CHAIRMAN’S MESSAGE

Mike Ammeter
Chairman

This is my first chairman’s message for Alberta Barley, and let me say that I am truly honoured to be representing our province’s barley growers.

I’ll take a brief moment before we get started to introduce myself. My name is Mike Ammeter, and I am a third-generation farmer born and raised in the Sylvan Lake area. I’ve been involved with this organization for over 15 years—and I’ve been a director since 2011. During my time with Alberta Barley, I’ve seen this organization grow and evolve into the credible, relevant and important voice in agriculture that it has become.

I believe that our industry thrives when farmers have a voice, and that is why I am eager to represent our members and our views. I am also an elected regional representative for the Alberta Wheat Commission, which gives me interesting insight into the cereals industry in both Alberta, and nationwide.

Quarterbacking Alberta Barley is a privilege, but also a huge responsibility. Filling our outgoing Chairman Matt Sawyer’s shoes is going to be a tough job, but one I’m up for. After spending the past year as our vice-chairman, I’ve seen up close the challenges, opportunities and exciting initiatives that we deal with on a day-to-day basis. I know that this job will be a big responsibility, but I also know that the rewards of representing the barley industry will make it well worthwhile.

Over the coming year, I will remain committed to my work on the executive and policy committees, and will also work with our strong staff team to pursue solutions to the issue of a shortage of barley acres in Canada. Agronomically, we all know that barley makes sense. Let’s help make it work economically, too, so that we can continue growing the best malt and the best beef in the world.

As you’re reading this newsletter, listening to the radio or watching the news, keep in mind that Alberta Barley plays a key role in advocating for you as a barley farmer, but also as an Alberta farmer who grows many crops, and, in turn, feeds the world. We’ve got a big job, and your board of directors at Alberta Barley is here to help you with it.
GENERAL MANAGER’S MESSAGE

When BSE hit Alberta in 2003, it was the last straw for many smaller cattle producers. My dad was one of many ranchers who left the business after years of fighting the good fight and waiting for business to improve.

I think about this in years like 2014 when Canadian farmers were hit by one problem after the other, from brutal weather and transportation issues throughout the winter and spring, to widespread unpredictable weather during harvest and a “fair average quality” crop at the end of it.

Whether it’s good times or bad times, the farmer’s job is often just to keep on keeping on.

At Alberta Barley, our goal is to support the work you do on the farm by providing value for your check-off dollars. In 2015, we will continue to work on transportation at the provincial level, while also working nationally via the Barley Council of Canada (BCC) and the Grain Growers of Canada.

At the BCC, we work with farmer groups and corporate industry from across the value chain to provide a fully formed analysis of the transportation issues that must be addressed in order for the entire value chain to succeed.

We also work with like-minded farmer groups like the Prairie Oat Growers Association, and industry groups like the Coalition of Rail Shippers, to ensure that we promote realistic solutions.

In comparison, we work with the Grain Growers in partnership with other commodity groups from across the country to ensure that farmers’ voices are being heard. Through Grain Growers, we lobby government, impact industry and provide a united voice on issues that affect all crops and commodities.

Investing in groups like these isn’t about duplication; it’s about strategically impacting the work of our provincial and federal governments by creating a better business framework for farmers. And that framework helps us all keep on keeping on.

Lisa Skierka
General Manager

MARKET DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

By Kara Barnes

It’s a new year and time once again for farmers to shift their focus to seeding intentions and marketing plans. With barley acreage declining across the Prairies, one of the questions Alberta Barley works on daily is, “Why should farmers grow barley?”

In partial response to this question, here are some developments in the marketplace to consider as you plan for your 2015 crop.

Malt demand continues to be “stable to rising,” with expectations of continued increases in malt barley

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We are also beginning to see interest in the creation of “craft malthouses” to serve the booming craft brew market.
—Kara Barnes

Garson Law is the research manager for Alberta Barley. He has been with the organization since April 2013.

As research manager, Law oversees Alberta Barley’s project portfolio and works with the Research Committee (comprised of farmers and industry experts) to identify research priorities. He also works closely with industry stakeholders, government organizations and private companies to ensure that Alberta Barley’s projects are informed by industry trends, regulations and laws.

Originally from Toronto, ON, Law studied at the University of Toronto, where he received a bachelor’s degree in pharmacology and toxicology. He continued his studies at the University of Guelph, working towards a master’s degree in nutritional sciences. One year later, he moved out west to complete his master’s at the University of Alberta.

In his free time, Law volunteers with Scouts Canada as a troop leader with the 72nd Strathearn Scouting Group. Law also plays hockey and softball and enjoys hiking.

demand as more craft breweries come online. Alberta’s elimination of minimum production requirements makes it easier for entrepreneurs to start small breweries. This is driving growth, combined with continuously evolving consumer preferences. We are also beginning to see interest in the creation of “craft malthouses” to serve the booming craft brew market.

In late 2014, the federal government announced support of $2.37 million for B.C.-based Macaloney Brewers & Distillers to establish a new premium whisky facility, further highlighting the growing demand for products made from Canada’s high-quality malt. The project is estimated to increase malt barley demand by up to 500 tonnes annually over the next four years.

Over the past two years, global customers appear to have reached a clearer understanding of what marketing freedom means for barley production in Western Canada. Representatives are now actively seeking out Canadian barley producers and suppliers. While these may currently be “tire kicking” missions, the potential opportunity cannot be ignored. China, for example, has seen a decline in domestic barley production of about 15 per cent annually since 2011, but a steady increase in the demand for malt and beer—resulting in the need for three million tonnes of malt barley imports a year. The majority of this demand is currently met by fair average quality (FAQ) barley from Australia, but Chinese importers are now revisiting Canada as a potential source of quality-controlled barley that can meet delivery specifications and timelines.

Food barley continues to be a small market with big potential, though caution should be taken to ensure a complete understanding of the production challenges and quality standards required. The continued success of the GoBarley consumer campaign has resulted in a better-informed public and an interested food-manufacturing sector, both of which are driving demand for food barley.

Barley supply and processing capacity are currently the limiting factors in the food barley market. The highly competitive retail environment has put pressure on the milling industry, reducing the margins for processors of barley flour, and thereby limiting production capacity. The growing demand and limited processing sites open the door for not only local production of food barley, but for new value-added investment as well.

Feed markets continue to be available, though malt quality concerns, and the supply of competitors like feed corn and wheat, will continue to influence price in what some see as barley’s “default market.” Conditions have been right to encourage herd growth, though the Canadian livestock industry continues to be faced with challenges in the areas of market access and labour. Advancements in yields and production technologies ensure feed barley remains a top rotational option in areas servicing the livestock industry.

Barley is a good rotational crop because it provides diversity within a crop and within a farm plan, which helps to manage market and production risk. Diverse rotations aid in pest management, control disease, preserve soil health, and expand a farm’s investment portfolio.