Pea growers want better image for their industry

MINOT (AP) — North Dakota pea and lentil producers know that image means a lot when it comes to marketing.

"In the lentil industry, we've created an image that we can grow high-quality lentils," said Mike Youngs, a Roseglen farmer and former president of the North Dakota Dry Pea and Lentil Association.

That image is yet to be established for the state's pea crop.

"We know we can produce a high-quality crop," Youngs said. "We need to promote that image domestically, abroad and to other growers."

Youngs was one of 150 farmers and industry representatives who attended the association's annual meeting Wednesday.

North Dakota farmers planted approximately 35,000 pea acres last year. Some say that could increase to as much as 80,000 acres.

Don Driscoll, a representative of NW Pea and Bean Co. of Spokane, Wash., said growers need to "plant with the end in mind."

"You need to know what the market wants," Driscoll told them. He said the right image will be created if North Dakota growers stick with planting quality seed and good handling practices.

Industry officials appear confident.

The Continental Grain company, in Bay, quit buying small grains in 1984 and changed its facility to better handle peas, lentils and mustard.

"As acres continue to grow, we need to find more niche and value-added markets for the North Dakota crop," said Continental manager Joe Holmes.

The rapid expansion in field pea acres in North Dakota has led growers to propose a 1 percent checkoff that they would pay on the sale of dry beans and lentils in the state.

The money would be used for promotion and research.

"We've lost some of our international markets to other countries.