

Barley the poor sister in the plant breeding family

Depressed prices, lower yields and crop competition face industry

BY WILL VERBOVEN
Editor

Delegates to the **Alberta Barley Commission (ABC)** annual meeting here last month didn't hear much good news about the current state of their favourite crop, but were heartened about the future possibilities of barley production and new end-user developments.

Outgoing chair Terry Young said that one of the major concerns over the past few years was the decreasing funding for research and plant breeding. Of particular concern is competition from corn, which is of increasing interest to cattle feeders for grain and silage. Young said corn has an advantage due to its use of GM technology and involvement of major seed companies in breeding programs.

CEO Mike Leslie said yields are increasing for new barley varieties, but that both wheat and barley were falling behind breeding advances in canola, corn and soybeans. Leslie said that the recent announcement by the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency of an investment of \$8 million over the next three years in feed grain development was welcome news. He said that **ABC** would be participating in the program by means of research and development projects by itself or with partners.

Rob Burns of Syngenta outlined his company's involvement with barley research and plant breeding. Syngenta barley breeding is presently focused on

variety development in Europe, particularly for malt production. Developments were also going forward with hybrid barley and winter barley, but all were for the European market where Syngenta is the market leader. He said that a number of conditions needed changing for his company to make major investments in North American barley breeding.

INCREASED CHECKOFF FUNDS

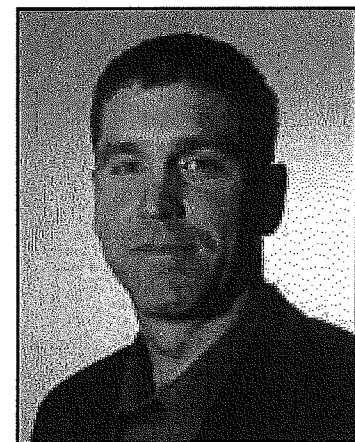
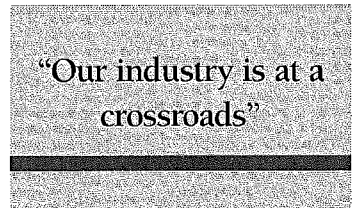
Leslie said **ABC** has fine-tuned and completed its corporate governance and strategic and business plan for the next four years. He also said that the number of licensed barley buyers collecting checkoff had increased from 109 to 197. He said the increased checkoff funds collected since the last increase in the checkoff rate will become available by February 2010.

Several delegates expressed their concern with the practice of some exporters of adding foreign material back into grain that some growers had paid to clean. It was said that this practice could add unwanted GM material and even plant pathogens into export shipments with the result that importing countries might prohibit the import of contaminated grain.

Delegates passed a resolution that would see **ABC** lobby the grain industry to cease the practice of adding back foreign material into grain shipments.

The **ABC** board of directors elected Matt Sawyer as their new chair and Leo Meyer as vice-chair.

Sawyer operates a family farm near Acme where they grow barley, canola, and wheat and raise Black Angus cattle. In accepting his new position Sawyer said, "Our industry is at a crossroads, we're not only facing many opportunities and challenges, we're seeing a new generation of barley producers coming into business."



Acme-area grower Matt Sawyer is new chair of the **Alberta Barley Commission**.

