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Warner producer wants CWB District 3 seat

**By Ric Swihart
WARNER**

Driving increased Canadian Wheat Board responsiveness to meet farmers' needs and making it more business-oriented are key platforms for Warner farmer Brian Otto who is seeking the board director's seat in District 3.

"That is the only way the CWB will broaden its support among farmers and move forward as an organization," said Otto.

In his website, Otto points to former U.S. president Abraham Lincoln who said, "A house divided cannot stand."

"That is exactly the situation that the CWB has painted itself into," he explained. "As your director, I will strive to change that at the CWB board table."

He questions the board's 2010 farmer survey showing wheat and barley producers see a problem with the lack of markets for their grain. The survey also shows 48 per cent of wheat growers and 34 per cent of barley growers would prefer only the CWB to market their crops. More troubling for him is that only 23 per cent of farmers under the age of 45 strongly support having the CWB marketing their production exclusively.

Otto says most farmers agree the CWB does a number of things well, such as market development, branding of Canadian wheat and barley and working to maintain the high quality reputation for which Canada.

"These areas are strategic to western Canadian farmers as they help differentiate western Canadian wheat and barley from our competitors," he said. "I

want to see these efforts by the CWB continue."

Cash flow is a critical issue, particularly for younger farmers, he said. He wants to strongly advocate for more flexibility and certainty in the delivery and pricing of board grains. Farmers need this to manage cash flow and risks.

On the business focus front, Otto wants improvements in risk management and operating efficiencies.

"The losses producers have suffered due to CWB market exposure and the lack of appropriate risk management have been very significant, literally in the hundreds of million dollars."

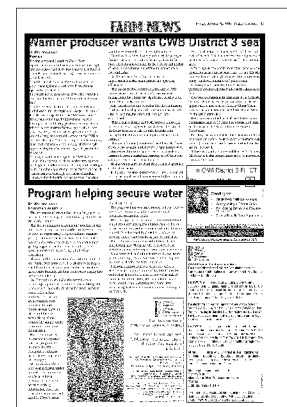
Also, decisions on funds flowing into the contingency fund by the board appear arbitrary and do not equate directly to managing risk which is why it was established.

"This needs to change and I will propose a strategic review of the Contingency Fund strategy," he said. "If the board is going to take on risk, it needs to be managed efficiently and on an equitable basis for all farmers."

Otto was a founding member of the Alberta Safflower Growers Association, and after Wrentham farmer Jerry Kubie retired four years ago, joined with some fellow farmers to form a marketing company to sell their own safflower seed to the bird feed market.

He also wants answers about rising costs of operation of the wheat board.

In the 12 years since farmer-elected directors started to run the board, costs have increased to \$78.7 million from \$40 million, an increase of 42 per cent.



“As your director, I will advocate for a full costing review,” he said. “I feel better accountability needs to be shown to farmers on where their funds are being spent.”

Otto brings 38 years of farming experience as a third-generation farmer on the same land. He and his wife Carolyn, farm 4,000 dryland acres. They grows wheats, barley, safflower, mustard and pulse crops.

The couple has three children. A heavy duty mechanic son has expressed interest in taking on the farm.

Otto was instrumental in formation of the Lethbridge Terminal Winter Wheat Association to spur delivery opportunities, and then the Alberta Winter Wheat Association which became the Alberta Winter Wheat Producers' Commission.

He has served on the board of the Alberta Barley Commission and for 10 years has represented farmers on the board of the Western Grains Research Foundation.

For Otto, the bottom line for the wheat board should be getting the highest possible price for farmers while building its market share for western wheat and barley around the world.

“If the CWB wants to make a difference for farmers this trend of losing market share must be stopped and reversed,” he said.