

## **Weldon Hobbs, Alfalfa Seed Producers Commission of Alberta**

Yes, my name is Weldon Hobbs. I'm from Lethbridge, Alberta in Western Canada. The organization that I represent is the Alfalfa Seed Producers Commission of Alberta. I've been involved with alfalfa seed and leafcutter bee production since 1962. I probably look a little bit younger than that would suggest. Being that there have been so many people that claim a rural upbringing in one year or another, I think that you realize that the first 4 or 5 or 10 years of your life is by conscription or volunteer labour to the family union that brought you into this world and kept a roof over your head such as my first 10 years of existence after we came into Canada.

The group that I represent has existed, was incorporated in the late seventies. A lot of the reasons for our existence - our activities involve around liaison with labour, with industry, with government, with industry providers, so that we can develop policies, pesticides, basically a continuance to our industry in Southern Alberta and so we have gone on for this period of time.

When Beth was making her presentation this morning, we were talking about GOZs (Grower Opportunity Zones) and what a good idea it was and stuff like that. What we can say about our organization is that we are one of the few Associations in North America - one of the few regions in North America that have either maintained or increased our acreage base, our number of growers and the amount of seed that we produce. Probably one of the reasons that we've been able to do this - especially over the last 10 years - had everything to do with politics and how constrictive it got to be to raise alfalfa seed in the U.S. So we are probably one of the last places where we have this phenomenally large area - large acreage of alfalfa seed production and it's mostly condensed into two counties.

One of the interests that others in the world have with us is the fact that where you produce alfalfa seed, especially in Canada, you produce pollinators. There are other crops that need the pollinators that we are producing, so there are other industries that are very interested in what impact this product will have in our areas in Southern Alberta.

Southern Alberta used to be the weak sister in Forage Seed Canada as to the number of acres and the amount of money that we were raising for national organizations and such like that. Now we definitely have the most acres and we definitely produce the most pounds.

Some of our seed comes to Ontario, goes to the Maritimes and stuff like that. Some of our seed goes into China. We have some that goes to Europe. The majority of it does go down to the U.S. and we're producing seed for markets in South America also.

So one of our concerns is continuance. We developed a policy statement about 7 years ago. The statement says that we do support agrobiotech in agriculture but we have a high sensitivity to consumer acceptance of the product that we're producing. At this point we have 10 or 11 contracting companies that work with our 22 thousand or so acres that we have in Southern Alberta. We want to keep them all there.

We don't want to see stagnation of our industry. We're glad to see the stability or expansion of it. Any excess leafcutter bees that we're producing seem to be spoken for before the previous generation flies. So we're looking at it and saying being that 95% of our acres are contract production, if the contracts aren't there, the acres aren't going to be there.

We already know that we can't bring in Roundup Ready Alfalfa for seed production and have conventional seed production have the same number of players still working in the area and there really isn't many other places in North America for this seed production to go. One of the reasons that the U.S. and their production is kind of in a net growth situation is that they are not pollinator stable. They have to import a certain number of pollinators from Canada every year. If you don't have the breeding base here, we're not going to have the pollinators.

The real king pin in this industry is going to be how the canola seed industry perceives what's going on and whether or not there is a threat to the pollinating base. We would have to convert by 23 thousand acres in one year to Roundup Ready seed production in order to maintain the pollinator base. We wouldn't be allowed a transition period.

So we had other people this morning making presentations and saying you know consumer acceptance isn't a real problem with this product. In Ontario you have a smaller export industry. Maybe you're not exporting to the same sensitivity of markets as we do in Western Canada. But I have a letter in my hand here that comes from Green Prairie International. Green Prairie International is a very large alfalfa processor. They also do a certain amount of Timothy in our neck of the woods. They have four other affiliated processing plants in the U.S. They have three exporting ports that they work out of. Basically the letter goes on to say that they agree that governments in various countries have agreed to let Roundup Ready alfalfa based products into their countries but, as Bob was alluding to, it's all about what the consumers want. At this moment Peter Paul, the President of Green Prairie International is saying that until they start seeing a larger acceptable audience or consumer base for Roundup Ready alfalfa, they've got to go wherever they can product conventional alfalfa.

That's really about the most I have to say. I don't know if there's any questions or not, but thank you for the opportunity.