Pea, lentil growers need to cultivate image of quality

By Jayson Menke
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MINOT — In today’s society, image is everything.

For North Dakota dry pea and lentil growers, that right image will enhance marketability for their crop.

“In the lentil industry, we’ve created an image that we can grow high-quality lentils,” said Mike Young, Rosendal, N.D., farmer and past president of the North Dakota Dry Pea and Lentil Association. That image is yet to be established for the state’s pea crop.

“We need to promote that image domestically, abroad and to other growers,” Young said.

Young was one of 150 dry pea and lentil farmers and industry representatives who attended the North Dakota Dry Pea and Lentil Association annual meeting Wednesday at the International Inn in Minot.

Growers were enthusiastic about their specialty crops, and they should be. North Dakota farmers planted about 25,000 pea acres last year, and some say that could vault to as high as 30,000 to 35,000 acres.

But for acres to keep spreading like wildfire, peas will have to create the “right image.”

Don Driscoll with NW Pea and Bean Co. in Spokane, Wash., said growers need to “plant with the end in mind.”

He said the right image will be created if North Dakota growers stick with planting quality seed, continue good agronomic practices and abide by good handling practices. Although the state’s production was good last year considering the late spring planting, there are potential problems looming.

Driscoll says that chalky spot was a big problem last year.

Industry officials in the state appear confident the state can rid potential problems and establish a good image. Continental Grain in Minot, N.D., quit buying small grains in 1994 and has since altered its facility to better handle peas, lentils and mustard.

Continental Manager Joe Blome says he knows North Dakotans can “grow quality, but there’s going to be humps” along the way.