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Plan to end CWB wheat monopoly slow, feasible -CEO
<http://asia.news.yahoo.com/061106/3/2sftz.html>

WINNIPEG, Manitoba, Nov 6 (Reuters) - A proposal to end the Canadian Wheat Board's monopoly on wheat is feasible, though timelines for the change could be accelerated, Agricore United 's Chief Executive Brian Hayward said on Monday.

Canada's largest grain handling company is looking for more details on how the federal government will move forward on its promise to end the wheat board's monopoly on the country's largest crop, Hayward said.

"We just would like clarity as to what the process is going to be and ... if things change, when they would change," Hayward told Reuters in an interview.

The CWB, one of the world's largest grain marketers, holds a monopoly on sales of wheat, durum and barley from the Canadian Prairies to millers, maltsters and export markets.

Canada's Conservative government has promised to end that monopoly, commissioning a task force which last week recommended new legislation this spring to make the agency voluntary by the 2008-2009 crop year which begins Aug. 1.

"We thought that (the task force) did spell out a clear, workable path to implement," Hayward said.
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But Hayward said he thought the timelines proposed by the task force were somewhat slow, stressing "it's a soft opinion.

"My experience in business is, sometimes going fast has some benefits ... whatever is going to happen, just get on with it," Hayward said.

The task force recommended Canada start by opening the barley market midway through the 2007-08 crop year, followed by the wheat market in 2008-09.

Agriculture Minister Chuck Strahl said he will start by consulting with farmers through a plebiscite on the CWB's barley monopoly early in 2007, and has refused to speculate on when that monopoly might end.

Strahl also said on Friday that he has no immediate plans to move on the wheat monopoly, which would stay in place for 2007-08.

The Canadian Wheat Board handled 2.25 million tonnes of barley in the crop year ending July 31, 2005 compared with 13.3 million tonnes of wheat.

Canadian farmers sold most of the 12.3 million tonnes of barley they grew that year to the domestic livestock market.

Hayward said an open barley market would be an "interesting and material change" for the grain industry.

"But it's not something that's a huge show-stopper," said Hayward, a 25-year veteran of the industry.

He named the radical decline in the number of grain elevators and a switch from grains into oilseeds and specialty crops as more fundamental shifts in the industry.

"We have shown, as an industry, that we are very capable of adapting to changing conditions," Hayward said.