

<b>The Lethbridge Herald (Lethbridge, AB)</b>			Order/Commande
			129713
Date 12.07.2010	Circ. 17818	Page A8	1 / 2

# Check-off program is working

A communications campaign promoting the value of check-off dollars to crop producers is netting new revenue and new opportunities for four Alberta agricultural producer organizations.

The **Alberta Barley Commission**, the Alberta Canola Producers Commission, the Alberta Pulse Growers Commission and the Alberta Winter Wheat Producers Commission launched the campaign in August 2009.

In Alberta, check-off dollars, or service charges, are deducted from farmers' crop payments at the point of sale and submitted to producer associations to support research and market development.

Each partner commission saw substantial results from the campaign.

The **Alberta Barley Commission** has doubled its licensed dealers in the

past five months and increased check-off dollar collection by more than \$25,000. The Alberta Pulse Growers Commission and the Alberta Winter Wheat Producers Commission have also seen licensees and check-off revenue increase.

The campaign has also raised producers' awareness of the value of check-off dollars.

Growers are not always fully aware of the many activities our commissions are involved with, says Ward Toma, general manager of the canola commission. Once

growers see the work being done on their behalf, they see the value and power of their check-off dollars.

Rick Istead of the Alberta Winter Wheat Producers Commission says the check-off value message needs to be told more often.

He suggests producers need to be reminded that the commissions bring value to farm operations through various research, marketing, communications and education initiatives.

Producer funding is crucial to success, says Mike Leslie, CEO of the **Alberta Barley Commission**. Barley producers have been urging the groups to work together and this campaign demonstrates the benefits of a collective effort.

Check-off dollars are the single most important way producers can invest in their industry, says Sheri Strydhorst, executive



## FARM VOICE

### Ric Swihart

Ric Swihart is The Herald's veteran agriculture journalist. His opinion column appears each Monday.





# The Lethbridge Herald (Lethbridge, AB)

Order/Commande

129713

Date 12.07.2010

Circ. 17818 Page A8

2 / 2

director of the Alberta Pulse Growers Commission. Government and industry partners are much more likely to support our research, development, marketing and risk management projects when they see producers investing their check-off dollars in priority areas.

The four commissions use check-off dollars to leverage government and industry funding, attracting \$7 to \$8 for every \$1 of producer check-off funds. These funds are used to develop and improve crop varieties with stronger disease and pest resistance packages, improve and refine agronomic practices, and develop new domestic and export markets.

That surely has to be considered one of the real good news stories in agriculture.

A good example is the barley commission receiving \$5 million in additional funding from the federal government since August 2009 for research projects that benefit producers.

The only thing missing is creating a way to allow every producer of canola, barley, winter wheat and pulses to contribute their fair share without promotional campaigns.

Making the check-off mandatory is the sure way, but that was wiped out by former Alberta Agriculture Minister George Groeneveld who rightly preached Alberta is a free enterprise province, and free enterprise will rule in agriculture.

Forcing a person to participate in a campaign designed for the good of all doesn't really ride against free enterprise. And it would be one way to let those "leave to the other guy" folks really feel part of the good news.

One can only imagine how many more government dollars could be secured if the farm industry had more money to cost share.

And more producer money likely would open up even more cost-shared work with the private sector.