

Grain bottleneck primary concern of meeting of Manitoba agriculture producers

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WINNIPEG - Ongoing problems with a rail bottleneck that has left grain sitting in bins across the Prairies has dominated discussion at the annual spring meeting of the Keystone Agricultural Producers, Manitoba's largest farm policy organization.

Keystone leaders said in a news release issued Friday that even though Bill C-30 is close to being passed, farmers still have concerns about getting their grain to market.

The legislation will extend inter-switching limits, thus allowing more service by more rail companies, and will enshrine mandatory quotas for grain movement by the railways and impose penalties if those quotas aren't met.

However, members of KAP are calling for open running rights, where railways would be required by law to allow other railways — including shortlines and U.S. carriers — to use their lines.

They say that would give farmers more options when a particular railway could not deliver cars and would enhance rail capacity.

Earlier this week, Claude Mongeau, the president of Canadian National Railway, said opening the market to U.S. companies would take jobs away from Canadians.

"The railways are denouncing this legislation, but they had the opportunity last June, with Bill C-52, to enter into voluntary service-level agreements with shippers and they declined to do so," said KAP president Doug Chorney.

Members also expressed concern at the meeting over biosecurity protocols and called for KAP to work with the Manitoba government, municipalities, utility companies and oil and gas companies to prevent the spread of agricultural diseases such as clubroot, a severe disease that affects canola fields, and PED, a devastating virus that affects baby pigs.