

A message from the chair of the board of directors and the president and CEO

On July 5, 2005, the CWB celebrated its 70th anniversary, marking a significant milestone in the history of Prairie wheat and barley farming. Seven decades ago, farmers sold their grain individually, leaving them vulnerable to the self-interests of railways and multinational grain companies. They grew some of the finest grain available, but the Canadian agricultural landscape meant they could exert little control over the prices they received for their crops.

Creating the CWB allowed farmers to combine their power together under one marketer, while still maintaining their much-valued independence. Selling together through a single desk gave individual farmers collective marketing clout in a world dominated by a handful of large private corporations. It allowed them to compete globally, while still protecting their entrepreneurial spirits.

Over the years, it became evident that the CWB offered other benefits as well. Selling together through a single desk enabled farmers to provide customers with consistent quality and supply, as buyers began to seek out the premium-quality grain that only Western Canada could provide. Long-term sales agreements were signed, providing ready and reliable markets for Prairie wheat and barley.

The CWB also ensured that farmers' individual opinions could be heard together as a collective voice, loud enough to be noticed by agriculture policy-makers. Working together through the CWB has also given farmers a say in agricultural research and plant breeding, so that farmers' profitability is a key consideration in variety development and registration.

But significant anniversaries should do more than mark a journey already taken. The past is the past; it can be learned from and celebrated, but it cannot be changed. More importantly, anniversaries provide an opportunity to measure current situations and take stock of what is needed to succeed in the future.

As the CWB enters its eighth decade, this farmers' marketing organization is not resting on past laurels and reminiscing about times gone by. Instead, we are looking ahead, making innovative changes and embracing original ideas that will ensure the continued competitiveness of western Canadian farmers. Bold ideas are needed as we meet the future – initiatives that preserve the fundamentals of the past, while positioning Prairie farmers to succeed in a changing world.

A major change took place in 1998, when control of the CWB was turned over to those who fund its operations: Prairie farmers. But this is not enough, because farmers continue to face major challenges, including volatile world grain markets, price-depressing foreign subsidies, rising input costs and unrelenting weather patterns.

The CWB is looking ahead, making innovative changes and embracing original ideas that will ensure the continued competitiveness of western Canadian farmers.

One need only look at the 2004-05 crop year to see these challenges play out, as farmers faced a nearly non-existent growing season. Cold spring temperatures were followed by an unexpected and unwelcome snowfall in mid-May. When seeding finally resumed, growth rates were stunted by one of the coldest summers ever recorded. But the worst was yet to come.

On August 20, 2004, an early frost hit vast regions of the Prairies, and farmers worried their bottom lines would suffer significantly. Cold, wet weather followed the early frost, and soggy fields and drenched yards made it difficult for farmers to bring in their crops. In some cases, farmers were forced to abandon harvesting until the following spring.

Challenges, however, can often be met by finding inventive solutions. Ideas can be put into practice that not only solve immediate dilemmas, but provide platforms for sustainable and bountiful futures.

In 2004-05, the CWB successfully pursued a number of innovative ideas designed to help farmers with a difficult crop year. Longer-term programs were also created and key investments were made that will help ensure the lasting futures of Prairie farmers. As you read through this publication, you'll learn more about the CWB's achievements in creating these programs and launching new initiatives that provide farmers with more marketing flexibility and the tools needed to achieve their goals.



However, the journey toward innovation does not end here. We can celebrate our success and enjoy our history, but we must focus our vision on the future – a future where Prairie farmers are fully in charge of their collective marketing organization and where their profitability is the only consideration driving all marketing decisions.

Current World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations place more urgency on the future positioning and structure of the CWB, because if a final deal is reached, initial payments and borrowings will no longer be guaranteed by the federal government.

Belief in innovation and faith in positive change are needed to ensure the CWB is able to meet the needs of both Prairie farmers and the customers it serves. The CWB has already begun a purposeful march down an evolving path. As we journey forward, we will remember that which served Prairie farmers well in the past and protect these fundamentals, but our vision will be focussed decisively on the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Ritter". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Ken Ritter

Chair, board of directors

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adrian Measner". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Adrian Measner

President and Chief Executive Officer