



CANADIAN SEED TRADE ASSOCIATION L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DU COMMERCE DES SEMENCES

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Bill 201: Agricultural Pests (Fusarium Head Blight) Amendment Act A Submission to Alberta Legislature Resource Stewardship Committee June 25, 2014

Introduction

The Canadian Seed Trade Association (CSTA) appreciates the opportunity to come before the Committee on Resource Stewardship to testify on Bill 201: Agricultural Pests (Fusarium Head Blight) Amendment Act proposed by the MLA for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

CSTA represents 132 companies involved in all aspects of the seed industry: plant breeding and research; production; marketing and distribution; packaging; conditioning; and international trade. CSTA members are engaged in all production systems - conventional, organic, and systems using modern biotechnology. We work with over 50 different crop kinds and members range from small, family owned companies to large multinational firms.

In 2002, the Alberta Government, believing that Alberta was free of Fusarium Head Blight, launched, by regulation, an enforceable management plan in an effort to prevent the establishment of *Fusarium graminearum* in cereal growing regions of Alberta. Now, more than ten years later, the situation is much different. Fusarium is present in Alberta despite the existence of the management plan.

Increasingly Fusarium is being found in wheat, durum and barley in more widespread areas of the province, meaning that Fusarium is present in the soil in those areas and, given the right conditions, will manifest in grain.

The current Fusarium Management Plan requires that in order for farmers to have access to seed, the seed must be tested and found to be "non-detect". Given the presence of Fusarium in other provinces and in the United States, it is difficult to source higher generation pedigreed seed from which seed growers in Alberta and elsewhere can produce seed for Alberta farmers.

In some cases the only option for reaching "non-detect" is to heat treat higher generation pedigreed seed. This is expensive; could potentially damage the seed; restricts the amount of seed that can be produced; and delays the introduction of varieties in Alberta. Even when the higher pedigreed seed is heat treated, given the prevalence of Fusarium, it is very difficult to assure that the resulting certified seed when tested will result in non-detect. In these cases the seed is refused entrance into the Alberta market.

The current Fusarium Management Plan requires that in order for farmers to have access to seed, the seed must be tested and found to be "non-detect". Given the presence of Fusarium in other provinces and in the United States, it is difficult to source higher generation pedigreed seed from which seed growers in Alberta and elsewhere can produce seed for Alberta farmers.

Growing for the World Une croissance axée sur le Monde

CSTA members estimate that retail prices for wheat seed in Alberta range from 12% to 19% higher than in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Many growers have had to go through a lengthy and expensive "re-certification" process in order to access seed, further increasing costs, and still there are cases where, Alberta farmers have not been able to access new varieties at all.

CSTA submits that a multi-prong management strategy that starts with high quality seed and includes rotation and the use of effective fungicides and seed treatments is the best approach for Alberta.

In addition, seed produced in Alberta that presents even with very low levels of Fusarium need to be moved out of the province. The result is a much smaller supply of seed for Alberta farmers and that supply comes at a higher cost because of the measures that have to be taken to try to reach a non-detect level. A rough analysis by CSTA members indicates that retail prices for wheat seed in Alberta range from 12% to 19% higher than in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

There are cases where the inability to source higher generation seed of new varieties has meant that Alberta farmers do not have access to those new varieties and are at a competitive disadvantage to farmers in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

There continue to be cases where Alberta seed growers who have Certified seed of a particular variety want to buy higher generation seed of that same variety but cannot because all of the foundation and registered seed that is available is from Manitoba or Saskatchewan. Fusarium is present in these provinces and as such the seed when tested won't result in non-detect and therefore cannot be grown in Alberta. As a result the seed grower is forced to go through the expensive and time consuming process of having their inventory of Certified seed recertified as being eligible to produce registered seed by the Canadian Seed Growers' Association (CSGA). The cumbersome process for applying for recertification costs the seed growers \$500 for each application and requires that they provide a significant amount of supporting information to justify the emergency recertification.

Given that the Alberta grain and seed is increasingly presenting with the disease (Fusarium), and the disease is present in the soil, CSTA submits that rather than denying Alberta farmers access to seed at competitive prices, a multi-prong management strategy that starts with high quality seed and includes rotation and the use of effective fungicides and seed treatments is the best approach for Alberta.

Scientific Review

CSTA appreciates that the Alberta Minister responded to industry's request for a scientific review of the Fusarium graminearum management plan, and that a highly regarded plant pathologist was chosen to do the review.

We appreciate all of the efforts that have been made to develop a new approach to Fusarium that recognizes the results of this review.

In November, 2012 CSTA, on behalf of our seed company members and their farmer customers, submitted a formal request to the Honourable Verlyn Olson, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. We asked that a science based review of Alberta's Fusarium Graminearum Management Plan be launched with the view to facilitating trade, and providing Alberta farmers access to high quality seed at competitive prices.

Our association sincerely appreciates that the Minister took action and initiated the scientific review which was carried out by a highly regarded plant pathologist with 25 years of experience, Dr. Andy Tekauz. We appreciate all of the efforts that have been made to develop a science based approach to Fusarium that recognizes the results of this review. The practical suggestions proposed by Dr. Tekauz will help to keep Alberta growers competitive by ensuring they have equal access to seed at comparable prices to other provinces.

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CSTA submits that a regulated management plan must be based on sound science and should be flexible enough to meet the needs of all Alberta producers.

CSTA understands that Fusarium management is a complex and potentially divisive issue. However it is clear that the current system is not working for all Alberta producers and the Alberta seed industry. Fusarium is not being completely contained, and in areas where Fusarium is already well established, Alberta farmers are being put at a competitive disadvantage to their prairie neighbours. Ironically some of the new varieties to which Alberta farmers do not have access are varieties with improved Fusarium resistance.

In his review of the Alberta *Fusarium graminearum* Management Plan, Dr. Tekauz acknowledged that the plan likely did provide a short and possibly medium term advantage for Alberta producers and it could possibly continue to slow the disease. However he also stated that it is not likely to prevent the establishment of Fusarium across the province.

Dr. Tekauz recognized that the presence of Fusarium varies in Alberta and recommended that the Best Management Practises in the plan should both recognize the requirements of those regions that are “relatively free” of Fusarium, and of those regions where it is present. He stated that a tolerance of level of 0.5% up to 5% could protect those areas that are relatively free of Fusarium. Other prominent researchers; Dr. Kelly Turkington and Dr. Ron Howard have concluded that seed with up to 10% Fusarium present would not affect infection levels in those areas where Fusarium is already established.

Bill 201

CSTA appreciates the efforts of the sponsor of Bill 201 to amend Alberta’s Agriculture Pests Act to recognize the status of Fusarium in Alberta, and as an attempt to address the needs of Alberta Farmers who need to source seed competitively

CSTA believes that it is time implement Best Management Practices that emphasise control in order to slow the spread of Fusarium while allowing farmers to source the seeds they need at a price that will allow them to be competitive.

CSTA appreciates the efforts of the sponsor of Bill 201 to amend Alberta’s Agriculture Pests Act to recognize the status of Fusarium in Alberta, and as an attempt to address the needs of Alberta Farmers who need to source seed competitively.

We fully recognize that there is no agreement across the province on the best path forward. However it is our association’s opinion that a broad zero-tolerance policy will not only be ineffective, it will continue to put Alberta farmers at a disadvantage. It will at best slow the introduction of new varieties in Alberta and at worst will prevent Alberta farmers from accessing them at all, because most Canadian breeding programs are in areas where Fusarium is present but managed.

CSTA views Bill 201 as an important step in the right direction, simply because it formally recognizes the reality for many farmers in Alberta. However, Fusarium is established in parts of the province and farmers are being placed at a competitive disadvantage. The measures proposed in this Bill are likely too restrictive - not flexible enough - to address the needs of Alberta producers who continue to live with and manage Fusarium.

We understand and support that there is no one solution for the entire province. In keeping with that, a zero tolerance policy is not likely the answer. The answer is in the implementation of Best Management Practices that emphasise controls to slow the spread of Fusarium while allowing farmers to source the seeds they need at a price that will allow them to be competitive.

Conclusion

The Canadian Seed Trade Association appreciates this opportunity to meet with the committee as you study Bill 201. We encourage you to continue to focus on the scientific studies and assessments of the Fusarium situation in Alberta, in order to find a flexible solution that will give Alberta farmers access to the seed they need to be competitive, and to play their part in the efforts to feed, fuel and clothe a growing world population.