



Alberta Barley Commission praises new WTO text

Feb. 13, 2008 (Calgary, Alberta) -- Alberta's barley growers came a step closer to gaining access to new export markets and trade opportunities this past week.

The World Trade Organization's release of the Revised Draft Modalities for Agriculture "clearly addresses major concerns we've had throughout the seven-year trade negotiations," Doug Robertson, chairman of the Alberta Barley Commission, said. Those concerns include reductions in trade-distorting domestic supports, improved market access and an end to export subsidies.

"Nine out of ten farmers in Canada rely on exports, but trade barriers and protective practices have effectively shut us out of many trade opportunities around the world," Mike Leslie, the Commission's CEO, said. "We have taken our message for free trade to the WTO's Doha negotiations on several occasions and are very encouraged by the direction the agreement appears to be heading."

Leslie said while only about 10 to 20 per cent of Alberta barley is currently exported. That could change if the WTO adopts this new draft. In addition, increased access will benefit Canada's beef and pork sectors; the vast majority of the 12 million tonnes of barley produced in Canada every year is fed to cattle and hogs raised here.

"The 17,000 Alberta barley producers we represent want to 'open up' trade with the world. They have an excellent product and they have the ability to compete globally when the playing field is level," Robertson said.

Industry analysis in 2007 found that 90 per cent of Canadian producers either export commodities or have their domestic prices set by export markets. Plus, the analysis estimated a WTO agreement with greater trade access would result in up to \$3 billion in new trade for all agricultural producers across the country and in all sectors.

"This new text could increase those opportunities," Leslie said.

The Alberta Barley Commission (www.albertabarley.com) is a not-for-profit organization funded, directed and controlled by Alberta's barley farmers. Established in 1991, the Commission coordinates and sponsors research, market development and policy development on behalf of its 17,000 producers.

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