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LEVY CENTRAL - 23 Years of Excellent Service

by Darlene Polachic

Certain agricultural producer organizations are government mandated to collect levies on commodity sales. When product is sold at an elevator or through a commodity buyer, funds are deducted from producer payments and returned to the agricultural organizations to be used for research and development, promotion, and marketing.

Levy Central was conceived by the Saskatchewan Canola Development Commission in 1991 to collect and track canola check-off. Over time, it expanded to take on check-off administration for other organizations. In 2010, Levy Central moved to the Agriculture Council of Saskatchewan Inc. (ACS), a non-profit organization that works to address issues and explore opportunities in the agriculture and agri-food sector.

ACS Executive Director Bryan Kosteroski says the organizations are a perfect fit because of the Council's co-operation with all the sectors of Western Canadian agriculture.

Operating under a strict confidentiality agreement, Levy Central currently collects 13 agricultural check-offs for a dozen Western Canadian producer organizations.

In the 2013-2014 crop year, Levy Central collected \$17 million from 158 buyers, representing grain delivery from over 106,000 Western Canadian producers.

Nicole Yip, senior client service representative for

Levy Central, says the service boasts 30 years of combined experience.

"We are a third party provider that ensures maximum levies are collected according to each of the client's unique regulatory requirements, in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible.

"Each buyer sends in a report and check-off reimbursement according to the Commission's regulations. Our job is to ensure the accuracy of each report and the corresponding dollar amounts. The funds are deposited directly into the client's bank account. The regulated report is entered into the Automated Levy Tracking System (ALTS), a database specifically created to track levies and generate various documents for the benefit of our clients. We also assist in the refund and buyer registration processes and generate various producer lists."

Over the 23 years Levy Central has been in operation, other services have been added; one provides election services for agriculture-based businesses. Yip says even if the business is not a client, Levy Central will function as Returning Officer and/or Scrutineer to lend efficiency to the process.

"Before we undertake the duties of Returning Officer or Scrutineer, we have extensive discussions with the client to review the regulations and determine the type of election required. We assist in the creation of the ballot package to ensure clarity and maximum voter return, verify candidate nominations, and receive, verify and tabulate votes."

Levy Central also compiles data and generates analyses and trend reports for clients, something Yip says saves the partners hours of work.

"Each report is personalized to the commodity and presents current, comprehensive data that is easy to follow and understand."

Levy Central will set up new clients for levy collection once they have received their mandate. This begins by building a database which offers clients 24-hour remote access. Once the client provides a buyer list, each buyer is contacted to answer any questions they may have regarding the reporting process for the new check-off. Buyer data is entered into ALTS and the database is then ready to receive reports.

Yip says taking on more clients at Levy Central results in cost effectiveness for everyone. "It's a win-win for all when a new commission comes on board. We are a cost-recovery program, so with each new client addition, the share of the program's operational costs decreases for all.

"Integrity and validity of data are crucial to organizations, so a stringent system of checks and balances developed over many years guarantees the veracity of information in each client's database."

Kosteroski adds, "Levy Central continues to keep at the forefront of technology so we can deliver the best to our clients. Our goal is always to provide efficiencies and top level service."

Levy Central is open to expanding services across Canada in order to better serve the agriculture sector.

For more information, visit www.levycentral.ca.

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