

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – TUESDAY JUNE 22, 2010

Hard work pays off for Canadian farmers on Colombia free trade deal

Yesterday, the long and arduous debates over the Canada-Colombia free trade deal came to an end with the passage of Bill C-2 by the Senate of Canada. Progress on this file was helped by an aggressive campaign of support by farmers and farm organizations from across the country.

“Our message of the need for market access has resonated in Ottawa. Our members were represented at committee by real farmers, and we had many meetings to build support for this legislation amongst Liberal and Conservative Members of Parliament,” said Doug Robertson, President of the Grain Growers of Canada.

“I think this shows that farmers do have a voice in Ottawa and can help put in place the tools we need to make our living from the market,” explained Robertson. “It was refreshing to see the two major Parties working together to support our producers, unlike the others, who put special interests and ideology ahead of the needs of Canadian farmers.”

Colombia represents the 7th largest export market for Canadian pulses (peas, lentils, beans) and has potential to be a major market for wheat, barley, malt, beef and pork. Currently, Colombia maintains an average of 16.6% tariff on agricultural imports.

“This deal will give our farmers several years of market access advantage over other exporters,” said Robertson. “For once, we will have the US and EU at a substantial trade disadvantage.”

The deal is also to the benefit of the Colombian people. The elimination of tariffs on wheat, pulses, pork and beef imports means cheaper food there, but also provides better market access for Colombians who can expand their tropical fruit and coffee exports to Canada as trade relationships develop.

“It’s a good deal for farmers in both countries because we each export different products,” said Robertson. “The simple fact is this deal is good for both countries, and only those ideologically opposed to all free trade would say otherwise.”

The Grain Growers of Canada represent over 80,000 successful farmers through its membership organizations who grow wheat, oats, barley, canola, corn, peas, lentils and triticale.

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