

**Pulse and special crops industry supports government efforts to advance free trade agreements in South and Central America**

January 21, 2010 (Winnipeg, MB) – The Canadian pulse and special crops industry supports Agriculture and Agri-Food Minister Gerry Ritz’s efforts to advance free trade agreements with Colombia and Guatemala. Access to international markets is of critical importance to growers and the trade.

Pulse Canada urges Parliament to put ratification of the Canada-Colombia free trade agreement at the top of the priority list when Parliament resumes in March, allowing for competitive access and potential new market opportunities for Canadian exporters. Minister Ritz met with Colombian ministers this week to reiterate Canada’s dedication to implement the free trade agreement, which has been negotiated but still requires parliamentary approval.

“Colombia is an important market for the Canadian pulse and special crops industry and we appreciate the Minister’s efforts to move this free trade agreement forward,” said Gordon Bacon, CEO of Pulse Canada. “Pulse importers in Colombia and Canadian exporters here at home are anxiously awaiting immediate approval of this trade agreement to enhance the competitiveness of Canadian pulses in Colombia.”

Colombia is Canada’s seventh largest market for pulses and special crops, with exports totaling \$72 million and 92,500 tonnes in 2008. Colombia is one of Canada’s top three markets for green lentils and one of the top five markets for canary seed. A U.S. – Colombia trade agreement eliminates tariffs for U.S. peas, lentils, chickpeas, canary seed and mustard seed, which will result in a 15 per cent or approximately \$150 per-tonne tariff disadvantage for Canadian lentils.

Minister Ritz also visited Guatemala this week, another market of interest for the Canadian pulse and special crops sector. In 2008, Canada exported \$2.8 million in pulses and special crops to Guatemala. Canadian beans and other pulse crops currently face import duties of 15 to 30 per cent. A U.S. free trade agreement with Guatemala provides duty-free access for U.S. small red beans and will eventually phase out duties for other crops.

“A free trade agreement with Guatemala would allow some Canadian pulses improved market access and help reduce tariff barriers for Canadian exporters doing business in Guatemala,” notes Bacon. “It could also potentially open up new market opportunities for Canadian pulses and special crops.”

Pulse Canada is the national association representing growers, traders and processors of Canadian pulse crops. Canada is the world’s largest supplier of pulses, with exports to more than 150 countries.

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