



COMMENTARY

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Grain Marketing: Discussions and Decisions

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In light of the federal government's plan to eliminate the Canadian Wheat Board's (CWB) single desk marketing structure, we need to ensure discussion takes place between stakeholders during this key transitional period. KAP will not stand in the way of farmers accessing profitable markets—however that may be best achieved.

Nevertheless, the implications of marketing choice need to be fully understood and planned for accordingly. I was told this week by a farmer that he wants options to market wheat and barley, but not at the sacrifice of the CWB for the farmers who still want to use the CWB. This message best exemplifies the challenge before us all.

We know our members and other Western Canadian farmers are divided on the CWB's future, and both sides need to be heard and at the table. As KAP president, I need input from all members to help shape the message of our policy to make it relevant to the political situation of the day. Clearly, we are in a transition phase and government should be open to input from all producers to make sure nothing slips through the cracks. All farmers have different needs and expectations for the future and I will do my best to provide a balanced view. Be assured that KAP does not take a position for or against making changes to the CWB single desk.

As farmers we have to take a business-like approach to the future in order to compete in the world markets that we service. Lessons from the past should guide us, but not limit our horizons. As a general farm organization we must stand together more strongly than ever before. The ongoing flood crisis has shown the importance of a strong coalition of farm members and commodity groups working to help everyone impacted by the disaster. We must be heard in the evolution of grain marketing, anything less should be unacceptable to every farmer.

At a time when we are facing annual weather related disasters, increasingly volatile markets and increasing input costs, making significant changes to the CWB without a formal transition plan in place is a serious concern. We need to know what type of impact the proposed changes will have on our operations. There are also many unanswered questions on issues surrounding the services connected to the CWB and how they will be provided.

Whether a farmer believes in removing the single desk role from the CWB or maintaining the status quo, we can and should have the opportunity to work together with the federal government to analyze an approach that will work for us all. We have a right to be included in these important decisions that affect our bottom line. I believe the majority of farmers would be put at ease if they could see the federal government's plan and have a meaningful opportunity to provide input.

Keystone Agricultural Producers is Manitoba's largest general farm policy organization, representing over 7,000 farm families and 22 commodity groups throughout the province. Our strength is our democratic structure, and our mission is to represent and promote the interests of the province's farm families.