

Plenty of optimism for wheat farmers

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Building a “Brand Canada” for wheat is one of the long term goals for the Alberta Wheat Commission.

It was also one of the topics discussed by Brian Kennedy, a growers relations coordinator for the AWC, during the Farming Smarter conference at the Lethbridge Lodge last week.

He talked about the AWC, launched in August 2012, and how its marketing, research investments and trade missions have already led to success for Alberta wheat growers, as refund check-off applications are already below three per cent.

“That shows that Alberta wheat growers see a lot of value in the commission. There seems to be no ‘Brand Canada’ now and with the Alberta Wheat Commission and the Saskatchewan Wheat Commission and the Manitoba commission working together, it’s establishing a ‘Brand Canada,’” Kennedy said.

“Meeting people, shaking hands, is still the most important tool in marketing.”

Kennedy discussed the product quality, as well, because of concerns from import markets about the high quality Canadian wheat in recent years.

“There had been a couple issues, apparently over the last few years, with gluten strength in Canadian wheat. It was an issue for millers in Southeast Asia. They were very concerned about it, and they’re very happy with this year’s crop,” he said.

“Although it has lower protein, the functionality of the protein has better gluten strength. It was a guarantee of Canadian quality and it was really important for the farmers involved to hear that feedback.”

Kennedy’s speech filled a spot scheduled for Martin Parry to discuss the 20:20 Wheat Project, a UK research initiative to improve wheat yields. Parry arrived in Calgary from England last Monday night, but returned home after three connecting flights to Lethbridge were cancelled due to weather.

He provided an abbreviated presentation via Skype instead.