



## **Barley Commission Finds Need to Connect to Consumers**

Dec. 9, 2005 (Banff, Alberta) – The need to connect consumers to agriculture emerged as the central theme at the Alberta Barley Commission’s annual general meeting this week.

“This need is not unique to barley growers,” said Doug Robertson, chairman of the Alberta Barley Commission. “Agricultural producers across Canada are struggling to help consumers understand that agriculture equals food and food equals wellness. Canadians cannot have wellness and good nutrition without good food, and they cannot have good food without Canadian agriculture and farmers.”

The commission’s gathering in Banff, Alberta attracted more than 100 people and covered a wide variety of topics, including rising input costs, marketing and transportation issues plus the World Trade Organization’s relationship to farm income. All emphasized the need for Alberta’s barley producers to have a closer relationship with not only their end users – consumers – but with every supplier in their value chain.

“Successful farmers partner with companies in their value chain that can get them closer to their clients,” said Len Penner, the newly appointed president of Cargill AgHorizons Canada and one of three featured speakers at the commission’s meeting. “Today’s consumers are knowledgeable, sophisticated and calling the shots (in food and agricultural production). Their power is only going to increase – it’s not going to go away.”

The power of consumers, however, can be productively and profitably harnessed, said Mike Leslie, general manager of the Alberta Barley Commission. “As producers, we need better insight into what consumers want, and we have an obligation to educate them about how we can meet their needs. So many consumers have lost touch with the fact of where their food comes from and how it’s produced.”

Robertson said strengthening the relationship between consumers, value chain members and producers is an important step to fairer compensation for barley producers. “We have to be paid above the level of ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water.’ . . . We need to have programs that don’t distort our markets or the value consumers and our supply chain partners place on barley.”

Leslie said his organization will cooperate and collaborate with a number of agriculture organizations in Alberta and Canada in 2006 to promote the benefits

and value of Alberta-produced barley – and other Canadian grains and oilseeds – to domestic and international consumers.

The Alberta Barley Commission ([www.albertabarley.com](http://www.albertabarley.com)) is a not-for-profit organization funded, directed and controlled by the province's 17,500 barley producers. Established in 1991, the commission coordinates and sponsors research, market development, technology-transfer and policy development on behalf of its producers. Forty per cent of the 15 million tonnes of barley grown each year in Canada is produced in Alberta.

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