Majority for export

At present, feed peas bring to $2 to $2.25 per bushel, he adds. Food-grade yellow peas bring to $3 to $3.50 per bushel, while food-grade green peas bring $3.25 per bushel on average.

"Right now, greens are not bringing a premium over yellow, which is not normal," Thomas says. "Usually, greens bring 25 to 50 cents over yellow.

An estimated 75 percent of U.S.-produced food-grade peas are sold in the export marketplace to nations such as China, India and Soviet. In India, peas are a common protein source often used in soups. Pea use in China often entails extracting starch from them for use in noodle making.

"I really see the market holding steady, maybe some seasonal strength before harvest — but I don't expect it to move much either way," Thomas says.

Pea purchases by the U.S. government for donation abroad as part of its PL-480 program also have lent stability to dry pea markets and likely will continue to do so.

Trade mission

Export markets represent an ongoing opportunity for the region's dry pea producers. China presents ample potential for growth in the coming years, as does Spain. Spain, a leading importer of feed peas, buys between 300,000 and 600,000 metric tons annually, depending on price.

Two North Dakota pea producers recently journeyed to Spain to promote U.S.-grown peas and lentils. Cliff Isendorf of Newburg, N.D., past president of NDBPA & LA was one of two North Dakota producers to make the trip, which included stops in Barcelona, Madrid and Leon.

Isendorf says if North Dakota's 102,000