



Message from Executive Director

Daryl Domitruk, Executive Director, MPSG

BALANCE IS TOUTED as the ideal state of one's outlook and actions. Generally, balance is good. A balanced point of view is associated with wisdom. A balanced crop rotation has many attributes. In its less desirable form balance can be a cover word for indecision or a lack of commitment; what we might call sitting on the fence. Working for a farm organization you are taught the difference between balance and sitting on the fence.

Farm organizations are called on to make decisions that avoid the fence. At the same time, we're compelled to gather evidence to support our decisions. That said, organizations need to be mindful that evidence can be inconclusive. We also know gathering evidence takes time and energy and can quickly reach a point of diminishing returns.

Having learned from their farmer owners, farm organizations like MPSG do not dwell on evidence to the point of sitting on fences. We strive to maintain an operating culture where time on the fence is brief. The visit consists of reviewing evidence, mixing in some intuition, rendering a decision, and moving on. If the decision isn't perfect, we're prepared to fix it next time.

I admit this crisp and efficient form of decision making is counterintuitive to many science-types like me. It doesn't seem balanced at all. To me balance is achieved by an exhaustive review of evidence that ultimately tests a hypothesis. My hypothesis, hopeless as it turns out, is that I can issue air-tight, defensible decisions on any question faced by the organization. If this means an extended perch on the fence, so be it.

I know this amuses and even frustrates our farmer directors. They're comfortable making gut calls that keep things moving at pace with the prevailing conditions. For them it's better to step off the fence on their own terms rather than risk being knocked to ground by circumstances. Farmer

directors intuitively know when to pull the trigger on a decision that effects the entire organization. It's from them I've learned balance is embodied in forthright decisions made by people who confidently combine evidence with intuition – not letting either one become dominant.

Most of the time my need for evidence (and corresponding lack of intuition) balances nicely with the board's gut calls. What emerges is a responsible approach to investing levy funds to generate the best possible return for members. Questions of balance arise every day. When funding research, we've decided that levies collected from soybean sales ought to carry part of the load for improvements to dry beans and peas. We've reasoned that a vibrant multi-crop legume industry is valuable to all and worth pursuing. Similarly, with demands for extension in every district of Manitoba, we've long since parted with attending to just the highest acre regions. As much as possible we engage with levy-paying members on their own turf. It consumes a bit more time and money, but our sense of balance says a little travel time serves our core belief that all members are owed service regardless of where they farm.

The current state of farming calls for balance in commodity group decision making. There's an ever-changing mix of opportunities and threats driving the need for decisions. Those attending the annual general meeting in February saw how we've balanced investments in very practical research with forays into more vague upstream investigations. We figured that to solve big expensive problems like root rot and drought tolerance we need to take some risks and fund discoveries in the lab.

Our crops exist in distinct supply chains. These days each supply chain is addressing the threat/opportunity of sustainability in its own way. Our sense of balance guides us to capture



each crop-specific opportunity while simultaneously extinguishing the threats. Another distinct example is emerging in the northern plains marketplace. Here the soybean industry is rapidly evolving. A recent Soy Canada promotional event revealed opportunities in the food market in Asia. At the same time, the ramping up of renewable fuel soybean crushing in North Dakota may present opportunities for moving soybeans south. What we really wanted was large scale crushing in Manitoba. Can we have it all? We'll be watching these developments and assigning resources according to the balance of opportunity we perceive.

I hope you have attended some of our events, spoken with our agronomists, signed up for an On-Farm Network trial, read our magazines, or accessed our on-line resources. I invite you to review what you see and hear and let us know if we've got the right balance or if we're sitting on too many fences. ■

– Daryl