

**Narrator:** Peter Edwards (PE)

**Company Affiliations:** Canadian Grain Commission (CGC), Saskatchewan Wheat Pool

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**Interviewer:** Nancy Perozzo (NP)

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**Summary:** Retired chairman of the Grain Appeal Tribunal for the Canadian Grain Commission Peter Edwards describes his career within the western Canadian grain trade. He begins by discussing his family's history as homesteaders in Alberta, his early interest in grain grading, and his joining the CGC as a railyard sampler in Edmonton. He recounts his movement through the CGC into the Edmonton office preparing samples to becoming an inspector in the Calgary office to becoming the inspector in charge of the Winnipeg District. Edwards then describes his move to the Grain Appeal Tribunal and explains the process of re-grading samples. In the CGC, Edwards also designed exhibits for agricultural fairs, and after his retirement, he performed contract grading work for Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. He discusses changes to grain inspection, like the consolidation of wheat grades and the introduction of protein testing and protein segregation. Other topics discussed include inspectors' skills at visually distinguishing grain varieties, the CGC's connections to other industry players, different regions producing higher or lower protein content wheat, and grain inspector exams. Edwards also reads several grain inspection related poems.

**Keywords:** Canadian Grain Commission (CGC); Grain inspection; Grain Appeal Tribunal; Grain varieties; Grain grades; Grain farmers/producers; Grain trade—laws and legislation; Canada Grain Act; Grain sampling; Protein testing; Visual grain inspection; Boxcar sampling; Grain transportation—rail; Boxcars; Saskatchewan Wheat Pool; Canadian National Railway; Canadian Pacific Railway; Grain storage; The Great Depression; Edmonton; Calgary; Winnipeg

Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: We'll start with the date which I'll introduce. It's Nancy Perozzo talking to Mr. Peter Edwards at his home on Lanark Street in Winnipeg on April 8, 2009. Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in our Voices of the Grain Trade project. Maybe we could just start with you talking a little bit about when you first were introduced to the grain trade in Canada.

PE: I feel I was introduced to the grain trade in Canada, actually, in 1927 when I was 2 years old, when my parents migrated from England onto a quarter section of land at St. Brides, Alberta, ten miles west of St. Paul. That was some of the last land in Alberta that was annexed, for a better word—I'll leave it at that—from our Native Canadians, our First Nations. There was 50 families that came out and left the homestead that consisted of a quarter section and, I believe, a 20-by-30, four-room house with no basement. There was six in my parents' family. Besides my parents, it was three brothers and a sister. A year after we came, the house burnt down. Yours truly got the blame for that playing with matches with some straw that my dad had used to insulate around the house.

A new home was built on the main road about a half a mile or so away at the other end of the farm. My dad opened up a store, which went broke in 1936 with about \$700 worth of credit. The reason why I'm saying that I believe that's when my time in the grain trade started. I was always interested in the grain, especially at harvest time. My dad headed up a junior grain club in the district. He was the head of that for eight or ten years, that I can remember. These meetings were held mostly in our store, and when the store wasn't there, still that area of the house.

I hung around at these meetings. At times, the directors from the provincial government would bring samples of grain, which the members of the junior grain club would grade. I was only barely into my teens then and not eligible to join. I think you had to be 15, but because I was there, I participated. I remember some good remarks as far as the results of the grading of these samples of grain that I did.

Moving on a little bit further, 1943, I joined the RCAF [Royal Canadian Air Force] at the age of 17 and a half. In 1945, I came back from England as a tail gunner in a heavy bomber and worked for four years in the private industry for Canada Packers in the packing food business. In 1949, I joined the Canadian Grain Commission [CGC], which was named Board of Grain Commissioners back in 1949.

I was employed as a grain sampler. In those days what we did as the railway cars came through Edmonton, they were stopped off both in the CP [Canadian Pacific Railway] and the CN [Canadian National Railway] yards. They were all boxcars in those days. We, the grain samplers, would go to these boxcars that would be put on separate tracks, and we would, with a ladder, crawl into them. We had a grain probe, and we would take seven probes of this grain in the car and put it in a bag where it would be sent down to the central grading office in Edmonton for grading. This information, the grade and so forth and other information regarding each individual car, would be then sent by first class mail to Vancouver or Thunder Bay, wherever the destination of that particular car was going. They were mostly Vancouver, but there were certainly lots for Thunder Bay.

As grain cars got the newer cars, heavier loads, there wasn't room to get in, and this was discontinued. Then the elevator manager would load a car, still boxcars, would hang a representative sample on a nail just inside the door, and we would open the door and just take the sample out. Instead of being called samplers, we were called grain lifters. Again, these samples would go down to the central office to be graded and the results onto the unloading ports—the elevators where they'd be unloaded. The information from these samples, it was used in part at times for the binning of that grain. If they didn't have the results when it was in, it'd be rare, but it was information.

NP: Can I ask you about when you did the sampling using the probe?

PE: Yes.

NP: Was that for different types of grain?

PE: All kinds of grain. That would include our four or five types of wheat, oats, barely, flax. There was no canola in those days. That came later.

NP: Different types of grain.

PE: Flaxseed was the easiest.

NP: And why was that?

PE: Because it was an oilseed, and it was slippery. It was easier to shove the probe in. You sank a little bit deeper into the flax, naturally. Sometimes the probe would be real difficult to push down in a dry year, when there was some dust that had got into the grain. It was sandy. But it was only about 1951 or so, they needed some help in the central office in Edmonton, and I was asked to go down there and work in there. My wife Margaret was very happy with that because that was a day job, and I had coveralls.

NP: So did you have shift-work then?

PE: Yes.

NP: So you worked when the cars were there, which I guess was 24 hours.

PE: Well, not quite. Two shifts. They would hold the midnight ones over for the morning. So there was a day shift and an afternoon shift. Occasionally, when the movement of grain was real heavy, there would be a night shift put on.

NP: Were you able to keep fit climbing up and down into the cars?

PE: You had to be fit to start with. I was always fairly agile and that was no problem for me. I think back on it now that you asked a question, I noticed that all the grain samplers and grain probers, they were all slim people, and fairly young people too. So 1951, I was exposed then to the actual preparation of samples for grading by doing the test weight, assessing the dockage—that's the impurities, the wheat seeds, and so forth—and other related manual duties that needed to be. But at the same time, you were only two or three feet away from where the actual grading was going on.

If you were fairly quick with your hands, you could prepare the samples quicker than the inspector would grade them. You would slip up beside him and don't say too much with certain individuals. [Laughs] You got your hands to see the grain actually being graded. After, I think about 1953, in a busy period of time when one of the regular inspectors was sick, you were under a little bit more close supervision by the supervisor inspector.

NP: Was there quite a separation between the inspectors and the samplers?

PE: Yes. Even in the office here, the qualified grain inspectors they had a little—it wasn't a lounge—but a separate little area where they could close the door and go in and have half a dozen chairs, because there was only about four of them. So they were a step higher than we were. So in 1959, I applied for and got an inspector's job in Calgary. It was the same type of operation that was going on in Edmonton. I worked as a grain inspector in Calgary from 1959 to [inaudible] in head office of the inspection division here in Winnipeg.

NP: Much different between working in the head office here versus either Edmonton or Calgary offices?

PE: Much broader picture of the operations because the re-inspections, or the re-grading if someone was dissatisfied with the grades, came back to Winnipeg, to the central location. But the whole operation of the Canadian Grain Commission then became fairly close because we're all in the same building. We were over on Lombard in the Grain Exchange Building in those days.

That was in 1960. I'm not sure of the year but it was in the early '70s, and it was just one floor away, where I got the position of inspector-in-charge of the Winnipeg District. That included the sampling and the grading of car lot samples that were unloaded at

the various flour mills here, as well as the terminal in Transcona—the grain terminal out there—and any samples that came in by the mail from producers or directly from country elevator managers.

NP: And why would they come in directly from the producers?

PE: When we're talking about a sample, we're talking about a minimum two-pound sample, and this is docking on a 500-gram basis. A producer could send a sample in for his own information, directly. Under the Canada Grain Act, and I believe it's—well it was when I retired—a producer, if he was dissatisfied with the grade or the dockage that was being assessed when he was delivering his grain to a primary elevator, he could request and ask his grain be sold subject to inspector's grade and dockage. That couldn't be refused him. The elevator manager would take the sample of his grain as it was being unloaded—the representative sample—send it to the Canadian Grain Commission with the appropriate documents. The sample would be graded, the dockage would be assessed, and both the producer and the elevator manager would get copies and that was the basis.

NP: Very often?

PE: No. I would say less than a tenth of one percent or lower than that in the overall operations. I was inspector-in-charge in Winnipeg for only about three years I believe. Then I was appointed chairman of the Grain Appeal Tribunal here in Winnipeg. Now, the Grain Appeal Tribunal is established under the Canada Grain Act. A chairman is appointed by the Commission, and he is a person who is qualified to grade grain, and as chairman of the Appeal Board, he only could grade samples of grain officially as chairman of the Appeal Board. The Act provided, and they were the senior grain graders of the various grain firms here in Winnipeg. A quorum, when there were appeals, would be two members from these eight that the chairman would select. Naturally, he would have to choose two neutral ones.

What was done would be basically on a rotation basis and then these two members, when they came and the tribunal was in session, all documents relating to the sample were kept confidential by the chairman. The two grain trade members did not know if that appeal was to have the grade raised or, especially a flour mill that's buying the grains, could appeal to have the grade lower, if they felt it was over graded, graded too high. They didn't know which it was. The two members voted confidentially to the chairman independently and the chairman—myself—only had a vote when there was a difference of opinion between these two members. That, I would say, would be about ten, twelve percent of the time, that's all, the chairman would have a vote. That was the Appeal Tribunal.

NP: The Appeal Tribunal, then, even though they were just looking at a small sample of grain, could really have quite a financial impact on the person appealing.

PE: Yes. If he wasn't that--. [...*audio skips*] At the end of the month they'd get these little cheques. I think when I left the Appeal was \$15 and they got five each. Five of the people they liked, I guess.

NP: [Laughs]

PE: However, the Commission could have assigned to the chairman of the Appeal Board other related duties, but he couldn't officially grade grain. For the last ten or twelve years of my career when I was on there, I was asked to coordinate and go out to country fairs with a grading exhibit, and I enjoyed doing that very much. Going back to my roots in the country, meeting producers in the general public. We used to attend about six fairs a year. We attended two in Regina. Progress show is in I think January. We used to go to one about this time of year in Lethbridge. Saskatoon was another regular stop. Brandon exhibition, that's in the springtime here, coming up I think—usually around school break.

So I enjoyed doing that very much and that was about my extent of my career with the Canadian Grain Commission. It was 43 years. I was 68 when I retired. Unbeknownst to me on the Friday when I retired, on the Monday in late August at quarter 8:00, the phone rang, and it was a request from Saskatchewan Wheat Pool if I would come and help them with their grading in the busy time during the fall months. I did that for nine falls for about two, two and a half months.

NP: How would you describe the similarities and differences between the grading practices in the Wheat Pool versus the Grain Commission?

PE: Very similar, but simply because it was the same grade definition, the same standards, and the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, and all the grain companies, eventually the grain was graded by the Canadian Grain Commission, so they would follow.

NP: So it was quite easy to shift into.

PE: Just natural, yes. But with Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, wheat was the main one, and I was assigned to that. That was my real cup of tea. Interestingly enough, when Canada Grain Act was revised and the Board of Commissioners name was changed to the Canadian Grain Commission, prior to that in our red spring wheat—that's the main crop of wheat which is used for bread—there were seven grades. There was actually eight. There was [No.] 1 hard, [No.] 1 northern, [No.] 2 northern, [No.] 3 northern. There were actually Manitoba northers because it was the Manitoba Act at one time—[No.] 4 northern, and a No. 5, [No.] 6, and feed.

When the act was revised and the grains consolidated in the early '70s, there became four grades in this main class of wheat— [No.] 1 Canada Western red spring, [No.] 2 Canada Western red spring, and [No.] 3 Canada Western red spring, and Canada feed wheat. The main reason why this was done would be the research that was done that there was very little, and some years virtually no difference, in actual quality determined by scientists in their lab and from our customers between our No. 1 and No. 2 prior to 1970. Those grades were consolidated. The [No.] 1 hard that I mentioned, that I only saw one sample that somebody graded that, they changed it to No. 1 Northern, because it just wasn't used so it was a show grade.

NP: Since you supervised so many grain inspectors and worked with them, are there certain qualities that make a good grain inspector?

PE: Not everybody that tried to write the exam and study for it. You practise grading, and there was a training facility, samples and so forth where you graded. To see grain graded by an experienced grain inspector, it almost looks a bit ridiculous because it's only a two or three second look at it, and he will say [No.] 1 or [No.] 2. You have a mental picture in your mind of the minimum quality of that No. 1 or No. 2, and the human mind must have some computer analysis in it, and it just registers. There is a test weight, and maximums of foreign materials, and other factors that if they're there, they become very obvious when you look at the sample. Then you will have to mix up the sample, weigh out a portion—we'll say 25 grams or 50 grams—and if it happened to be barley that was in the wheat, then you would hand pick out the barley from the wheat, from this 50 grams, weigh it, and calculate the percentage. It was Percentage maybe 0.2 at No. 1 and half of one percent at No. 2 and so forth like that. So those could be grading factors.

Same as wheats of other classes. We grow, in Western Canada, red spring wheat is the main one, the main crop. And there's amber durum wheat, which is used for pasta products. Winter wheat, which is the main crop around the world but relatively small crop in Western Canada, quite a bit in Southern Ontario. It's the main wheat crop in the United States because of their climatic conditions. There's soft white spring, which is grown under irrigation, which is very low protein wheat. There's-- Oh, it used to be called utility wheat, but I've forgotten the name of it, which is a very hard wheat.

So there's six different classes. You had to be able to distinguish these classes from one another. To have a variety licensed into one of these classes, they couldn't look like another variety. They had to have their own distinguishing features where they were able to be visually told apart because in the handling of grain, remember that a car lot of grain is unloaded every five or six minutes in an elevator, maybe quicker now, and someone is waiting to bin that grain with, like, same quality grain, basis the information coming from the inspection. And some of the elevators, they won't wait for that, they'll bin it on their own.

NP: And if they bin it on their own and there's some discrepancy between the Grain Commission inspector and the elevator inspector, what happens?

PE: Usually, if it was a different grade, the bulk-handling system will take care of that. For example, you can take a good No. 1 and a poor No. 2 and mix them together. It'll probably come out as a poor [No.] 1 because the differences aren't that great.

NP: How many years do you think it takes to develop a good grain inspector?

PE: If you'd asked me that question in—when did we move to Calgary?—1959, I would have said, “Oh, a couple of years.” But I look back on that now, it was always a learning experience, and I would say 10- or 15-years' experience or more. And experience in long-time grading, you just become more proficient at it, and it comes with greater ease.

NP: Going to move on to a fairly general question. What are you most proud of in the work that you did over that 43 years plus, I guess?

PE: I'm proud of it all. I'm not going to commit to any one thing because I had a wonderful career, all aspects of it. I enjoyed being inspector-in-charge. I was very hesitant to allow my name to be put forward when I was approached, but I would consider the chairman of the Appeal Board because I only had about three years with that, and I enjoyed working with people. I knew that I'd have direct staff. But as you got into the Appeal Tribunal and there were different aspects and different responsibilities and one thing or another, and that soon faded. As chairman of the Appeal Board, you had a little bit more flexibility with your hours, and personally that suited me as my wife wasn't in very fitting health then.

NP: You mentioned that you had gone on the road with the display from the Canadian Grain Commission.

PE: Yes.

NP: What kinds of responses or questions—reception—did you get from the people that attended those fairs and exhibitions?

PE: As mentioned, it was a grain grading exhibit. I was given a free hand to develop this. The Commission did have an exhibit before, but I had a free hand, and we kept it to a grading exhibit. We stayed out of policy, out of politics, which was a good thing. The producers, and even a lot of the young people that came by, junior grain clubs—their leaders would bring them by—were the actual grain samples that we had. We had them in round baking pans where they could pick up an individual pan and look at it.



The reason for the pans and not something poured because people would be tempted to put their hands in it anyway, but by picking up the pan, if there was a little spill it wouldn't go into the next one because they had it in their hand.

That served two purposes. It suited the customer, and it was this grain samples that they were most interested in. We did have a pamphlet on the grading and the general information on the Commission that we handed out during this time. It would usually be three of us. If you went to Lethbridge, you would use one of the local staff there and the same as Saskatoon. Regina didn't have one, so we used to take some personnel from Winnipeg or wherever somebody was available that you knew was good for meeting the public.

NP: So the Grain Commission then had inspection staff offices in Winnipeg obviously, Thunder Bay, Saskatoon, Lethbridge, Calgary, Edmonton?

PE: Yes, and Moosejaw in the old days. That's where there was government terminals located at these locations, and that's where the inspection offices were eventually, there. There were central offices in Calgary and Edmonton when there was the grain cars, that I mentioned, back in the early '50s with the probing and sampling of grain cars. The staff has much been reduced now.

NP: So when you left there had there already been quite a reduction?

PE: Yes. Maybe two inspectors or one inspector in some cases. Those numbers would have escaped me.

NP: We have a series of questions here that are all related to the interconnectedness of the Canadian Grain Commission with other components of the grain industry. I think you've probably commented on some of them, but I just wanted to give you a chance if there's something else that you wanted to say. The connection and interaction, interdependence, of the Canadian Grain Commission and the farmers?

PE: My understanding of the original Canada Grain Act, and I'm not sure when it was written, 1912 or something, seems to me—that just came to my memory here—it was a demand from farmers who, at the time, believed that they were not getting the right grade for their grain when they took it to the primary elevator.

NP: So at the very outset then of the Grain Commission, it was a really close tie.

PE: Yes. Demand was demand from producers that something be set up.

NP: And that demand and appreciation continued, would you say?

PE: I would say absolutely.

NP: Yeah. Connection between the grain companies and the Grain Commission? Connection, relationships.

PE: Well, the grain firms, and I'm not familiar with the details on that, but the grain firms were all licensed by the Canadian Grain Commission to start with. Their individual elevators were licensed, and they had a licence displayed so there was certainly that connection. Obviously, they had to abide by the provisions of the act which directly related to their operations.

NP: The railways, other than having to climb into the cars, did your positions—out west or here in Winnipeg—did it require you to deal with the railways at all?

PE: Yes. You actually dealt with, not the running trade—the ones that operated the trains—but you had to go to the railway office to get a list of the cars and they would give you the actual waybills. They would have them sorted out. I can remember Edmonton, they would be in little bundles as to which track. They had 23 tracks as I recall in the Clover Bar yard. That's the big CNR yards in Edmonton. When our people would be-- So the information—the car number, point of shipment, the grain company, destination—they would all be hand recorded.

When the grain samplers finished our probing and so forth, and we came in, then the foreman had a stamp, and he would actually stamp these waybills as being inspected. Then that allowed the railway then to move them on. It was compulsory for the railroads, under this Canada Grain Act in those days back in the '50s, to stop these cars in Edmonton and Calgary and Winnipeg for this inspection. At times when they inadvertently one got on, they'd bring it back. It all became obsolete with a little quicker methods of doing things and so forth.

NP: Yeah, the advent of computers or punch cards.

PE: Oh, before the computer.

NP: Canadian Wheat Board. Any connection with them?

PE: I guess that question would have to go to our administrative people that you must have interviewed. Did you interview Dennis Kennedy?

NP: He's on our list.

PE: Okay.

NP: So your job didn't put you in any contact with them?

PE: No.

NP: What's your sense of the role that you, in your roles as grain inspector at various levels, and the Canadian Grain Commission, plays in Canada's success in the international grain trade?

PE: I'm not going to isolate myself. I'm going to say the inspection of grain, and if we look under the Canada Grain Act, the government of Canada, was able to guarantee the quality as stated on the certificate final for grains that were covered by the Canadian Grain Act. That not only included our five or six types of wheat, it included shipments of barley, oats, flax, canola in recent years, and three types of mustard seeds. We look at Ontario where there's a lot of soybeans and so forth. There's various crops legumes now that are grown, peas and beans which came under the act. For customers buying from Canadian products, it's the certification of the grading of these samples that guaranteed by the Government of Canada.

NP: What was the connection between you and the east of Thunder Bay?

PE: Personally, I had little or no connection at all in positions that I held because there was an inspector-in-charge for the eastern division. That was a separate entity.

NP: That person was housed in Winnipeg or elsewhere?

PE: No, usually Montreal or Chatham.

NP: Okay. Did you ever meet up?

PE: Oh yes. They would come to Winnipeg from time to time for meetings of the senior inspectors and that.

NP: In situations like yours, and especially given the length of your career, asking a question about changes. What major changes did you see over the years?

PE: The significant change was in the '70s when the eight grades were consolidated into four for our main crop, our hard red spring wheat. Then the protein introduction. Of [inaudible] all the years, and that was when the technology came out that protein could be determined like moisture content could. Protein in red spring wheat is significant.

NP: Is it easy to describe a protein test?

PE: I'm not able to do that, what they have today.

NP: No?

PE: No.

NP: At your time, were you doing protein tests?

PE: No. That was done in the Grain Research Laboratory. It was grinding a portion of the sample. I better not get into that aspect of it.

NP: So did every sample need a protein test then?

PE: In our red spring wheat, in recent years, yes. The milling grades, like feed wheat, it's necessary because there's like [No.] 1 Red and there's various levels of protein. The protein levels when I left the industry were at one percent. There would be [No.] 1 Red 14.5, 13.5, 12.5, and I don't know if it was anything lower than that. Protein is significant.

I'm an amateur baker and, believe it or not. I'm an old storyteller. I've been kneading bread--. I shouldn't say I've been kneading bread. It is about 78 years ago that I started kneading bread. The reason behind that was that I wasn't in school yet. We lived on the farm. It was all homemade bread. My mother was a very tiny person, and she had mixing all the way through in those days, and the reason why it was me that was asked to do this was because I wasn't in school yet. I remember her cutting my fingernails and washing my hands thoroughly. By the time I was 11, 12, certainly when I was 13, I could remember I would be making the bread. I had eight or nine years of experience under her supervision that, when she was ill and couldn't do it, I did that on the farm until I went into the Airforce when I was 17. There's maybe a 30-year gap or so in that. My dear wife, Margaret, she was a baker

from her mother. She had lung problems and health problems, and she was puffing and blowing. One day when I came by and I said, “You know, I can do that. I’ll knead that for you.” I went on to do it, and I can remember her saying, “Go wash your hands first!”

NP: [Laughs]

PE: So there was a 30-year gap, and I got back into it on a gradual basis, just kneading it up—kneading the bread for her. As her health deteriorated or got worse, I became the baker. I bake three times a week now. You people as interviewers, I’ll give you some samples.

NP: [Laughs] We were hoping you’d say that.

PE: Make sure you remind me. I hope this is going to be edited.

NP: Do you know what kind of flour is in this, or are you pretty certain what kind of flour with protein levels and so on?

PE: I have my own mix of flour.

NP: Okay. Tell us about that.

PE: I use all-purpose flour and about 20 percent best-for-bread flour. The best-for-bread flour that you see in the stores, beside the all-purpose flour, the only difference is the best-for-bread is a higher protein. That’s the main difference. I better not say the only difference. That’s the main difference.

NP: And why do you make that mixture?

PE: The higher protein flour in a loaf of bread gives you a higher, lighter, fluffy loaf. Going back to how I got to know about protein, back in the days of the Depression on the farm, my dad used to take a wagon load of wheat to the flour mill in St. Paul. You would get half back in flour, didn’t cost anything. I remember one year in particular, my mother’s loaves of bread, they just wouldn’t rise. They were quite heavy for their size, and it wasn’t as tasteful, and got a lot of complaints. She virtually slept with it to try and make it rise but couldn’t.

Later on in my career when I got into the Canadian Grain Commission, especially as chairman of the Appeal Board, the Canadian Grain Commission Research Laboratory, the bread-baking section, was just two doors down from where my office was as chairman of the Appeal Board. I very soon found my way in there. With the help of the baker, in those days was Bill Blaschuk, found out the truth. In 1935 when my mother couldn't--. [...*audio skips*] Wheat. A new piece of land that was bush land. That type of land I know from experience, both in farming and seeing where samples would be from as a grain inspector, is low protein wheat. As compared to wheat that comes off grass prairie lands. Just the soil conditions.

NP: So then when you look at where a sample is coming, from that in itself, because of your experience, gives you a bit of a clue of what you're going to see. Is that an accurate statement?

PE: Certain years, yes, to some degree. The product was what you graded. The wheat sample is what you graded.

NP: How soon into a season could you tell--? You know they always talk about a good quality crop. How soon into a season could you tell the overall quality of a crop?

PE: You're clued in beyond grading samples, the weather. You get dry, warm weather during harvest, that's ideal. If you get rain, showers, long period of rain, sprouting is one of the worst grading factors that you can have in grain. In the grades of red spring wheat, there's what is known as a minimum percentage of hard-vitreous kernels. That's kernels that don't show any starch or starch problems. Starchy wheat comes from soils where there was bush, generally, generally. Your hard-vitreous kernel, without any visible starch, comes mainly from grassland, Prairies. The protein is generally higher protein in the southern Prairies as to the northern prairies where the land was bushland.

NP: So there are actually protein maps then?

PE: The Canadian Grain Commission produces these, or did, each year for the red spring wheat based on the testing of thousands of samples from various locations. They try to get representative samples from various--. They come from the grain trade.

NP: Interesting. What kind of training did you get over the 42 years?

PE: As a grain inspector?

NP: Well, good place to start.

PE: Yes. As a grain inspector, first of all, the specifications that you had to memorize in the grading of grain for the main grades, there is prepared by the chief inspector. There is a standard committee that approves these. They're called standard samples and what they are, they're the visual, minimum quality for the grades that they're prepared for. For No. 1 red spring wheat, there's this visual quality sample, which is the standard. Then you can put a portion down side-by-side and compare them to make your judgement call in a lot of cases. This is done using the standard samples.

NP: So every year then?

PE: Yes. The reason why they're made every year is to reflect the type of crop, the type of damage that may be in the crop. Some years it's mainly bleach from adverse weather. Other years there may be an early frost.

NP: What does an early frost do?

PE: The growth of the plant and no further ripening goes on. At that stage, if it's severe frost, and the grain can be--. It shows up very visually. If the kernels are wrinkled, if it's very green—or it'll turn virtually dark green or almost black—so that's very readily recognizable. If it's through experience, seeing samples graded, that you just, your mind picks this up.

NP: Did they change much in the type of grain grown? For example, I'm thinking that the plant breeders were always trying to come up with a type of product that would be frost resistant or whatever. Any kind of resistance really, rust resistant.

PE: Right. Rust resistant would certainly be a main factor, resistance from bleaching and that.

NP: How did that impact on your job, then, when they brought in changes regularly?

PE: If I may just make a comment on plant breeder's samples, the Canadian Grain Commission inspection division work hand-in-hand with plant breeders in Agriculture Canada. They submit samples of their new strains of wheat that they have in the development stages from the very early stages through their six- or eight- or ten-year period of development for the Canadian Grain Commission to not only assess the quality of these various new strains, but visually firstly, can they be distinguished from the other classes of grains that they have? That works hand-in-hand. The plant breeders work with the Canadian Grain Commission, and they advise them back, because some strains get dropped because they're not visually distinguishable from another type which the quality is different.

NP: Are they still, as far as you know, doing visual?

PE: I would say so, yes.

NP: What were the major challenges that you faced during your career?

PE: Well, it was such a wonderful career that I had that it was all most interesting. I would say none, really. I just enjoyed my work so much, and the work seemed to fit with me and hopefully I fitted in with--.

NP: Challenges can be positive things.

PE: Oh, yes.

NP: So it was smooth sailing?

PE: Yes, for me.

NP: What about the Grain Commission? Did they face any challenges that--?

PE: Not that I'm aware of, but that would be a question that should be directed to administrations.

NP: What positions would those be?

PE: Well, you said Dennis Kennedy. He was the executive director. Another person you may consider, we can pick it up here, was Victor Martens, too.

NP: Yes. I just talked to him this afternoon to set a meeting up. Was he--?

PE: He was the executive director when he retired, prior to Dennis Kennedy. So he will go back way further. He was also the chief administrative officer in the Grain Research Laboratory. So he could speak to what some of these that the Grain Research Laboratory. Dr. Tipples is another name that--.

NP: Yes, we have him on our list as well. Significant events that happened over the time?



PE: Significant events? Oh, I would say the consolidation of the grades in the early '70's from the seven grades down.

NP: That made life easier?

PE: Oh yes. It made more sense. Especially when you realise that some years from the reports that you got and then later on when I got into head office—well, I was in head office—that you knew that there was very little difference in the quality between a No. 1 and No. 2 on certain years. Virtually none. That was major. The advent of the protein segregation because, I don't know how much, but there is sometimes the protein segregation was more than the difference between a grade. If you have two percent higher protein, I'm sure the price would be of a [No.] 2 red and 14.5 would be worth more than a [No.] 1 red a 12.5—but don't quote me on that.

NP: Why did the protein make such a big difference then, the introduction of that?

PE: Because it's such a factor in the baking of bread, such a factor.

NP: Is there a point beyond which high protein is not a good thing?

PE: I can't answer that.

NP: What are your most vivid memories of your work life—people, experiences? You may have already covered those but any that come to mind?

PE: Certainly people. If they're not, they should be. They certainly were for me. Working with people.

NP: Were there special people that you worked with? Did you have mentors?

PE: All the supervisors I had go back to when I first got into that grading office in Edmonton. The grain inspector there, Jack McGee. Another inspector who was very good is Allan Bailey—Al Bailey. He was a great teacher type. I often wish I had more of his qualities when I had staff.

NP: What did he do that you appreciated?

PE: He would stop what he was doing—a sample—and explain the details, the details of it. He was just a natural teacher. Whether myself, we had a large family, we had eight children. My children tell me, “Dad, that you mellowed. You didn’t have much time to teach in those days when, you told us.” [Laughs]

NP: So they took the time and thought it was important that you understood?

PE: Exactly! Exactly.

NP: They may have been on the job, I guess, right from almost the very beginning, those gentlemen, would you say?

PE: Yes, they had careers. Yes.

NP: People seem to stay awhile in this industry. Has that been your experience?

PE: Most, yes. There’s not many grain inspectors that I know that left the Canadian Grain Commission, that did not go to--. Other than go to the private sector as grain inspectors.

NP: Bea, do you have any questions that I haven’t asked?

BC: I guess just going back to the training question, it sounds like you were pretty young when you started, 17, in the business. Or you went overseas?

PE: That’s when I went into the--.

BC: So you weren’t very old when you--.

PE: I was 24.

BC: 24. It sounds like it was a job where you really had the opportunity to learn on the job and advance because you had a number of jobs.

PE: Yes. A great deal of the training of a grain inspector is you own initiative. If you don’t take the initiative, they say to choose people who did take that initiative to ask questions and to seek to do what’s going on at the next level.

BC: Were you tested when you applied? Because you said, “I made an application for a particular job and I was a successful candidate.” So did you, every time you moved up the ladder?

PE: In the lower ranks, yes. To become an assistant grain inspector to an Inspector I or Inspector II, there were exams. It consisted of two exams. It consisted of a written exam and a grading exam in the lower levels. The inspection division had a staff-training division that were the responsibility. A couple years I was involved in that. When we get to the conclusion, I have a couple poems that I would like to have recorded.

NP: I can’t believe the poetry that’s coming out of this Voices of the Grain Trade that I never expected. Since you mentioned it, why don’t we do them now? I have some general questions that we can deal with later.

PE: One of them is a little verse that I composed and just thought it up when I was grading on the bench, and in the poem, it uses the A.D. and A.D. stands for amber durum. Amber durum is a class of wheat that’s used for pasta products. So the poem goes like this. Picture a grain inspector, and he’s got a sample of amber durum, and he’s about to grade it. So it goes something like this:

It’s four A.D. that’s all that it can be  
 It’s green and it’s frosted, too  
 The elevator man major says it’s number three  
 And the farmer insists that it’s two.

The other one is a poem and it’s called “The Wheat Number,” and I’m sorry to say I don’t know the author of it. I hope my memory goes through it. But I remember it being dated 1932. We have to set up a scene back, if this poem was in 1932, we have to go back that far to set up the scene where there was--. Before the combines. The scene is a threshing outfit and that includes the threshing machine, the tractor, the long belt, usually six teams of horses with people bringing in of the stoop thing. The threshing machine had a person who was called, he was a kind of an engineer. He looked after the setting of the cylinders, that the wheat was properly separated. He’s the guy that’s referred to in the first place. There were eight grades of wheat. So they’re harvesting red spring wheat here:

The guy that did the threshing  
 Said we’re going No. 1.  
 But this, I rather doubted  
 As slowly down did run.

Then the neighbours gathered round  
As you know they love to do,  
And they shouted out in chorus,  
“It’s a darn good [No.] 2!”

On the way I met the banker,  
Waiting hopefully for me.  
He looked it over and said,  
“It’s No. 3.”  
So getting quite excited, I departed on the run  
And by dodging some more creditors  
The elevator won.

There the buyer looked it over,  
Put a handful in his cheek  
Spat it out across the driveway,  
And to me did kindly speak,  
“It’s a 4 of that I’m certain, though I wouldn’t care to buy it,  
As the market’s closed today.”

Ship it to the West or to Thunder Bay or Vancouver  
Wherever he thought the best.  
Then I sat me down in patience to await that gentle day  
For all our summers labour,  
We’d receive a little pay.

Sure that grader was a creature  
Who could treat a fellow rough.  
For in his utter blindness  
He had named it No. 5, and tough!  
Outraged by this ranking justice  
Re-inspection, an appeal I did claim.  
And I had to pawn my Sunday topcoat

To pay the cost of same.

In a fortnight came the answer  
Raising heck within our camp.  
For I fainted when I read it  
Re-inspected, appeal  
No. 6 and damp!

NP: [Laughs] You mentioned Thunder Bay in there, so does that mean this poem was in the 1970s? Or would it had been earlier?

PE: Well, I changed that. In the actual poem it said, “Ship it to the East or to the West” and I put in Thunder Bay and Bank River.

NP: Okay

PE: It’s a modern version. Very good! Very good you picked that up. [Laughs]

NP: So it was older than that?

PE: Oh yes. I remember this being 1932.

NP: Oh really?

PE: Ship it to the East or to the West, whichever you thought the best.

NP: Yes.

PE: Of course, it was Fort William and Port Arthur in those days.

NP: Right. [Laughs]

PE: Got caught, eh?

NP: Well, no, because I think you did say 1932. Thunder Bay was always there, the bay, but not the city. Are there any other questions that you think we should have asked that we haven't asked you that you would've--?

PE: No. I think you covered it as far as I'm concerned.

NP: We've been very fortunate in interviewing people that they've also been people who have liked to keep memorabilia and pictures of their time on the job. Are we continuing to be fortunate? Do you have any?

PE: No.

NP: None of those things? Not you sitting at your desk?

PE: No.

NP: No? Ah. We'll have to go to the Canadian Grain Commission to get those, although we would like to take your picture today as well, so we at least have that.

PE: I have a difficulty with words. I have—are we still on?—I have pictures of where I worked. Just two of us left.

NP: So are you a part of the group that Frank Rowan belongs to then? The Airforce group?

PE: No. I knew Frank but, no. I never joined that.

NP: We are hoping, at some point, that we might actually get a centre established to commemorate the history of the terminal elevator in Thunder Bay. If we did that, what do you think might be something we should do to illustrate the work that you did? Is that a good way to say it, Bea?

PE: I know how much or anybody who has some of the old equipment. I certainly don't have any, although I'm a pack rat.

NP: [Laughs] You're a selective pack rat. Do you know of anybody who might've kept some of that equipment?

PE: Not off hand, that they'd be willing to give up, I would assume.

NP: Even if we get pictures of it, that is sometimes the best we can do. We're hoping to do a website as well where we can have pictures of the various--.

PE: Vern Duke might be a source for that. You said you were going to be interviewing more. If anybody, that would be the person.

NP: Yeah.

PE: Vern Duke is the one that heads up--. He organizes and has headed up the retirees' luncheons.

NP: So, I'm getting anxious to try that bread. [Laughs] I'm going to thank you, officially, for speaking to us this afternoon. It's been fascinating, and it's provided information that is invaluable to the project. So, thank you very much.

PE: It's been my pleasure.

**End of interview.**