

Narrator: Bill Toews (BT)

Company Affiliations: Canadian Wheat Board

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Summary: In his second interview, retired farmer and former elected board member of the Canadian Wheat Board discusses the major change since his last interview, the demise of the CWB. He describes the major changes as a result of the Board's demise, such as grain research money coming directly from farmers and the private industry, changes to grain deliveries handled by grain companies, less loyalty from farmers to specific grain companies, less efficiency in the grain transportation system, and the disorganization at the beginning of the system transition. Toews also discusses changes to crops grown, expands on the issue of GMOs in certain crops, and describes the shift from Canadian-focused grain companies to multinationals.

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Time, Speaker, Narrative
<p>NP: This is a follow up interview with Bill Toews of Kane, Manitoba, a producer that I first interviewed back in 2010. At that time, we had talked about doing a follow-up interview because of the fact that he's with the Canadian Wheat Board [CWB]—one of the directors there—and that there were big changes in the wind. Those changes have since taken place, so we can follow up on that. The interview is taking place at the Hotel Fort Garry in Winnipeg on November 23, 2015. Bill, I sent you a copy of your interview and you had a chance to listen to it. I did the same thing. I took a few notes as I was going through, and there are a couple of things that were sort of loose ends at the time. I want to follow up on those ones before we go more broadly at some of the issues. One of the things we talked about was the issue with genetically modified flax. At the time, there was some problem about shipments not</p>

being well-received by European customers because there was a very, very tiny amount of genetically modified flax, and that there had been a move to bring legislation in. Can you follow up on that at all?

BT: Yeah, I think I can recollect the essence of that whole scene. The NDP Ag critic was trying to bring in legislation that would require a company that wanted to introduce a genetically modified plant in agriculture to some analysis and assessment before it was allowed to become commercialized. So, there was quite a discussion in the parliament. Actually, at the Wheat Board, it was one of the staff members and I had gone to Ottawa to speak to our position on it. But I think we only were able to leave a copy of our submission there. We didn't get to speak to a parliamentary committee or anything. What happened was it was brought up in the House and tabled. There was mostly Conservatives in there that were opposed to it, and there wasn't a lot of support from some of the Ag people. There's always a concern by some of the key Ag people, the farmers representatives, that they don't want to be seen to be luddites and requiring this additional step of performance appraisal before something is brought in. So, there wasn't a hue and cry by the Ag community to support this, so it was defeated in the House.

I recall watching the debate on CPAC [Cable Public Affairs Channel] and hearing my name mentioned in the House of Commons. I just about fell over thinking, "What the hell is going on here?!" [Laughs] You know? One of the people that was speaking for that regulation, I guess, had seen the paper and had made some reference to it. But ultimately it was defeated. The flax story has essentially disappeared. We lost a lot of that market in Europe but have gained markets elsewhere over time. But it was a very costly experience for farmers in Western Canada and a lot of problems. We were required to send in samples of any flax we wanted to sell and have it checked for this particular modification.

NP: So, just the practicalities of it. I'm assuming that this flax was in a shipment actually headed over to Europe, was offloaded, and then tested?

BT: I don't think it was offloaded, although I could be wrong. It never saw commercial use in Europe. It was shipped back. I don't think it was offloaded the ship. I think they checked it before it was offloaded, and there was a ship floating around the ocean looking for a market for this flax.

[0:05:06]

NP: Okay. Now, so the flax then that would have been sitting back at your farm, what happens to it in that case?

BT: Well, what really happened in the flax industry is that they tried to run it through the US crushing mills because they weren't particularly concerned about it. Eventually, I think after two or three years, they moved enough so I think that they felt that they didn't have that problem anymore. So, I haven't heard anything about that for quite a while.

NP: So, did that stop the production of--? Because I think it was a relatively small--.

BT: It was a relatively small crop too, in terms of acreage, but it's pretty well lost its place in southern Manitoba. I think there's still a fair amount grown in Saskatchewan and in the States. But it did have an impact on the growers' views about it because, I mean, it was a bit of a problematic crop anyways for weed control and whatever. I think this was sort of the last straw for farmers. They just felt it was too much of a problem, and so there is very little flax grown in my area now. I don't know whether or not there's a marketing issue anymore or not.

NP: So, that ties up that little loose end. Then we had moved onto a discussion about the whole area of farmers' involvement in grain research. At that time, you had mentioned that you had been a representative for Keystone Agricultural Producers on the Western Grain Research Foundation [WGRF]. Have I got all those names right?

BT: That's right.

NP: At that time—this was 2010—there were moves afoot to reorganize the research on the Prairies going to a clustered approach. And you had mentioned that the CWB had been quite active in supporting grain research on behalf of the farmers. So, over the five years that we've been through, have there been any changes there?

BT: Well, I guess the most obvious thing is the change in the organization of how research funding is collected and forwarded to the research community. I think it was a mistake, and I think it will be a mistake in the future--. With the loss of the Board, the collection system, of course, is quite different because the Board used to just take a cut of all of the returns from selling wheat and transfer a small portion into the research community on an annual basis through the WGRF. Now, they set up individual, provincial committees to collect it and prioritize the research. I think they may do some useful things, but I always felt that on a Prairie-wide basis there was no point in having the provinces partition or the Prairies partition into the three different communities because I think the research community won't find that particularly useful. I think the committees may be at cross-purposes when they're allotting money to the various researchers. There won't be that uniformity and a collective approach in the research community and funding agency to do things more efficiently and together.

I don't think there's that much difference between the three provinces in terms of wheat research, in particular. I thought the WGRF was working very well. It's still functioning. In the meantime, these three provincial organizations are up and running. I think the intention was by Mr. Ritz is to shut down the WGRF and just have the provincial committees look after this. I'm hoping that changes with a new government, that they will take a different approach. Once they've got these provincial committees established, it'll be hard to shut them down, but there might be a way of having them do close collaboration with the WGRF in terms of prioritizing the research and so forth. But it just creates another level of administration and bureaucracy and uncertainty, really.

[0:10:32]

NP: Mmhmm. Now, I think you started out your comments by saying that you didn't think that the researchers would find it that useful either.

BT: Well, I think in the area of what they were doing in the research community it was putting the research community through a process of changing the whole structure of research in clustering. To be honest with you, I don't know how that's all gone. I know that they were very unhappy with it. Not just with that, but with the constant change in direction and organization that the bureaucrats and the politicians gave them. They were having trouble setting long-term goals and meeting them without being interrupted by the changes in administration. So, I'm not sure how that went. I just figure now the research community will have to apply to three or four different groups to get their funding for their research. It'll probably make things a little rockier.

NP: You may not be able to answer this question, but out of those three Prairie provinces—Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba—there are different--.

BT: Environments?

NP: Well, [laughs] fund availabilities. So, was there an impact on Manitoba in particular? Because, you know, was the research money even there? Or even the size of the farming communities, did that have any impact at, say, at the university and research level that you are familiar with?

BT: No. I honestly don't know what the university community has done in the last while. The Manitoba committee has just been set up within the last eight months or so, ten months. So they've just barely gotten going. The costs to the farmers is higher than it was before because there's two agencies now that are doing the check-offs. So, theoretically, there should be more money in total for the research. Part of the check-off money now is going to Canadian International Grains Institute [CIGI] because one time it was the

Board that supported the Grains Institute, and now it's through a check-off. So, Manitoba will proportionally be putting in about as much money as they did before into that organization.

NP: Have the private companies, do you know whether they've sort of upped their contributions now that--?

BT: Yeah, I think there's been some input by the private grain companies into CIGI. I don't know whether they are doing any more in research. I think a number of them have their own breeding programs that in fact were in competition with the public sector and with the funding that was provided by farmers for the public sector. Generally speaking, I think farmers appreciated the public sector's involvement in breeding because it kept the costs of purchasing seed grain down by quite a significant margin. I think the fear that farmers have is that if it's all privatized, they'll be paying the same cost for say wheat that they do for canola or soybean, which has really gone out of sight, really.

NP: Speaking of wheat versus canola then, just quickly, even though canola seed input is higher, is it fair to say there's been a steady growth in the percentage of crop that farmers are putting in that are canola?

[0:14:54]

BT: Yeah. I think the acreage increased quite a bit and the volume of canola, of course, has gone up. It was particularly high in 2013/14, just like it was for wheat. But I think there are a few farmers now, at least in Manitoba, that are starting to look at soybeans as a replacement to canola just because of a risk factor and the costs. Soybean seed is quite expensive. I think it costs about \$75 an acre to plant an acre of soybeans, but you only have that cost. You're not paying for nitrogen fertilizer, so it makes quite a difference. Fungicides aren't really that critical for it either, and it spreads out the harvest load too throughout the fall. Some of the glow on canola has gone down a bit because it's just a little riskier and costs are not just in the seed, they're in the fertilizer and the fungicides.

NP: Could you say what the per acreage cost is for canola and, say, wheat, factoring in those extra inputs?

BT: Well, I'm guessing just on the basics for canola you're looking at \$80 at least for nitrogen fertilizer. We won't worry about the phosphate, although that's pretty important too. The weed control is another \$25 an acre. Fungicides would be another \$25 an acre. So, before you get going you've spent at least a couple hundred dollars an acre and you haven't even pulled your machine out of the shed. Soybeans, it's just sort of the one expense for seed right off the bat.

NP: When you say risk, or you're mentioning risk, is that an actual growing risk? Or is that just--?

BT: Well, it would be more subject to hail damage than soybeans would be, although soybeans can be damaged as well. But generally speaking, insect populations are always more of a problem, so you're going to be applying insecticides more likely on canola than you would on soybean.

NP: Why the—other than the actual cost of it—why weren't farmers growing soybeans more? Was there no market?

BT: Well, I think the soybean varieties were a little too long for Manitoba, so they're bringing in some Ontario varieties and US varieties. Only recently has there been a fair amount of breeding done on soybeans for Manitoba—shorter-season varieties. It's sort of taken off from there because I can't recall farmers getting stung with frost that killed the soybeans.

NP: They're pretty hardy?

BT: They're pretty hardy in fall. They're not very hardy in the spring, but they're pretty hardy in fall. They're just easier to grow.

NP: And harvest?

BT: And harvest, yeah.

NP: Moving on to sort of wrapping up some of the details of the previous interview, you had talked about producer-car loading sites. The whole producer car issue was one that was front and centre when it came to the dismantling of the Wheat Board because the Wheat Board was a real advocate for producer cars.

BT: Yeah.

NP: Correct? So, I don't know if these are two related issues, but I have them one after the other. No. Let's just do producer cars. Any changes over the last five years?

BT: Well, I haven't followed it very closely in the last three years. As you're aware, I've retired from farming and I haven't been paying as close attention to that because I never was involved in producer cars, really, myself. I would rely on the media and some farmers that I knew in Saskatchewan in particular that would talk about it. I honestly don't know whether there's more producer cars or less under the current system. I always felt that at some point the grain companies that have primary elevators will do their best to hamper producer cars because they take away from their handling fees that farmers would use if they're using their primary

elevators. So, I think they'll need to keep the independent terminals around in the system because they're not relying on primary elevators to make their profit.

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NP: That leads to two other items. One was, at the time, one of the things that you had mentioned with the inland terminals and if there was a producer car site, there were incentives for hauling to the inland elevators in order to draw business away from the producer-car deliveries. Any changes there that you know of? The incentives for hauling?

BT: I honestly don't have a good handle on that right now. I'd have to talk to some of my friends to see what's happened to them. I know the producer-car business was pretty intense when the '13/'14 crop was trying to be marketed because the grain companies had such a high basis that it really paid for farmers to use producer cars.

NP: Now what did you mean by really high basis?

BT: Well, the difference between the port price and the street price—or the elevator price—would include all of the things that you have in handling and in transportation, plus return to investment. Over the last three years, there's been a very high basis, which means that farmers are getting less of the port price for their grain. That's been documented by Dr. Richard Gray in a number of papers, that he's been monitoring the situation and finding that overall farmers are doing without \$2 or 3 billion a year. That's a lot of money.

NP: That is not something that would be a surprise to people who were supporters of the Wheat Board, but does it really have an impact on the farmers? Or are they doing so well that they really don't notice?

BT: Well. [Laughs] You know, that's a good question because I really don't know. I don't think farmers are aware, for example, of the study even though it's been public. I guess they're always a little suspicious of papers of that nature where Ag economists have gone in and examined this. I think farmers have just been anxious to move the grain recently, and they haven't been as concerned about whether they're getting the top dollar for it or not. I think it's a bit of a scandal. I don't blame the grain companies for exercising their ability to control what comes into the elevator by increasing the basis because the system couldn't handle the amount of grain that they were being offered.

It's just business really. But that was the difference between the way the Board handled basis and the way the grain companies handled basis. Just as a general rule, the Wheat Board basis was based on actual costs of shipment. The restrictions that were placed

on farmers' delivery were on a contract basis. Maybe they couldn't deliver a certain portion of a contract in a given period of time, and so they didn't have to restrict the flow of grain into the elevator by increasing the basis—it was done by contract. That's really hurting now when we have an excess amount of grain in the system and the basis levels are staying pretty high because grain companies can't handle all the grain that would be offered to them if they offered the price that was relative to the port price.

NP: So, what's the storage situation on the farm then?

BT: Well, there's been a lot of new grain bins put up. That's partly due to the fact that the elevator terminals are at quite some distance now and farmers need that space when they're harvesting. Secondly, it's probably staying in the bins longer. [Laughs] I'm not one of the normal people in the system, but I've got 40,000 bushels of wheat that I haven't sold from last year—and some of it from the year before—because I've been angry, [laughing] and I'm not going to sell the stuff for under a certain price. I can afford to do it simply because I'm selling out and my accountant doesn't want me to be selling and paying a lot of tax on stuff if I can postpone it for a little while.

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NP: Is there a shelf life on stored grain?

BT: Well, if it's in good condition, wheat for example can be stored for years. Canola, I'd be a little hesitant to do that, although if it was dry enough—say down to seven percent moisture—you can store that for quite a long time too. When it gets borderline into the damp range, that's when you have to be worried about, particularly, canola. You always want to be checking your canola and move it if you can as quickly as possible.

NP: So, what's sitting in your bins? Little bit of everything?

BT: No canola.

NP: No canola. [Laughs] Now, at the time you had just started to use Delmar Commodities as your--. Are they still around?

BT: Yeah, they're still around. They're still buying and selling grain. I haven't really done much business there recently except with the soybean business because they have a soybean crushing plant right at their location, and you haul directly into the plant. Generally speaking, they are priced a little better than the mainline companies because it goes right into their mill as opposed to being handled by the grain elevator. But I think I was a little concerned about my method of selling grain when I was deferring

quite a bit of the income to the next year. I got caught in that cycle, and I was a little concerned that Delmar Commodities—being a small company—there might be more risk there in doing that. So, I've just generally worked on a cash basis with them. They made it perfectly fine, but there's been cases before where companies have suddenly gone belly-up, and your farmers that haven't been paid out—get caught with hundreds of thousands of dollars.

NP: So, who would you deliver to now then?

BT: Well, I generally haul to Morris where there's a Paterson and a Cargill. You know, you just go wherever you can make it a deal because they're not always able to take the grain you want to haul. So, sometimes it's just because one company's taking wheat and another one isn't you might go there. It's not as if you can haul any grain at any time. I guess some companies, for example, Paterson has a different standard for mildew grain because their sales are mostly going through the US—the US isn't as fussy. Cargill, on the other hand, is going to Thunder Bay or maybe even West Coast where they're going by the tougher Canadian standards. So there might be a difference of a grade there. So, you take that into account where you choose an elevator company. But I have to be honest with you, I haven't been as active in searching out markets or the grain elevators like I might have been at one time.

NP: From what you hear from other farmers who are still active, is there good competition between--? Or is it mainly just a question of who is taking what when and the prices are pretty standard?

BT: Well, there is certainly some competition. I just had a text message today where Morris Cargill was offering wheat at a certain price, and you sort of decide whether you're going to accept that or not. If you're interested in moving grain, you might check with a couple of other grain companies, and they may not be taking wheat or they may not be offering the same price. So, I think there is a bit of competition. But right now, the grain companies can get as much grain in as they want. It's not as if they're clamouring for your grain. I always liked it when the grain companies started phoning around for oats when I was growing quite a bit of oats. You knew once they started phoning, the chances are the prices are going to keep going up for a while. You had to sort of out-guess them as to when that would [laughing] [inaudible.]

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NP: Any impact that you know of on malt barley?

BT: No. I really don't know the malt barley situation at all because there's very little of it grown in my area. So, I haven't been following it very closely at all.

NP: Okay. Moving right along. A little later on in the previous interview we talked about the impact of the demise of the CWB. Maybe before I go into that, is there anything that you want to say or can say about--. Because we talked nothing about other than being on the board was challenging, is there anything you want to say about how that whole thing went down for the record?

BT: Well, I think I can say it was particularly difficult to have an agency like the CWB legislated by the federal government to perform in a certain way as a single desk, and then to have appointees by the government to the board, which were determined to take it under. I thought, really, this will be a challenge really from a governance point of view to allow that to happen. So, that was always a problem for me. If farmers had a different opinion, that was fine because they were elected, and that would have some political importance to know what farmers are thinking by electing certain kinds of farmers for the farmer-directed board. But I always resented the fact that you would have appointed directors who were not favourable to the single desk because that was the mandate of the Board by legislation.

NP: It was a really intense time during that, what, 2011 through to 2012? Even within the farming community, there was a lot of intense debate. Has that just sort of settled down? What are farmers thinking now from your perspective?

BT: Well, I'm not sure if they're thinking a lot about it. There's still a very active group based out of Saskatchewan called the Canadian Wheat Board Alliance and the Friends of the Canadian Wheat Board that have an ongoing court case. But I think you don't get into a lot of intense discussions where I am. I suspect that if you go to a meeting in Saskatchewan or maybe somewhere in northern Manitoba—in Dauphin or whatever—you might get a lot more discussion about it.

NP: Why would there be more of a discussion in those two regions?

BT: Well, I think in my area, we have access to a number of grain companies, so you can assume that there is more competition there. In some areas, there's very little competition, and I think they'd be more inclined to be annoyed about that or concerned about how it might affect their ability to extract a proper price out of the grain. But I honestly don't think it's going to be a situation where you're going to have 65 percent of the farmers going out in the street and protesting. Because the government didn't have plebiscite on the issue, we had one ourselves at the Board. We still, even after all the hassle that the Minister of Agriculture was giving us and talking about it in the public domain about how poorly we were doing, we still had the support of I think 62 percent of wheat farmers in the Prairies. That was discounted.

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I felt very badly about that. In fact, when I met with my local MP, we had a discussion about that when I was a director. We just came to the conclusion that she and the government believed that they were the ones that would make the decision about the Wheat Board, and I felt that farmers should make it. I just thought that was the reasonableness of it, but as it turned out that wasn't okay.

NP: Did you follow at all what happened after the directors were sent on their way? Because it went through a few different--.

BT: Yeah. We challenged that legislation in court, and I remember--.

NP: The legislation being the removal of the single desk?

BT: Yeah, the new Wheat Board Act. We won the first case. It was interesting. It was a bit of a surprise, but we won the case. The judge had a decision within a day, but then the federal government appealed, and we lost the appeal. I think we tried to have it looked at by the Supreme Court, and they didn't hear it. So, that was sort of it, but there's still a case for the—what do you call it?

NP: The assets?

BT: The assets, yeah, that needed to be determined. And whether or not anything will come of that, we don't know either. I think what will happen now is I think Ralph Goodale has said the new federal government will look at the books because once the elected directors were gone, we had no public financial report that would tell us what was really happening. So, this might be an opportunity to see what really happened to the assets.

NP: Do you have any thoughts--? I mean, you're not actively farming now except for the bins that are still holding some product. But we had the non-single-desk CWB and now we have a totally different ownership of whatever was left of the Wheat Board, including some attempt to involve farmer equity. Do you have anything--? I don't know much about it, so I can't ask any specific questions, but do you have anything to say about that?

BT: Well, I think the farmer equity portion of the deal is an incentive for farmers to use the new company—the G3—with the idea that you're actually investing in a company. I think it's a bit of a scam because there's no guarantee that you're going to get the value out of it. A farmer might as well have been better to take that \$5 a tonne incentive that was going into the fund and just take it right off the top and investing it in your own fund somewhere else because it didn't allow you to have any control of the organization at all. You're just simply a bystander watching your investment. Then I have to wonder, I actually hauled to the voluntary CWB a couple of years ago. I think I hauled 500 tonnes, so I got my \$2500 worth of equity, but I have nothing that shows

me that I've got that equity. I'm not too sure [laughs] whether I ever will. I guess the company can buy out that equity on their own account if they decide to do that in about—what was it?—six years or seven years.

NP: I'll now go to the specific predictions. One of the things that some said were an advantage of the demise of the single desk Wheat Board was the ability to market into the US. What's happened there?

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BT: You know, I don't really know very well what's happened. I know that there has been some grain moving into the US. There's some brokers that are doing a bit of business in that regard. There has been some shipments for really high-quality wheat to certain mills, but it hasn't been a big explosion of shipment down to the US. I don't know all the ins and outs of that whole scene. It just isn't what I thought it might be. There haven't been a lot of farmers in the US being ticked off because they don't see a whole bunch of trucks parked at the elevators that they're trying to deliver to. So, I'm not really sure what the answer to that question is.

NP: Associated with that was the issue of becoming a North American market and Canada not concentrating on the reputation that it had built over years for a higher quality product and going for the higher yielding--.

BT: Higher quality and consistency.

NP: Consistency! So, anything developing there?

BT: Well, first reports after the new Board had been in place after the private trade had taken over the sales, there were quite a few complaints coming in from some of our customers—I know in Japan, and I believe Indonesia. Our reputation for being able to deliver on time and so forth was falling, but part of that might have been due to the large crop and difficulty the railways had. They complained about the winter being extremely tough, but we lost a lot of money with ships waiting at the port there for extended periods of time. I think, certainly initially, there was a fair amount of disorganization there with everybody falling over themselves trying to get their ships loaded and get their grain to port and so forth.

But I'm sure that we will have a North American system sometime in the not-too-distant future. I know the one complaint the American US Wheat Associates have—not the Wheat Associates, I believe it's the North Dakota Wheat Commission—feels that they don't have access to our elevators like they should have because we still have a restriction on dumping American varieties of wheat into the Canadian system. That's their next attack, and I think it's going to be an irresistible attack in the Canadian system. I think for the grain companies it doesn't make a lot of difference. There's really not a particular body other than perhaps CIGI and

the Grain Commission that will protect our ability to segregate and deliver the kind of grain that we want to deliver. I think it'll eventually collapse because when the Wheat Board was in charge of that, they were aware of the value of it. The grain companies are more concerned about the margin between what they have to sell for and what they pay for it. So, their mandate isn't to keep the prices to farmers up at a level that we might have had under the Board. So, I still think that'll go the way of the dodo bird.

NP: One of the things that has also changed is the amount of international grain company ownership. Does that have any impact at all on the farmers?

[0:44:57]

BT: Well, I really don't know. It's kind of disturbing too. The whole Pool elevator system is now owned by a company in Switzerland. The Wheat Board is owned by Bunge and a Saudi Arabian government monopoly. It just seems that their main concern isn't the welfare of the farmers. I mean it's just logical. They're interested in running their business. It's kind of volatile because now the company that bought Viterra is considering selling off their Ag assets, and you can only imagine that in that process with all of the changes in ownership and so forth it must be quite a bit of an additional cost attached to that whole process. But I can't specify quantitatively that there's a certain amount of money that is involved in that.

NP: That was the end of our list of predictions. I don't have exactly what this point was related to, but you had made some comment about the international companies—such as Viterra and Cargill—would fare fine, I think your comment might have been. But then you did mention Paterson, Richardson, and P&H [Parrish & Heimbecker], which are Canadian companies and how they might do because of the changes.

BT: I think Paterson is big enough that they'll probably do fine, although perhaps the family will decide that if the right offer comes along, they might sell. P&H I think is probably more likely to phase out and sell out their operation when they see a good opportunity.

NP: Richardson's?

BT: Richardson's has been expanding. They've become an international company now, and I suspect they're run pretty well, so they'd probably be doing okay. They've taken over a number of other grain elevator sites from Viterra in the process of the mergers that had been going on. They seem to be doing quite well.

NP: One of the things that I've talked to other people about as a result of the change—and this is just an observation, a non-scientific observation on my part—that the availability of information to farmers on markets and prices and so on, has that changed at all? The Wheat Board used to provide a market analysis and all of those things. Have CIGI and private companies taken over that role to provide farmers with the information that they used to get through the Wheat Board?

BT: Yeah, I think the private companies are doing as good a job—or at least some of them—are doing as good a job as you might expect them to do in helping farmers to make decisions about when is a good time to price their grain. But that's really all it's based on. Other companies that I've dealt with really don't have any sense of what to tell a farmer at all. Then, of course, there's a number of private companies that do nothing but analyze and sell their services to farmers at a cost. They seem to be doing pretty well. I think they might charge about 10 bucks an acre or so to tell you when to sell your grain and so forth. [Laughs] It's like you do anything else. It's like custom combining or custom spraying. You hire the help you need to make it work. At some point you might question whether you could do it better yourself. But I honestly don't know. I think the Wheat Board used to be very good at putting out information, discussing the nature of various customers, where the strength was, what some of the problems were, and being able to organize the grain shipments to be able to meet the customer demand. I think that's a bit of a, I guess you'd say, it's haphazard now.

NP: The last question I'll ask has to do with the shipments. You mentioned the ocean or Seaway shipments and the demurrage costs going up because of, at least initially, the large crops and also maybe an initial confusion. What about the railway situation? Did anything change there with the demise of the Wheat Board?

[0:50:36]

BT: The one thing that changed was farmers did not have a tool or an agency to hold the railroads to account. Now we depend on the grain companies and the government to step in. The government did step in in the '13/'14 crop. But the Board used to monitor and have a good handle on what was happening in the system and was able to provide that information to farmers. I miss that kind of hands-on approach to understanding what was going on in the system. I mean, we would always calculate the demurrage that was occurring and the Board was paying for or the dispatch that we were earning. The Board was very good at organizing the shipments to the ports and minimizing the amount of demurrage that was going to happen and trying to maximize the amount of dispatch. I mean, there was times when there was demurrage which we couldn't do anything about, but generally speaking that was a fairly major consideration. I think having that single desk was very efficient, relatively speaking, compared to what we have now.

NP: And along with that, the Canada Ports Clearance Association was dismantled and likely wasn't necessary under the new system.

BT: Yeah, I honestly don't have much to say about that. I'm not familiar with that at all.

NP: So, that's the end of my questions for follow up, is there anything that I should have asked you or that you'd like to comment on that we haven't covered?

BT: No, I don't think so. [Laughing]

NP: You'll leave that for the book that you write?

BT: No, I won't be writing a book either. Somebody else is going to have to do that.

NP: Yeah. Well, except you can put this under wraps if there's something you'd like to not go to your grave with.

BT: Well, I think I was just really disappointed in the manner in which the federal government—under Strahl initially, but under Ritz in particular—the way they handled this whole situation, refusing to meet with the Board members to discuss what they wanted to do and why they wanted to do it, having an opportunity to have some input into that discussion. I think I felt, at the end, when our terms were up at the Board, there wasn't a letter from anybody saying, "Thank you for your services" and whatever. I just thought that pretty petty and ungraceful as far as I was concerned, but that's just a personal view. I remember the same thing happened when I was on the ARDI board.

NP: ARDI?

BT: The Agriculture Research and Development Initiative. There was a change in government and of course they changed the appointments there, and I would have thought that the least they could have done is send a thank-you note. I'm sure that that's just proper business practice. I thought it was pretty amateurish, but I think it was done out of a sort of meanness as well. They had absolutely no use for us guys at all. Didn't treat us with any kind of respect at all.

NP: It was a really tough time.

BT: Yeah.

NP: Yeah. And thank you very much for telling your story. It's unique in our record, so that's good.

BT: I'll be very interested—well, maybe I won't be all that interested—but I think my tone of voice and my speaking ability in this one will contrast significantly from the first one.

NP: No.

BT: You don't think so?

NP: No, no. Not as much as you would think. You're more sensitive to it, I think.

[0:55:01]

BT: Oh, I could be.

NP: But thank you very much.

BT: You're welcome! I'm amazed that you've got the stamina to keep doing this.

NP: [Laughs] Some people are disappointed I have the stamina enough to keep doing this. Anyway. It's been great because of all the wonderful people I've met. My appreciation for the whole grain industry was leaps and bounds above what I had before I started the project.

BT: You'll still have a few more people to go on?

NP: Not too many.

BT: Not too many, eh?

NP: [Laughs] No, no.

BT: Getting close?

NP: We're coming to the end. The university, which is Lakehead University, the Research Ethics Committee that approves our ongoing project, they have decided along with our agreement that at the end of December we'll finish our formal interviews anyway.

BT: Oh, okay. Well, good for you. It's really a big job. You must enjoy a little bit of it.

NP: Oh, just a little. Yeah. Thanks Bill!

BT: Okay!

End of interview.