



## WESTERN BARLEY GROWERS ASSOCIATION

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### **Opinion Piece – CWB BOARD CONTINUES TO ABUSE PRODUCER POOLED ACCOUNTS**

It has become painfully clear that the eight remaining elected directors of the Canadian Wheat Board (group of eight - "single desk directors") do not understand that the money in the pool accounts belongs to farmers. Their most recent dip into the pool accounts was to grab \$1.4 million for an ad campaign that will not market any grain; rather, it is a political campaign launched against the Conservative Government's plan to give farmers marketing freedom.

And it's not even aimed at farmers. For the most part, the TV and print ads that compare the government's approach to the CWB to a steamroller are only being shown in Eastern Canada, specifically Ottawa and Toronto. And what's worse is that this campaign is just the latest of a growing list of abuses of the farmers' pool accounts by the remaining eight elected directors.

Earlier this year the CWB directors announced that \$65 million would be taken from the pool accounts to buy two lakers. In August, they spent \$84,000 conducting meetings across western Canada to promote the single desk. This was a not-so-veiled attempt to influence the non-binding plebiscite it was holding at the time, which cost a reported \$275,000 plus advertising costs for \$177,000. And, more recently they asked for (and received) intervenor status in a court challenge of the government launched by the Friends of the CWB, costing a yet to be determined amount. And then for some unknown reason, the CWB launched its own legal challenge of the government's plans that is effectively identical to the Friends' case, even though their own lawyers suggested it had little hope of success. If they are to be believed, this "hopeless" case will cost only \$100,000; all this before the useless political ad campaign which will cost a reported \$1.4 million.

Add to this the travel and per diem costs that farmers will be forced to pay for these directors to travel across the country to defend their personal ideological positions. The pool accounts have become nothing more than a slush fund for the group of eight to promote their own political agenda - and that is unacceptable.

If the group of eight wants a political campaign, they should use their own money, not producers'. Since not all farmers share their ideology, it has been suggested that the CWB allow farmers to opt out of paying for all this largess. When asked if they would consider this, Allen Oberg, Chair of the CWB board said they would not. Obviously, they believe that the flawed plebiscite they held in August gives them the moral and "democratic" right to fight the government because a majority of farmers voted in support of the single desk.

They continue to say, the plebiscite showed that 51% of barley farmers voted in favour of the single desk; there is no doubt that, in reality, that is too high. In 2009-10, like most years, the CWB marketed only 2.5 million tonnes of the 10.5 million tonnes of barley produced; the other 80% was marketed by farmers - without the CWB. But the only barley producers to receive plebiscite ballots were those with CWB permit books and that had marketed barley through the CWB. This represents a mere 20% of the total barley production in Western Canada.

It takes a huge stretch of imagination to believe that 51% of barley farmers voted for the single desk when farmers representing only 20% of the production received a ballot. Holding up this plebiscite as credible shows an unsavoury disrespect for the intelligence of producers in Western Canada. The term "bully" has been used by the group of eight to describe the Government but I would suggest it is more aptly describes these directors.

The time has come for these eight directors to face the reality an open market for farmers is going to happen. Continuing to spend money on political campaigns, legal actions, self promoting meetings and travel, in a vain attempt to change the government's policy is an abuse of the producers they say they represent. These directors have made the situation so intolerable that it could be impossible for the CWB to continue in an open market. By doing so, these directors once again show their disregard and contempt for producers.

The change to an open market and choice will be good for our industry. The announcements by Rahr Malting and Alliance Grain Traders show that positive change is attracting investment in our industry. When we look back to these last few weeks of the single desk, we will be reminded how eight ideologically bent CWB board members created unwarranted havoc and grief for the industry. And we will be glad to see the end of that era.

Brian Otto  
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