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# FAST FACTS

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## The Harper Government and the Canadian Wheat Board

**W**hen a federal government is elected there is an expectation that they will develop sound policy by consulting with both the people directly affected by policies and Canadians as a whole. That is what farmers and Canadians expected of the Harper government with respect to the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) issue.

Instead, the Harper government has deliberately attempted to bypass good process and existing laws. This flawed approach slashes deep into the principles and expectations held by Canadians when they elect governments. The government has been able to get away with this only because farmers are a small voice in this country, and farming has neither drawn the concern, nor the interest of the broader population.

This is a government that would initially not engage at all in policy discussion because the decisions about the CWB were already made. This is a government that only after much outrage and pressure moved to engage, but then sought direction only from the groups that agreed with its position. This is a government that placed a gag order on the very organization, the CWB, whose future was at stake – the only organization that was large enough and knowledgeable enough to be a balancing force against the government agenda.

This is a government that terminated the terms of its appointed directors, including mine, before our terms were up, in order to alter the composition of the CWB Board – a Board on which eight of the ten democratically elected farmers disagreed with the government’s direction.

This is a government that held a plebiscite that prompted at least one professional pollster to question whether the authors of the questions were either incompetent or diabolical. Two other professional pollsters said that the questions would not yield meaningful results. The plebiscite had no official voters’ list for scrutiny; multiple ballots were sent to many voters; and the ballots were numbered. And then, when after all of that the government failed to get the results it wanted, it simply added two of the questions together to justify its predetermined actions!

Legal challenges have been brought to bear against a number of these actions.\* But it is my opinion that if this had been any other issue of a more national scope, rather than one having to do with a minority, farmers, there would have been a major revolt.

These actions go beyond the rights and powers conferred upon the federal government by Canadians.

Why is our Prime Minister so focused on this issue?



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## **FASTFACTS continued ...**

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We see the influence of ideology and what I would view as a personal agenda dating back to his days with the National Citizens Coalition.

We also see the intervention of some very large companies whose shareholders will benefit enormously from Harper's efforts.

A recent newspaper article talked about the price of gas at the pumps, saying that while it is easy to say "competition will take care of everything", when you have a few sellers and many buyers as is the case in the oil industry you experience higher prices at the pumps. That is because oil companies set prices as a cartel. Given that truth how can anyone believe the arguments of Rolf Penner of the Frontier Institute and other right-wing think tanks supporting Harper's agricultural agenda, that destroying the CWB and forcing many farmer sellers to sell their crops to a few private grain buyers is going to give farmers higher prices. It defies the logic of supply and demand, and defies any real-life examples in other industries.

That is why four out of five CWB Directors, voted in by farmers as recently as last fall, support single-desk marketing. It is the elected Directors' role to ensure the organization is delivering maximum value for the farmers it works for. From working eight years with those Directors I know they are very good at their job.

One element that should never be overlooked when discussing the CWB issue is that the CWB is a Canadian company with a top-notch international reputation. A recent poll in the Globe and Mail showed that 68 percent of Canadians surveyed were concerned about foreign ownership of Canadian companies. Similar comments have been made by prominent CEOs in Canada who feel the government should be doing more to protect Canadian companies

from foreign ownership. The CWB is the last chance for a significant Canadian presence in the international grain market. In the CWB's absence the market will be dominated by a handful of international companies as is the case in all countries operating without single desk marketing.

This is a road we should not go down. The better alternative is to maintain the single-desk marketing that is wanted by and that benefits the vast majority of farmers, and to continue to support a Canadian institution, the Canadian Wheat Board, that is recognized internationally for the quality it delivers, and that brings credit to all Canadians. Any changes in the CWB's role should be made by farmers.

- Adrian Measner

*Adrian Measner is the former CEO of the Canadian Wheat Board who was fired by the Harper government for his decision to follow the direction of the CWB's farmer-elected Board of Directors and his refusal to acquiesce in the government's decision to strip the Board of its monopoly position in the Canadian grain market. He was the guest speaker at the CCPA-MB Annual General Meeting in Brandon in June 2007.*

\* One of the CWB court challenges was initiated in response to the Harper government's attempt to end the CWB monopoly on barley sales by an order-in-council that would allow barley producers to sell their crops without going through the CWB. The CWB argued that this action contravened the Canadian Wheat Board Act. On July 31, 2007 Federal Court Judge Delores Hansen ruled that the federal government's action was illegal, because the Act requires that changes to the powers of the CWB be voted on in Parliament. The question now is: will the Harper government do the right thing, and terminate its campaign to dismantle the CWB?



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