

# Ag organizations state priorities

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Spotlight Staff

New provincial Agriculture Minister Jack Hayden has his work cut out for him, according to representatives of several agricultural organizations.

Hayden received the Agriculture portfolio in a recent cabinet shuffle by Premier Ed Stelmach. The former minister, George Groeneveld, is no longer in cabinet.

"The top priorities for him (Hayden) would be the same as for the past minister," said Valleyview producer and Western Stock Growers' Association (WSGA) president Bill Hanson.

The most important priority, said Hanson, would be the issue of regulations, which mandate that meat at a packing plant in Alberta cannot be shipped to B.C. or Saskatchewan, and vice versa, creating a hardship for producers.

"The regulatory burden always comes back to the cow-calf man," said Hanson.

"It's a huge burden."

Hanson said high costs have driven packing plants out of Alberta, but if they're made more efficient, perhaps they would be able to stay.

He said Groeneveld was willing to discuss such issues with groups and individual producers.

"Hopefully, the new minister is of like thinking."

Hanson said the WSGA has written a letter to Hayden asking for a meeting.

For Grant Gaschnitz, supervisor of the Prairie River Feeders Co-op and Hi-Valley Beef Co-operative, there are two main priorities.

"We've got to get a lot of the red tape gone and get the meat moving," said Gaschnitz.

Like Hanson, Gaschnitz sees regulations as a hassle.

"They're regulating us to death."

On the grain side, Alberta Canola Producers Commission (ACPC) general manager Ward Toma said he sees two main priorities for

Hayden.

"(They are) engagement in crop insurance and ensuring agricultural safety nets are working properly," said Toma.

Toma said he'd also like to see Hayden continue discussions with other ministries, such as Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, about policy.

He hopes the positive relationship with the province enjoyed by the ACPC will continue.

"The Alberta government has been a good research partner; and we anticipate it always being a good partner," said Toma.

**Alberta Barley Commission** chairman Matt Sawyer said there are a number of matters he'd like to see Hayden tackle, among them the rebuilding of the trust lost between the food sector and the government.

Sawyer would also like to see the agriculture sector go even higher.

"We could have possible stronger ties with the federal government and move the industry nationally and

internationally," he said.

Hayden said the commission would also like to see funding restored to the department to work toward eliminating travel and hiring restrictions, which are barriers to success.

The commission wants to have a meeting with Hayden in the near future.

"We're looking forward to working (with him). We're very excited," said Sawyer.

