SPENDING OTHER PEOPLE’S MONEY

It seems that two factors involved with the removal of the CWB single desk are on a collision course.

I’m hearing more and more from producers who are saying they plan on storing this year's wheat crop until they can sell it without going through the CWB. One said he plans on contracting his 2011 crop as soon as he can for delivery in August 2012. Others are saying they will only sell wheat for feed or ethanol (around the CWB). Clearly most producers can’t store grain for a year - they need the cash flow - but I know that some can, and likely will.

Also, the board of directors of the CWB has made it clear that they will use all resources at their disposal to fight to keep the single desk. Basically, that means money in the pool accounts or the Contingency Fund, and they don’t seem to be shy about spending it on the plebiscite, the conference call with producers, the advertising campaign, and the seven producer rallies (so far).

On his blog, about the plebiscite, Allen Oberg has said:

“We would ask the federal government to also respect the plebiscite results - if they do, there really isn't a question of spending any additional funds.”

I think what he’s saying is if the plebiscite results show support for the single desk (which it is skewed to do) and the federal government ignores the results (which they have said they will), then the CWB will continue to spend producers’ money fighting it. (Probably best to count on it.)

Now put these two issues together; if the pools are smaller due to some producers boycotting them, those remaining in the pool will each be burdened with an even greater share of the growing cost of this campaign.

This could be considered by some to be appropriate since CWB supporters will remain in the pool and pay for their portion of the campaign based on their deliveries to the pool. But, many who don’t support the CWB, the single desk, or the campaign, will have no choice but to deliver to the CWB and will have no choice but to pay for a share of the campaign that is completely contrary to their interests. The smaller the pool and the longer the campaign, the more each producer in the pool will pay.

The CWB is using money from all producers delivering to the CWB whether they support the single desk or not; whether they support the “save the single desk” campaign or not. This is true whether producers hold back this year’s crop or not. How can the CWB logically – or morally – take money from producers for a campaign to undermine their interests, knowing full well that they would never agree to it if they were asked?

It reminds me of that old Bill Cosby stand-up routine where he told the story of when he would get into trouble and his father would say, “Go get me your belt so I can beat you.” That was funny; this isn’t.

Allen Oberg has said on his blog (aimed at Minister Ritz):

“Maybe it is time to move beyond the sound bites and start listening to farmers – all farmers, including those who have different views…”
This is hypocrisy at its finest. Mr. Oberg, as representative of the CWB board of directors should take his own advice. The CWB needs to stop playing politics with the bottom lines of producers that have “a different view” than eight of the board of directors and don’t support its efforts, whether marketing efforts or quasi-political “save the single desk” efforts.

A good start would be to allow producers to decide whether they want to pay for the campaign.

It would be a very easy task for the CWB to allow farmers to indicate that they either approve of the campaign and wish to contribute to it, or that the campaign is fighting against their interests and therefore they don’t want to contribute to it. At the end of the year, the CWB will know the damage to the pool accounts from the campaign and, those that chose to support it could have their fair share of the cost apportioned to their final payment. Those that didn’t support it would have their final payment left intact without the extra deduction for the campaign.

Alternatively, the CWB could leave the pool accounts alone and use only money in the Contingency Fund (which they say isn't producers' money. I disagree.) That would be a tough one though, since they seem to see the Contingency Fund as the nest egg for the “New Generation CWB”, the organization they are fighting to avoid.

Either way - allowing producers to opt out of paying for the campaign, or using Contingency Fund money - seems fair to me. If the CWB forces all producers to finance the campaign, not only is it hypocritical, it is a blatant abuse of power.


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