



## AGRONOMY UPDATE DECEMBER 2016



# Which wheat variety should I grow? Modernizing Our Wheat Classification System



As most of you are likely aware, we are undergoing major changes in how Western Canadian wheat will be classified and sold in the future. There have been several starts and stops in the process as the new standards are being implemented, so it was suggested to me that it would be a good idea to review where we are in the process and what the classification system will look like when the dust settles.

Before we talk about where we are in the changes to our wheat classification system, it might be worthwhile to review why these changes are happening. The last major changes to the Canadian Wheat classification system occurred in 1971.

Since that time we have seen the introduction of several new classes of wheat (CPS, CWHWS, and CWGP) and kernel visual distinguishability was removed as a registration requirement – which means that wheat classes no longer need to be distinct from each other in appearance. In 1971, the major focus of wheat marketing was to produce high gluten wheat that made the best quality bread in the world. Since then, we have introduced a plethora of varieties that focus on everything from bread to noodles to fuel production – add to that the influx of unregistered varieties that growers are increasingly willing to grow and we have a situation where it is becoming difficult to maintain consistent quality using our present classification system. The tipping point came in 2012, when Canada moved from a single desk marketing authority (The CWB) in the same year that unusual weather conditions led to the production of a CWRS crop that exhibited below average gluten content. An investigation into the causes found that the poor quality mostly came from three varieties that represented about one third of all the wheat grown in the



Picture courtesy of Manitoba Co-operator.

prairies. The combination of a poor quality crop in the same year as the end of the CWB shook the confidence of a large number of our customers in the ability of Canada to provide a consistent quality of wheat for export.

If you want further details on the impetus behind the present changes, the Canadian Grains Commission outlines the entire issue in its Feb 20, 2015 consultation document at <https://www.grainscanada.gc.ca/consultations/2015/classes-01-en.htm>. When all of these changes have been implemented, Western Canadian wheat will fall into 9 classifications based on the quality of the wheat and the demands of the end users. If you want to know more about what kinds of products Western Canadian wheat ends up being used for, follow this link; <https://www.grainscanada.gc.ca/wheat-ble/classes/classes-eng.htm>. The Western Canadian Wheat classes are at the bottom of the page.

So that covers off the big picture, leaving 3 big questions to be considered.

- What does that mean for your cropping intentions and variety selection in 2017?
- What varieties are going to be in which class?
- What are prices going to look like for these new classes of wheat?

According to the Canadian Grains Commission, as of August 1, 2016, two new wheat classes come into effect: Canada Northern Hard Red (CNHR) and Canada Western Special Purpose (CWSP). Three wheat classes are eliminated: Canada Western Interim Wheat (CWIW), Canada Western General Purpose (CWGP), and Canada Western Feed (CWF). For the upcoming crop year, there are only going to be a few varieties moved into the CNHR class. They all come out of the CWIW classification and are varieties that would likely only be grown under production contract anyway. There is also an extensive list of 25 varieties that you presently think of as CWRS wheat that will not meet the new milling standard for the class and will be moved to Canadian Northern Hard Red class in the future. There are also several varieties presently sold as CPS wheat that will be moved into this class. However these changes will not be implemented until August 1, 2018. This will give you time to either phase out varieties that no longer meet the specifications for the market you wish to sell into, or else after a year or two of evaluating the price structure of the new markets you may decide you want to sell your present variety into the CNHR market. There will be much more immediate action in the new Canadian Western Special Purpose class of wheat as there is a large list of general purpose wheats that were officially

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Some of these questions don't have answers yet, as I can't find an offer for CNHR Wheat posted thus far, but we still have time to learn about it. Although the changes have officially already happened as of August 1, 2016, the impact on your operation is likely minimal at this time.



moved to the new designation on August 1st. For a complete list of all of the varieties that will be affected, please follow this link; <https://www.grainscanada.gc.ca/consultations/2015/classes-en.htm>.

And, don't forget – there are still more varieties that need to be evaluated. Until that evaluation is complete those varieties will remain in their present class, and any that fail to meet the new standards will not be moved for two years after the evaluation is completed.

So the good news is that if you want to keep growing your present variety, there will still be a market for it. The question remaining is at what price? Most of the changes to Hard Red Spring Wheat will not happen until 2018. If your present variety is scheduled to make the move to CNHR, now may be a good time to try a variety that is not being reclassified. This will give you an opportunity to find something you like and reproduce it in quantities that will allow you to have enough seed available for the 2018 season.

As we come to the end of another eventful, surprise filled year, both on the farm and in the world in general, on behalf of Battle River Implements, I'd like to take the opportunity to thank you all for your business this year. Hopefully amid all the hustle and bustle of the season, you have an opportunity to kick back, relax and reflect on all the good things that have happened in the last 12 months. So Merry Christmas to everyone, and here's looking forward to a prosperous 2017!

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