



Report Prepared for Peace River Agriculture Development Fund

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Executive Summary:

In Securing Agriculture Outlooks and Opportunities this past year, the directors of the BC Grain Producer's Association have continued to be involved in and represented the BCGPA and it's membership on a number of committees including the Grain Growers of Canada, Canadian Canola Growers Association, Canola Council of Canada, BC Agriculture Council, Agriculture Research and Extension Council of Alberta, Investment Agriculture, Agriculture and Environment Partnership Committee and various local committees. They have represented the interests of the BC Peace Region grain & oilseed producers in matters relating to crop research, environment, wildlife damage to crops, farm business risk management, production insurance, crop market development options and transportation issues.

Activities & Accomplishments:

Objective 1. Member connection and public awareness:

Producer to BCGPA

BCGPA continues to facilitate collaborative communications between the BC Peace region's grain and oilseed producers and the BCGPA. Effort has been made to identify current issues of concern and ensure corrective actions are taken and effective. As a result of a member survey done last year, direction was set for the completion of a strategic plan for the organization. Sue Kenny from Community Futures was hired as a consultant and met several times to work with the organization. Answering questions of relevance on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities; taking the fulfilled items from the past off the list and adding a 'to do' list was all part of the process in the development of a comprehensive strategic plan up to 2014.

BCGPA to Producer

The website has been well maintained with bulletins of upcoming events, past meetings, Newsletters, current contact information, including the toll-free number to the BCGPA administrative office. It also has many links to other organizations that the BCGPA is affiliated or has membership with. The website is an effective tool in reaching producers and other organizations and was redesigned this year with a fresh look and easy to navigate.

The quarterly newsletter continues to receive positive reviews, with upcoming events, meeting reports, committee updates and relevant policy update information distributed among our members.

Small casual meetings in rural communities have been used as networking tool, an avenue for frank communication, and remain a priority for the board to stay in contact with producers to hear their concerns.

Public Meetings:

A Research crop tour and BBQ supper on the Dawson Creek site in July was very well attended and provided an opportunity for communication during the supper and beyond. The heavy rains in early summer were a concern that there may not be a crop to see as the site had been under water several times before the tour. The day was a beautiful one and once again the format of having stations set up around the plots was a great educational tool. The gathering of quality speakers that included crop breeders, industry professionals and producers encouraged direct communication of the producer's needs to the individuals who can influence the direction of crop breeding and technologies.

The BCGPA hosted an open forum in July by inviting the membership to participate in a focus group for an Agriculture and Food Climate Action Initiative. This group was designed as a first step in

developing tools and resources to assist agricultural producers to manage existing and future weather and climate related challenges and opportunities. Strengthening the resilience of BC agricultural operations was the ultimate objective of work done being by the Climate Action Initiative. A number of key producers spent a day in discussions with Coordinator, Emily MacNair, brainstorming the various ways that climate change would have with positive and negative affects on Peace River farms and some strategies on how to mitigate damages as well as take advantage of new opportunities that may present themselves. The report of our region and the 5 other commodities in other regions was completed and sent out in March. The information gathered will be very useful in Stage 2 of the initiative, with the contemplation of future pilot projects in the Peace to examine the recommendations made.

Objective 2. Research:

Investigate new production techniques & crop technology advancements

The BCGPA's research committee has been dedicated to ensuring that the research occurring through their department is relevant, timely, and proactive. A member of this group, the research manager and general manager attended the Prairie Grain Development Committee meetings in Banff, Alberta to monitor and observe the process for variety recommendation for approval for registration.

WGRF:

The research committee chair is a director on the board of the Western Grains Research Foundation.

The Marketing Freedom for Grain Farmers Act legislation, Bill C-18 includes provisions for a point of sale check-off on wheat and barley for variety research and market development. WGRF was pleased that the federal government included provisions to continue the collection of the wheat and barley research check-offs in Bill C-18 for another 5 years after August 1, 2012.

WGRF staff has been consulting with numerous organizations across western Canada with regards to research issues in the areas of New Crops/New Uses and Agronomy. All of the organizations WGRF has met with so far have been very pleased to have been included in the consultation process and are open to potentially partnering with WGRF on research projects in these areas. WGRF will complete its consultations and then review the research items of interest identified and present recommendations for possible projects to consider co-funding.

BCGPA is excited for the possibilities this may have for the research department and will continue to work with WGRF on the latest issues.

A director attended a Science/Flax cluster meeting in Saskatoon and presented of a list of potential future research items.

Committee members have overseen the management of the variety trials program, made suggestions and ensured that the research team has the equipment and resources needed to extract the most accurate results possible.

Research continues to be focused on energy crops, utility wheat, crop adaptation to drought/pests, drought tolerance, frost tolerance and others. Recruitment and education for up and coming young people to get interested in agriculture/education for succession is always on the forefront.

Objective 3. Environment:

Promote Environmental Stewardship:

Directors of the B.C. Grain Producer's Association attended local and provincial meetings dealing with environmental stewardship. Through involvement with the B.C. Agriculture Council, BCGPA has had input into the continuing Environmental Farm Plan program, new funding became available Jan 1, 2012. The entire fund allotment was administered by the end of March, 2012.

On Farm Food Safety Initiative:

The BCGPA conducted 2 On Farm Food Safety workshops to producers, one in the South Peace and one in the North Peace. This workshop laid the foundation to adapt to a national recognized On Farm Food Safety program for the grain and oilseed sector. This will open up opportunities for individual farmers to respond to market demands or create niche markets for some of their production. This proactive approach will further ensure that Food safety measures in the grain and oilseed sector are recognized as an important component of today's business environment and that communication of these measures may lead to wide adaptation of On Farm Food safety protocols in the BC Peace. 5 farms participated in the workshop and may apply for the implementation funding 1 year after they are certified. BCGPA has applied for another round of funding through ARDCorp and has been approved for 2 more workshops in the coming year.

Cosmetic use of pesticide ban:

Over thirty communities in British Columbia have adopted their own municipal bans on cosmetic pesticide use, a move that is being supported by the Canadian Cancer Society and several other health organizations. The Canadian Cancer Society cites that scientific research shows exposure to pesticides puts people at greater risk for cancer, reproductive problems, and neurological illness. However, none of the communities in the Peace Region have signed on to support the ban. In fact, there has been push-back from the rural directors of the Peace River Regional District because of concerns over the spread of noxious weeds to farmlands near municipalities. All the pesticides used in British Columbia, and Canada, go through a very stringent review, and quite probably have the safest herbicides and pesticides in the world. If left unchecked, weeds can easily spread by water, vehicles or air to adjacent agricultural lands and it would just exacerbate the problem. Some municipalities are having problems with thistles and scentless chamomile. Rural communities are really concerned about ensuring that they have all options available to control noxious weeds.

Pesticides cannot be attributed to broad healthcare problems in the province as much as lifestyle choices such as diet, a lack of exercise and smoking and consumption of alcohol. Many families have used pesticides on their farms for decades and have not encountered any health problems.

The B.C. Grain Producers Association, representing grain growers in the Peace Region, also raised concerns about the possibility of a ban on cosmetic pesticides and the implications for commercial use of those chemicals on farms.

The use of pesticides is critical to BC Peace farmers, and a ban on cosmetic use could lead to banning certain or all pesticides and severely impacting the crop protection tools available to farmers. BCGPA has written several letters to our MLA and Environment Ministers pointing out that each and every pesticide product on the shelf has been through a thorough scientific assessment by Health Canada and meets international standards.

Water Act Review Policy:

A position statement was put forward for the Water Act Review, which had not been updated in over 100 years. With concern over climate change and increase in population it is critical that water legislation be brought up to date. BCGPA supported the concept of an agriculture water reserve, with unused allocations remaining in that pool. Ranking of purposes for which water is used from highest priority to lowest priority needs to be done. Groundwater legislation is recommended in priority areas and Drought Management Plans and Water Use Plans need to be developed on a watershed basis.

Of utmost importance to Peace River Farmers and the agriculture industry as a whole is maintaining the First-in-time first-in-right (FITFIR) water Continuation of the FITFIR model along with government's protection of water for food production on all farmlands including land within and outside the ALR, will validate the Province's commitment to food security. The general manager has taken on this portfolio and attends meetings on BCGPA's behalf. Details are in progress and need to be finalized by the fall when the new 'Water Sustainability Act' is to go to legislation for the first draft.

Agriculture Land Reserve:

The ALR review committee came to the BC Peace, looking for recommendations on how to improve the ALR. As a result, B.C.'s agricultural land now has even greater protection after legislation strengthening the Agricultural Land Commission became law, the changes will enhance the operational capacity of the Agricultural Land Commission in order to expand opportunities for farmers and ranchers. British Columbians value local food, local farmers and local farms, and the Province has supported those values with this action.

The new legislation and related initiatives should rectify some of the concerns of the agriculture community, while securing land for food production. This will be extremely important to B.C.'s economy as we move towards an era where food will become one of the most sought-after resources any country can provide.

The legislation is part of a comprehensive reform package that also includes \$1.6 million in additional provincial funding, increased sharing of provincial resources, and a new minister's bylaw standard restricting building residential homes in the Agricultural Land Reserve.

Several Directors had the opportunity to attend a cross commodity meeting with South and North Peace MLA'S to discuss a user friendly ALR by way of a delegation agreement. Each of the groups represented brought 3-5 issues to the table and these were narrowed down to 8 priorities. The group agreed to ask for a delegation agreement with the PRRD who heard the request in April. There has been discussion about whether a delegation is necessary after the recent changes in the ALC, and possibly allowing some time first to see if those changes would be effective enough.

Objective 4. Transportation

In a recent meeting CN had with BCGPA, they committed to make an effort with companies to find solutions and will work with companies and sectors who want to build a business case to open the Dawson Creek-Hythe line. A Rail Service Review four-point plan is a positive step forward in resolving chronic rail service problems faced by Canadian farmers. BCGPA will continue to press for effective rail use.

BCGPA directors also attended meetings with Dawson Creek MLA, Blair Lekstrom and Cariboo Road Services to have input into rural road maintenance.

Objective 5. Business Risk Management

Farm Income Protection

Directors of the BCGPA attended meetings, seminars, and conferences in order to have input into policy changes and regulations regarding issues such as market access, farm income protections, and other threats to farm income.

Safety Nets:

Through BCGPA's involvement in the Grain Growers of Canada and the Canadian Canola Growers, there has been input into the continued Safety Nets review conducted by the Canadian Canola Growers.

Production Insurance: The agristability program in Fort St. John is having difficulties in the deliverance of timely cheques. Many complaints have been made by producers and were addressed at the recent conference call in April. No meeting was held in this reporting period but many updates were sent out to producers as they became available.

Harmonized Sales Tax (HST) - The implementation of the HST simplified and fixed the broken PST system – and it has put BC agriculture in a better position to keep lower priced imports out of the province, and to compete in export markets. The change is the single biggest improvement BC agriculture has seen from a government policy change in many, many years and has provided at least some relief for BC's farmers and ranchers. A referendum vote was put in place by an Anti-HST group who eventually won the July referendum.

Biosecurity Guidelines/ Program for the grain sector: The Grain Council of Canada was asked to put together a Bio Security Protocol for addressing disease, chemical residues and pests for the grain sector on a national level. The BCGPA board has representation as part of the Grain Growers of Canada. BC Peace producers meet together in February to give direction on these issues.

Invasive Species: A director of the BCGPA sits on the North East Invasive Plant committee with advisement to the PRRD and the weed inspector for issues from the grain industry. Their key initiative this year was public education for weed reporting and supplying resources for early detection and rapid response. They have also been instrumental in piloting a weed free forage and straw program for sale to the province for use in the vast 'weed free' wilderness and demonstrate its effectiveness. The committee also educates on herbicide overuse in the BC Peace and which weeds are becoming immune to them.

Canadian Grain Commission User Fees:

The CGC has released a User Fees Consultation Document to start the process of updating the Canadian Grain Commission user fees. They want to increase fees substantially and have asked for BCGPA views on the proposed changes. Jim Smolik presented at the BCGPA Seminar in February in detail. A position paper was finalized by the BCGPA and sent by the deadline date of March 23, 2012

Objective 6. Marketing

Investigate New Markets & Follow up on Existing Opportunities

Promoting Ag industry in BC:

Directors of the BC Grain Producers attended a 3 day event in Victoria recently promoting the Agriculture Industry in British Columbia. Several directors attended outreach meetings and a reception sponsored by the Canola Council of Canada. On the Agenda was the importance of keeping BC Farmers competitive with asking for the elimination of the carbon tax and not to go back to the old PST system once the HST has been scrapped. The delegations also talked about wage rates, support of market development, adequate funding for the Ministry of Agriculture and Renewable Energy efforts.

Radio- grain prices and announcements:

CJDC 890 in Dawson Creek has given the BCGPA the opportunity of making use of the noon hour farm news and daily grain price time allotment. This free air time has been useful in making timely announcements and has direct interaction with the farming public in a 400km area.

Biofuels:

BCGPA expressed support for the B2 Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) that came into effect on July 1, 2011. In addition to benefiting Canada's farmers, the RFS moves Canada forward by setting a higher standard in environmental sustainability and lessening dependence on petroleum diesel. BCGPA feels that the RFS is in line with their mission and look forward to realizing the benefits it will bring to the producers in the region by creating a stable new demand for the oilseed crops that farmers grow in Canada. In addition, if crushing capacity biodiesel plants would be built in rural BC, the enhanced income for farmers and insulation for producers from the volatility of international prices would be a stimulus that would be felt through our rural communities.

Summary comments, conclusions:

More than ever there continues to be a need for this producer association. This has been a year of volatile markets and uncertainty in the direction of marketing for the future. The directors, members and General Manager of the BC Grain Producers Association have had a very busy and productive year attending many meetings, seminars, workshops and presentations locally, throughout the province and across the country to stay up-to-date on issues impacting the grain & oilseed industry in the BC Peace Region. The directors have met and received feedback from local producers on a regular basis and have brought their concerns forward to appropriate organizations and/or government agencies in a timely and professional manner. At times the work that needs doing seems to be overwhelming, but they have continued to build communication to bridge the gap between local producers and organizations, government and non-governmental agencies and the general public for the good of grain producers and the food industry in general.

Attachments:

Newspaper articles
Agenda for Information Seminar
BCGPA newsletters
Monthly Update reports
Financial report: budget vs. actual