

On Common Ground: Messages from the Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta

A Look at the New Alberta Wheat Commission

Submitted by the Alberta Wheat Commission

New Commission Plans to Advance Alberta's Wheat Industry on Many Fronts

Alberta's agricultural industry has always been innovative and forward-thinking and on August 1, the industry proved once again that it is a leader in the nation by establishing the first all-wheat commission in Canada. The primary purpose of the new commission will be to increase farm gate returns on wheat and to work as an advocacy organization representing the interests of Alberta's wheat producers.

Even though the commission was only recently regulated into operation, the process of making this organization a reality began several years ago with a dedicated group of Alberta's wheat producers who gave a lot of their time and effort to make it happen. In 2008, members of the Alberta Winter Wheat Producers Commission (AWWPC) resolved to investigate growers' interest in creating an all-wheat commission. The first step was to conduct some third party market research aimed at gauging the interest of Alberta's wheat producers in the establishment of a new all-wheat commission. A subsequent survey of 300 diverse Alberta wheat producers from across the province found that the majority of them favoured the idea.

"Having an all wheat commission representing the interests of all 11,000 Alberta wheat producers provides a single stronger voice when it comes to policy and advocacy efforts and it just made a lot of sense to producers," says Rick Istead, Executive Director of the Alberta Winter Wheat Producers Commission and General Manager of the new Alberta Wheat Commission. "AWWPC was encouraged by the positive survey results and subsequently partnered with the Alberta Soft Wheat Producers Commission (ASWPC) to establish a steering committee to develop a strategic business plan for the all-wheat commission in Alberta."

After many months of working collaboratively with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, the steering committee completed its mandate and the new commission was officially established on August 1, 2012. The new commission will replace both the AWWPC and ASWPC, and serve as the single voice for wheat producers across Alberta.

The new wheat commission will play a key role in supporting innovative research, market development initiatives, advocacy and producer extension and education. Amongst its advocacy initiatives, the Alberta Wheat Commission hopes to play a significant role in contributing to Alberta's agri-environmental policy development. "One effective way to accomplish this is through the Agri-Environmental Partnership of Alberta which is a multi-stakeholder partnership of government, industry and public stakeholders working together to proactively address agri-environmental issues from a policy perspective," offers Istead. "Alberta's wheat producers realize that working together and collaborating is the best way to move our industry forward." Historically only about five percent of Alberta's wheat producers were represented by the two predecessor commissions. With the support of all 11,000 Alberta Wheat Producers, the Alberta Wheat Commission will be a powerful voice for environmental policy development in the agriculture industry. And although Alberta's all wheat commission is the first of its kind in Canada, it certainly won't be the last. As producers in other provinces realize the value of industry collaboration, a national wheat council may be just around the corner.

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