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Barley growers address declining acreage

PAUL FREY
MVG Staff

About 130 Alberta Barley Commission delegates and directors from around the province gathered in Banff on Dec. 10.

One of the issues discussed was declining acreage devoted to barley due to competition from corn and other more profitable crops being planted.

"Declining acreage due to low returns is a big thing," said Trevor Petersen, newly-elected vice-chair. "Barley just doesn't have the returns that, say, canola does or wheat . . . so it's just tougher and tougher."

Petersen, who farms 600 hectares (1,500 acres) of barley, wheat, peas and canola near Penhold, said some farmers attempt to get around the low returns by devoting more acreage to the crop, which in turn

drives the price lower. Other farmers attempt to boost returns by growing specialty crops such as peas. The ABC would like to see barley move from a largely rotational crop to a mainstay such as wheat or other crops.

"We want to try to get barley to a place where it isn't a rotational crop, where there is value in barley to make growers want to (plant) it. Anything we can do to find more markets and other uses for it, that's what we do," Petersen said.

Bob Treadway, a futurist, gave a keynote presentation on the creation of a single buying cooperative for 80 per cent of the feed market, the impact of the rise of the Balkan region on grain production and export, and how China could impact the industry. Genetically modified barley was also discussed.

