

New Alta. agriculture minister knows about farm challenges

JACK HAYDEN



ALBERTA AGRICULTURE MINISTER

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Alberta's new agriculture minister, Jack Hayden, is taking over one of the province's largest portfolios and knows the challenges he faces in the coming months.

Hayden replaced George Groeneveld, who was dropped from cabinet in a Jan. 13 shuffle by Alberta premier Ed Stelmach. Hayden was first elected in 2007 and appointed minister of infrastructure in 2008. Prior to his election, he was chair of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties.

He owns a 100-year-old farm in Endiang, Alta., an area hard hit by drought.

"I was ground zero for the drought. My hay crop was 10 percent of what it should be," he said.

Hayden wants more action from Alberta Farm Financial Services when it comes to delivering timely crop insurance programs and farm safety nets.

"If the farmer and primary producer is not doing well, nothing up the value chain is going to do well either," he said.

Hayden called many farm leaders within hours of his appointment to set up meetings, including Chuck McLean, chair of Alberta Beef Producers.

"It was a short conversation but it was a good one and I look forward to

working with him," said McLean.

Groeneveld introduced controversial legislation to create the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency and an amendment to make all commodity group checkoffs refundable.

"Everybody inherits some baggage but that doesn't necessarily mean you can't get it sorted through. There are some things you can fix and some things you can work around," said McLean.

"We're not happy with what happened previous, but that is water under the bridge. We're going forward from here."

Herman Simons, chair of Alberta Pork, wants the new minister to present a strong voice at federal-provincial meetings about the hog sector financial crisis.

"We hope to openly discuss where we are at and feel out his position in doing something for the industry," he said.

Hayden has inherited ongoing policy changes that include the land use framework, water allocation, electric transmission line construction and environmental care.

"I want to make sure the ag producers are receiving what they should be receiving for the stewardship of the land they have now," said Hayden. "I want to make sure the land-use plan-

ning and the people we work with there, make sure the things that go into place do not hamper the ag industry."

Bill Hanson, president of the Western Stock Growers Association, is pleased with the new minister.

"I am glad he recognizes environmentalism. That is a challenge we would like to educate the government on. We are the original environmentalists and want recognition that we do a lot for the land."

Hanson said Groeneveld moved agriculture to a new state.

"He broke it loose from the stagnant state that it was in. Now we have some tools to get producers re-engaged and get this industry back on track and improve this economy of Alberta," he said.

Leo Meyer, vice-chair of the **Alberta Barley Commission** and member of the Canadian Triticale Biorefinery Initiative, wants the new minister to communicate better with producers and reform AFSC programs. Farmers with failed crops waited up to three months to hear from crop insurance officials last summer, he said.

"I think we have not been served by AFSC as well as we could have been," Meyer said.

