

Seeback seeks government support for local soybean, canola farmers

Written By MIKE BAKER

In what was his first official act in Ottawa as Dufferin-Caledon's new Member of Parliament, Kyle Seeback voiced his concerns over the impact Canada's ongoing trade dispute with China was having on local farmers.

"I recently met with the Dufferin Federation of Agriculture, all hard-working farmers in my riding," he said during last Friday's question period. "They are suffering from a lack of market access for soybean and canola as a result of unresolved trade disputes.

"In the United States, the government is stepping up with a \$28 billion market facilitation program. Other than words like 'we stand with', or 'we always support', what is the government actually doing to support soybean and canola farmers?"

Marie-Claude Bibeau, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, replied:

"Mr. Speaker, we stand with our partners and farmers because this is very important. It is a priority for us. I spend a lot of time talking to stakeholders and farmers themselves. We have a strategy that we have developed with them to reopen the market in China and diversify our markets.

"Next week, I will be meeting with the ministers of agriculture from the provinces and the territories. We are committed to improving our business risk management programs as well. We know the risks have changed through recent years in terms of climate, in terms of trade and we are committed to improve the business risk management suite."

Earlier this year, the Chinese government stripped two major Canadian grain companies, Richardson International Ltd. and Glencore Canada's Viterra, of their canola export licenses, citing pest concerns. It has been reported that Chinese importers have also stopped purchasing Canadian canola seed. As a result, canola acreages in Canada have dropped by nearly seven percent across the country in 2019.

A report compiled by Statistics Canada earlier this year noted there was 21.3 million acres worth of canola planted in 2019, which represents the lowest seeded area of canola in Canada since 2016.

Canola is one of the most popular, and profitable, crops grown by Canadian farmers. Prior to the trade standoff with China, approximately 40 percent of the canola grown in Canada was exported to China.

And 2019 has also been a difficult year for soybean farmers, with acreages dropping by more than 10 percent over the past year.

Mr. Seeback noted he met with several representatives of the Dufferin Federation of Agriculture on Dec. 10, where he learned more about the significant challenges the farming community in the Dufferin-Caledon riding have encountered over the past year, including the impact of the U.S. market facilitation program.

This program has allowed American producers to sell at lower prices to other areas, such as the European Union. This action, Mr. Seeback says, has made it harder for Canadian farmers to be competitive. He condemned the Liberal government for failing to provide compensation to farmers in Dufferin-Caledon, and all across Canada, with measures comparable to those seen in the United States.

Bill McCutcheon, President of the Dufferin Federation of Agriculture, insists farmers in the area are crying out for help, with the situation appearing to be getting worse.

"We need our federal government to support our industry," Mr. McCutcheon said. "The American government has taken

considerable steps to support producers, however, here in Canada, we have yet to see any real action by this government.?

He added, 'We've been left at a huge disadvantage, and it's hurting farmers here in Dufferin-Caledon, and across Canada. Immediate action is needed, not six months from now.?'