision makers;
- Promote collaborative approaches to common problems and issues;
- Seek areas of cooperation with priority states;
- Advocate for implementation of Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) regulations and food safety legislation that does not impede trade.

The WASDA meeting includes a roundtable meeting, presentations and agriculture site visits. Themes included: climate change, agriculture's role in climate change, United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) priorities and individual state agriculture reports.

WASDA's opening dinner began with Montana showcasing the Dine Montana program. The Dine Montana program mimics the very successful Dine Alberta program. This effort is a direct result of a 2009 Alberta-Montana information exchange on the Dine Alberta concept. In the program, Chefs develop a menu that profiles locally grown products.

Lieutenant Governor John Bolinger provided opening remarks on the state of Montana. Under the Schweitzer administration, Montana has successfully bolstered their

economy. Innovative approaches to coal mining have contributed to Montana's positive revenue position. It is estimated that Montana will generate US\$250 million per year over 20 years from coal mining. Montana boasts the third lowest state taxes in the country. The Schweitzer administration has prioritized education funding as a key pillar to building a vibrant, healthy economy.

Dr. Eric Grimsrud, retired professor of chemistry and author of "Thoughts of a Scientist, Citizen and Grandpa on Climate Change," provided an overview of the science of climate change. He stated that the continuing acceleration of climate change has implications for agriculture and that innovative approaches that minimize climate change will be critical to maintaining a sustainable agriculture industry.

Dan Fagge, Research Ecologist and Climate Change Research Coordinator, Northern Rocky Mountain Science Centre, Glacier National Park, provided an overview of the impacts of 100 years of climate change in Glacier National Park. Shrinking levels of snow and ice are resulting in decreasing water levels for agriculture. Mountains provide 85% of the water source for agriculture. With the potential disappearance of glaciers by 2030, agriculture's future sustainability will be compromised.

Roger Johnston, President, National Farmer's Union (NFU), provided NFU's perspective on agriculture's role in climate and energy policy. The organization has long supported agriculture as part of climate and energy solutions. NFU sees a need for a cap and trade system that incorporates regional agriculture policies. It is felt that the Clean Energy and Security Act will have a greater focus on energy policy than on climate change policy.

Jennifer Yezak, Director, Intergovernmental Affairs, USDA, provided an update on USDA's priorities. The recent oil spill in the gulf has redeployed agency staff to monitoring the impact of the environmental disaster on agriculture in the affected regions. USDA is prioritizing development of a New Rural Economy. Pillars to support this effort include: supporting new markets and local regional food systems (i.e. "know your farmer, know your food"); creating eco-system markets; broadband access; promotion of renewable energy-provision of loans, grants and funding to accelerate research; promoting and enhancing recreational opportunities; addressing food safety of imports, and supporting the Child Nutrition Program (CNP). The CNP accounts for 80% of the US Farm Bill funding.

Steven Haterius, Executive Director, NASDA, shared that 20 states are in elections this fall resulting in numerous new state Secretaries and Directors of Agriculture being appointed. NASDA policy priorities highlighted include: food safety legislation; child nutrition reauthorization; water issues, toxic substances control act; current regulations on meat inspection, pesticide and Environmental Safety Act issues; and Farm Bill issues including dairy policy, specialty crops, pest and disease management, and energy. An invasive species resolution is being brought forward at the fall NASDA meeting for consideration. The resolution proposes federal funding towards invasive species management, education and awareness.

State report highlights included:

- Arizona providing a perspective on the controversial "Support our law enforcement and safe neighborhoods" Act.. The law is in response to recent violent incidents from Mexican cartels advancing into Arizona.

- Alaska is targeting China for their potato seed exports.
- Utah is undertaking a public education campaign “Agra Advocate” to amplify awareness and support for agriculture sustainability.
- California’s debilitating budget shortfalls is paralyzing department activities. Governor Schwarzenegger has initiated development of the first “Ag Vision” 2030 document to address California’s future vision.
- Colorado has undertaken development of best practices to adapt to climate change which includes a focus on innovative irrigation techniques and research. Colorado’s Tuberculosis (TB) positive dairy herd is being depopulated.
- Wyoming is experiencing grasshopper challenges and is addressing the wild horse management issue.
- New Mexico is working with Mexico on ag bio-security and is investing in Information Technology (IT) efficiencies at border crossings to expedite inspections.
- Oregon has experienced deep cuts to their state budget, limiting their ability to deliver on their mandate. The state has provided an agriculture position to the Department of Education to address inclusion of agriculture education in the curriculum.
- Hawaii has declared a disaster designation in some areas due to drought and volcano fog. Anti-Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) legislation continues to challenge the agriculture industry.
- Idaho is depopulating a Brucellosis positive herd and confined feeding operations have been impacted by the Clean Water Act.
- Montana’s dairy industry is struggling. Montana’s education curriculum has been enhanced to address renewable energy, climate change, nutrition and economics of agriculture. A Brucellosis outbreak in wildlife has resulted in a downgrade of Montana’s animal health status.

MLA Mitzel provided an overview of the state of Alberta’s agriculture industry. Mr. Mitzel shared Alberta’s support of our federal governments’ WTO COOL (Country of Origin) challenge. He stated that COOL should be implemented in a way that supports our robust two-way trade and that COOL is less about food safety and more about marketing.

He encouraged state participation at the upcoming Cross Border Livestock Health Conference (CBLHC) being held within the Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER) meeting in Calgary, Alberta. The CBLHC brings together provincial and state veterinarians, animal health experts and industry, from PNWER to discuss animal health protocols, issues, best practises and collaborative opportunities. The conference has been held in high regard by officials, legislators and industry that attend, as a valuable forum for cross border dialogue.

The agriculture site visits included: a production facility of hydroponic tomatoes using geothermal heating tubes to use underground soil temperature to minimize heating and cooling costs; a certified seed potato producer that experiments with diversification crops including canola, lentils and sorghum. The operation also assists with research on disease testing and control and the Northwestern Agricultural Research Centre which is responsible for conducting research to maintain the vitality of Montana’s agriculture industry. Of note is the extensive research Montana is undertaking in camelina as a bio-energy crop.

**Results:**

- Provided an overview of the state of Alberta's agriculture industry.
- Invitation extended to US states to attend the 2010 CBHC being held within the PNWER meeting in Calgary in July.
- Met with state Secretaries of Agriculture and state representatives to explore areas of collaboration and cooperation.
- Met with US state Secretaries to discuss the priorities and approach for maintaining engagement in the Canada-US-Mexico Tri-National Agriculture Accord and advancing the efforts of the Rural Development Working Group.
- Advocated for COOL implementation and food safety legislation that does not hinder robust two-way trade.

**Delegation:**

Len Mitzel, MLA Cypress-Medicine Hat

Ms. Annalisa Baer, Branch Head, Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development