

The Saskatchewan Agriculture Student Scholarship Program is now accepting applications

BY ROB PAUL
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
Applications are now being accepted for the 2021 Saskatchewan Agriculture Student Scholarship Program. The program is focussed on giving graduating high school students in Saskatchewan interested in the Ag industry an avenue to continue studying agriculture in post-secondary and help contribute to the sector.

The Saskatchewan Agriculture Student Scholarship Program invites grade 12 students and recent high school graduates who are planning to take agriculture-related post-secondary education beginning in the fall of 2021 to apply. The deadline for applications is March 1, 2021.

This year's theme is 'transparency.' Applicants for the scholarship are encouraged to explore what transparency is and how it is connected to the public's perception of modern agriculture.

Submissions to the program should answer one of the guiding questions about the theme of transparency. The guiding questions are, what does transparency in modern agriculture look like? And, what can the agriculture industry do to improve its transparency?

To apply, students are asked to submit a creative three-minute video or 1,000-word essay discussing transparency in agricul-



Saskatchewan Agriculture Minister David Marit.

ture. The submissions will be judged and one scholarship of \$4,000 and three runner-up scholarships of \$2,000 will be awarded.

Along with the video or written submission, students must provide a letter of conditional acceptance to a post-secondary institution and provide a letter of recommendation from either a teacher/professor, agriculture industry leader, or community leader.

Videos and written submissions will be judged by a review committee based on: alignment with the theme provided, de-

velopment of ideas, structure and clarity, creativity and quality, and professionalism. Leadership qualities and school/community involvement in letters of recommendation will also be taken into consideration. The Ministry of Agriculture reserves the right to publish or promote all submissions as deemed appropriate.

For more information on the Saskatchewan Agriculture Student Scholarship Program, visit www.saskatchewan.ca/ag-scholarship. The award is funded through the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a five-year, \$388 million investment in strategic initiatives by the federal and provincial governments.

The scholarship encourages constructive conversations about where food comes from and how everyone along the value-chain, from the field to table, shares a role in communicating about food production.

"The Agriculture Student Scholarship Program is an opportunity for our province's youth to help tell industry's story," Saskatchewan Agriculture Minister David Marit said. "By encouraging the best and brightest young minds to pursue a career in agriculture, we are helping to ensure the future success of this important sector."

The basis of the scholarship program is for the Ag industry to hear new ideas while also providing a stepping stone for the younger generation in the province interested in agriculture.

"Young people are key to the continued growth and prosperity of Canada's agricultural sector," said Federal Agriculture and Agri-Food Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau. "This scholarship program will give young leaders the help they need to pursue their studies and embark on a rewarding career in the sector."

The 2020 winner of the scholarship program, Mackenzie Van Damme, submitted an essay that highlighted the impact of agriculture on Saskatchewan, specifically her own community, Imperial. Her essay also touched on genetically modified organisms, new technology in the agriculture sector and how innovation has modernized farms and increased sustainability across the industry.

"The scholarship has offered me so much," said Van Damme. "By helping to fund my education, I'm able to learn all about agriculture, meet new people and spark an even greater passion for the field."

Van Damme is furthering her education at the University of Saskatchewan. She plans to obit a Bachelor's of Science in Agriculture with a focus on agronomy.

The Ministry of Agriculture believes the scholarship program is one of the

most important parts of what they do because these students are the future of the Ag industry and this gives them a path to sharing their ideas while helping with their education.

"We've been doing the scholarship for a number of years now," said Marit. "It's just something to help grade 12 students that are looking at post-secondary education in the agriculture realm. We've been offering it for quite a while and what we do is theme it every year. This year the theme is transparency with not just transparency in the agriculture, but a focus on public trust and where that can lead."

"Applicants can either do an essay or a video and then we have a panel of industry people and government/ministry folks as well who look at them and judge them. Then the first place winner gets a \$4,000 bursary and then the other finalists get a \$2,000 bursary so it's something we've done to help the younger generation interested in the Ag industry. I think it really adds to students who are engaged in the Ag industry or want to be engaged in the Ag industry with an opportunity for funding towards their post-secondary education."

"We also get some pretty good ideas from it and get an understanding of what kids are thinking. It's something we're really quite proud of and it's in partnership with the federal government through the CAP funding."

Marit says that it's not just about giving these students a helping hand, but truly hearing from them with fresh ideas and learning about where the younger generation sees the Ag industry going in the future.

"It's really quite good," he said. "It gives them an opportunity to showcase what piques their interest in the Ag industry and where their focus is. Obviously, for a person who has been farming all their life, like myself, it's really kind of neat to see these young kids with some of the ideas they have and where they think agriculture is going."

"It builds on everything that's happening around the Ag sector here in the province when you look at value-added, new technology, and everything. It's quite a circle right now and it's pretty dynamic and interesting to be around right now. It's always good to know what the younger generation is thinking."

Freeze up report shows various moisture conditions across Sask

The Water Security Agency (WSA) released its 2020 Conditions at Freeze-Up report, showing a mixed picture for moisture conditions across the province entering winter. In combination with the winter snowpack, this forecast becomes the initial conditions for the spring snow-melt runoff.

Most agricultural areas of the province entered the winter drier than normal, particularly the area east of Gravelbourg and south of Yorkton where severe dry conditions exist. Exceptions are areas in the extreme southwest and northern portions of the grain belt where conditions at freeze-up were near normal.

While most larger water supply reservoirs in the

south have adequate supplies, surface water users who rely on smaller reservoirs or dugouts have been impacted by the dry conditions. This includes both diminished supplies and quality.

Over northern areas of the province, well above normal rainfall in late spring and throughout the summer has resulted in conditions at freeze-up that are wetter than normal. This is particularly true for the Churchill River Basin where flows at the end of October were at or near record levels for this time of year. Winter flows within northern areas are expected to remain above normal throughout the winter. Wet conditions in the north will increase the risk of above normal runoff

in spring 2021.

Compared to the south where conditions at freeze-up were much drier, the infiltration capacity of the soils and storage capacity within wetland areas will be higher, reducing the risk of above normal runoff come spring. Over these southern areas, above normal snowfall would likely be needed to result in sufficient runoff to replenish surface water supplies in spring 2021.

Current long-range forecasts and climate indices suggest above normal precipitation and below normal temperature over the winter months.

WSA will release their initial Spring Runoff Outlook in early February.



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Renewed funding for the Next Gen Agriculture Mentorship Program

BY ROB PAUL
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Governments of Canada and Saskatchewan are announcing \$200,000 in renewed funding for the Next Gen Agriculture Mentorship Program (Next Gen), a Saskatchewan initiative delivered by Canadian Western Agribition (CWA). The funding will take the program into 2023, allowing for two additional cycles of mentorship matches.

The objective of the program is to develop young leaders and prepare them to take on active roles in industry leadership, governance and efforts to build public trust. The program does this by pairing each successful applicant with an established member of the agriculture industry.

It serves as part of the Ministry of Agriculture's effort to increase engagement between experienced professionals and the next generation of industry leaders. This renewed funding will allow 16 new mentees to enter the program over the next two years.

"Canada's young agricultural professionals and producers are key to the future success of our sector," said federal Agriculture and Agri-Food Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau.

"Our government is working hard to ensure our youth have access to the necessary training and opportunities that will allow them to develop their skills to become leaders in the agriculture industry. By ensuring they are equipped for the future, we can build a stronger, more prosperous agriculture industry in Saskatchewan and across the country."

This year, eight applicants will be selected and paired with a mentor for an 18-month mentorship experience beginning in February 2021. Applicants should have clear developmental goals and exhibit strong leadership potential. More information about the program is available online at www.saskatchewan.ca/CAP.

"It's exciting to watch the Next Gen Agriculture Mentorship program grow as it has over the last two years," CWA President Chris Lees said. "To see what the mentees are getting out of the program and the connections they're making is something CWA is proud to be a part of."

Next Gen is funded through the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a five-year, \$388 million investment in strategic initiatives for Saskatchewan agriculture by the federal and provincial governments.

"The agriculture sector is an important driver of economic activity in our province," Agricul-

ture Minister David Marit said. "This program offers mentees new opportunities for knowledge sharing and network expansion while ensuring they have the resources they need to contribute to our thriving industry."

The mentorship program gives young people involved in the Ag industry an opportunity to learn and develop their ability from a governance perspective as well as helps them create relationships with those already in the industry says Marit.

"We've been doing the mentorship program for a couple years now and it's in partnership with the Canadian Western Agribition," said Marit. "They kind of administer and house the program and so we just signed a two-year agreement at \$100,000 per year. What we do is, we take young kids from around the province that are interested in governance—where they want to be on commissions and looking Ag policy and things in that realm—and we seek out mentors—mentors can be from right across Canada.

"We do eight of them per year, so we put the eight mentees with a mentor for about 18 months. With the situation we're in right now, it's different, but the first year we did it they would go to conferences and sort of work things out and learn about the process that way. A great



Ogema's Codie Nagy is an alum of the Ag Mentorship Program, he was recently elected to the SaskCanola Board.

example of one is the SaskCanola council had elections for board members just last month and one of the young folks that was in the mentorship program—Codie Nagy fro Ogema—actually got elected to the board.

"It helps them so they're not going onto these boards and commissions not knowing what it's like and what their role is," Marit said. "It really helps them to become a better board member and give them the experience that other professional people have had. The nice thing about it is that it's really a one-to-one so they learn from very smart people who have been involved in Ag policy and governance.

It's important that we hear the young folks and their ideas around Ag and it trains these young people to really get engaged in the whole Ag policy and governance structure. This is something that I've never had and we're trying to develop that next generation."

Codie Nagy stumbled onto the mentorship program and it's been a huge help to him developing his professional career and he credits it to being elected to the SaskCanola board. He says it allowed him to

get in-depth knowledge on Ag governance helped him network with the most experienced members of the industry.

"I just found it on the internet when I was googling mentorship programs in Saskatchewan when I came across it," said Nagy. "I was part of the first cohort, so that was around November of 2018. So I sent in an application on a whim hoping to hear something back and I got a phone call in February saying I'd been accepted.

"It was phenomenal. The amount of people you meet and get to interact with through a program like this is amazing. Before Covid caused the cancellation of the conferences, I was able to attend a fair amount of them and the amount of people I met through my mentor—Alanna Koch—

was phenomenal. In my personal experience with the program, the networking capability is the biggest thing. The team does a great job rounding up the right mentors and pairing them up with the right mentees. So for me with Alanna, the biggest takeaway was the amount of people she knows and the experience she has—she was able to unload some of that information onto me," he said.

"Getting elected to the SaskCanola Board was absolutely a byproduct of the mentorship program. It connected me with Alanna, whose husband is Gerry Hertz and he's a director for SaskCanola. Talking with him it kind of piqued my interest a little more and gave me the confidence to put my name out there."

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THE WORLD  **AG NEWS**

What to consider for next steps in growth or diversification

BY TREVOR BACQUE

There comes a time in farm operations when the conversation to expand or diversify the business comes up. The inevitable questions commonly include how, when and, most importantly, why?

But what does a farm CEO need to consider before answering these questions? Asking an advisor like Mark Verwey, BDO's partner and national agriculture leader in Portage la Prairie, Man., would be a good start. He's been advising farm clients for more than 25 years on everything from estate and succession planning to tax planning and wealth management.

Involve your financial institution

From Verwey's perspective, one of the first considerations is to have your financial house in order, since a growth or diversification phase is often a capital-intensive proposition.

"It's important to meet with your financial institution well in advance of any decision, to try and arrange pre-authorized financing," he says. "This will allow you to move quickly should an opportunity arise."

A lender will examine the strength of your operation before approving additional financing, so be prepared to talk about three ratios: debt-to-equity, debt-servicing and



working capital.

Build a solid business plan

Similarly, diversifying may be a great decision, but don't go in blind. Verwey suggests farmers have a solid business plan to cover key areas such as production, labour, technical expertise and marketing opportunities.

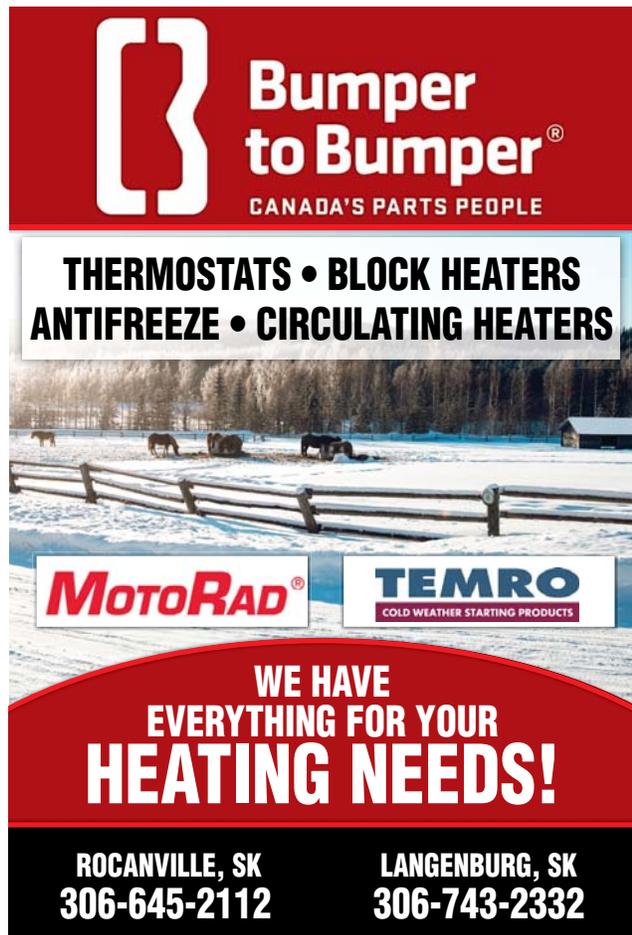
"You must avoid going into a project that you love without having the technical expertise nor potential to make it profitable. That's what you call a hobby," he says. "Bottom line is that acting from the heart can be dangerous without the proper financial analysis."

Flexibility is key

Operations aside, the pandemic of 2020 was a fluid situation, and farmers had to consider many factors that could impact their business model.

"COVID-19 has exemplified how uncertain farming can be, the need to be financially aware of your operations and the need to be prepared for these uncertain times ahead," Verwey says. He adds that Canada's farmers always face challenges, including recent geopolitical issues with China, price fluctuation, weather and farm subsidies.

Feeling stuck at the starting line? Check out our March 2019 story about Beverly Greenhouses, one of Ontario's largest commercial cucumber operations run by brothers Jan and Dale VanderHout. One of many ways they diversify is through energy, generating baseload electricity for internal use and recycling heat to keep the greenhouses at optimum temperature. Diversification may be easier than you think.



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THE WORLD Spectator AG NEWS

A wrap of the decade that was 2020 (July to December)

BY MARTHA ROBERTS
FARM CREDIT CANADA

The first half of 2020 was nothing but a once-a-century seismic shock. By July, across all Canadian ag, food and agribusiness sectors, we knew “the new normal” was simply code for much that was abnormal. Nonetheless, news of COVID-19 faded somewhat as crop progress and meat processing dominated headlines in July and August. News of successful vaccine development spurred hope everywhere. September and October also held much promise, despite mounting evidence of COVID-19’s return. November was filled with uncertainty following the U.S. election, while December’s rising commodity prices pointed to a much-needed recovery.

July

The Parliamentary Budget Officer’s (PBO) update of its COVID-19 economic scenarios suggested the 2020 recession would be deep (Figure 1). However, by July, Canada’s economy was on a better track than many had assumed it would be a couple of months prior.

However, two fiscal indicators stood out. The budget deficit for 2020-21 was projected at 11.8% of GDP, well above the 1984-85 record peak of 8.0%. And the federal debt-to-GDP ratio was projected at 44.4% at the end of the 2020-21 fiscal year, the highest in almost 20 years. It would take several more months to realize these mid-year estimates were too optimistic. The Bank of Canada held its benchmark interest rate steady at 0.25, indicating inflation would likely be below the 2% target for the next two years.

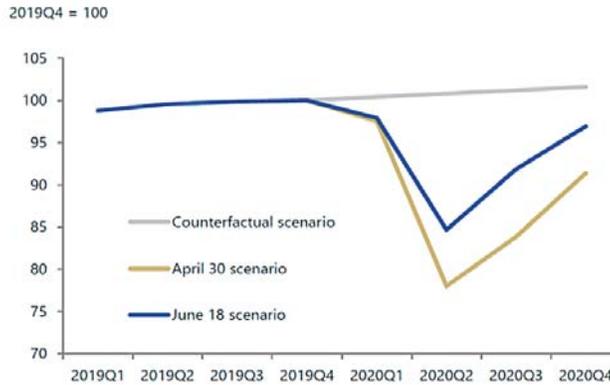
On the bright side, CUSMA went into force July 1, helping ease any worries about the health of North American supply chains. The powerful agreement outlined challenges facing supply-managed sectors. Simultaneously, it enhanced trade stability (among other benefits) with a partner accounting for over 55% of Canadian agriculture and agri-food exports and nearly 50% of imports in 2019.

August

If the early summer months of June and July showed a break in the relentless stream of worrying news, August brought even better news. Major weather events in the U.S. reduced expectations of the 20-21 marketing year’s crop size for both corn and soybeans. Better prices and an excellent harvest would do wonders for growth in Canadian producers’ crop receipts for 2020. Data for the second quarter had already shown an increase in those receipts.

The beef packing plants that had closed in spring and early summer were once again running at full capacity, their return prompting McDonalds to resume purchases of Canadian beef. And while the weakened CAD had helped boost exports to China and the U.S. in the early days of the

Level of real GDP under PBO economic scenarios



A glimmer of hope for a V-type economic rebound

pandemic, the loonie’s growing strength relative to a declining USD (Figure 2) throughout the summer boded well for importers of food, equipment, and inputs. Such strength didn’t show up everywhere. The CAD continued to decline against the Euro, with Canada enjoying a competitive edge against European exporters to China.

September

More good news arrived in September. Hog prices surged after the discovery of African Swine Flu in Germany. Elsewhere, expected Canadian production was estimated to be higher for most crops than previous estimates—and in the case of wheat, the 2020 harvest was forecast to be the second-largest on record.

Production growth pushed expected revenues up for canola, dry peas, lentils, durum and spring wheat. Corn and soybean futures continued to trend up, as did estimates of their Canadian prices. U.S. export commitments to China in 2020-21, if adhered to, would be four times the actual volume of exports between the two superpowers in 2019-20.

Some news was mixed or pointed to uncertain outcomes. For instance, although global economic output recovered swiftly after the first shock caused by the pandemic, it had lost momentum shortly after.

The 2019 FCC Farmland Values Report published in April had shown a decline in farmland’s affordability—2019’s growth in farm income hadn’t kept pace with the growth in land values. While the first six months of 2020 didn’t reveal much impact from COVID-19 on land values, the second half may. The low and falling commodity

prices we saw during the early months of the pandemic may have weakened farmland demand between January and June. But higher prices and crop revenues in the second half, along with the low interest rates COVID-19 has produced, should increase demand for the rest of the year.

October

Sure enough, the good news of the summer waned in October when, as expect-

ed, COVID-19 cases gained momentum. While the ag and food supply chains had proven remarkably resilient in the first nine months, we started to again watch some of the most critical trends and factors to understand their re-emerging impacts on those chains:

Changes to both production and consumption of animal proteins

Measures implemented in packing plants to control the spread of COVID

The macroeconomy, including GDP and unemployment

Analysis conducted this month showed the year’s growth in Canadian ag and food exports between January and September had done little to alleviate concerns about the effectiveness of CETA, Canada’s trade agreement with the EU. Those concerns still exist. Instead, our exports’ gains had been largely attributed to challenging EU weather, biodiesel demand and a weaker CAD compared to the Euro—not the trade agreement.

But there was still good news. Western Canadian grain harvest was exceptionally quick this year, leading to strong producer deliveries to meet robust demand. Simultaneously, the USDA’s quarterly grain stocks report lowered stock estimates for corn, soybeans and wheat, pushing futures prices up again. U.S. hog prices were strong in October, with optimism growing around U.S. exports to China.

And the business sentiment that was strong in January, but that had fallen dramatically since showed improvement (Figure 3). In October, it was still negative but climbing.

Continued on Page 13

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THE WORLD Spectator AG NEWS

A wrap of the decade that was 2020 (July to December)

Continued from Page 12
November

The month ushered in a hugely anticipated U.S. presidential election that read a lot like a high schooler's play about treason, corruption, and U.S. pluck. Now in the middle of December, we're still not sure how its results will play out for Canadian agriculture, food manufacturers and agri-business in the years ahead. Trade relations, especially with China, are arguably the #1 issue to watch with a new U.S. administration.

November's other major trade news was also significant for Canadian exporters. First, fifteen Asia-Pacific economies signed the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. The deal ensures greater competition from Australia for Canada's beef and grains exports once it comes into effect. On the upside, Canada and the United Kingdom reached an interim post-Brexit trade agreement. Extending the terms of CETA, 98% of Canadian products exported



Above: % change in CAD exchange rates since January 1 shows growing strength against USD; declines against the Euro.

December

Local and global supply chains were both robust and fragile this year. For example, the strength in demand from China and production concerns in Europe, the Black Sea region and South America led to higher grain, oilseed and pulse prices. Canola futures neared \$600 per tonne in mid-December, a sharp contrast from the 2020 low of \$446 recorded in February. U.S. soybean futures flirted with US\$12 per bushel at the beginning of the month, quite different than the US\$8.22 recorded in mid-March. U.S. corn futures at the beginning of the month were 30% higher than in April. Cattle prices remain below their 5-year average, but hog prices have rebounded from the summer lows.

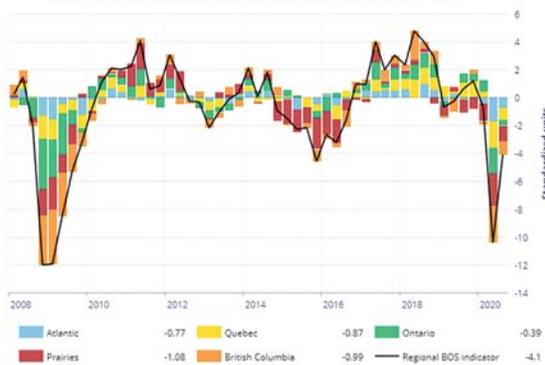
Most of these economic signals point to a recovery. But although we're ending an incredibly difficult year, we're not through the challenges that shaped so much of it. Three forces—the geopolitical tensions, negative weather events induced by climate change and the deadly global virus—that exposed risks for agri-food supply chains in 2020 will return in 2021. We'll dig into these three in our first two posts in January.

So, as vaccine approvals climb globally amid strengthening hope for eased lockdowns, we'd like to take a moment to acknowledge Canadian ag, food and agri-business. We've survived, and some have thrived in, a year of devastating losses, unmitigated uncertainty, and a persistently murky vision of the horizon ahead. That success is due to nothing other than the strength and resilience of the industries we at Farm Credit Canada serve. To all, a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

Martha is a Research Specialist with a focus on economic performance and success factors for agricultural producers and agri-businesses.

Left: Canadian business sentiment has improved across all regions

Regional Business Outlook Survey indicator, contributions by region*



to the UK will remain tariff free.

Finally, the ag sector was spared some of the worst business outcomes of COVID-19 during the fall months. For one thing, Canada's backlog of fed cattle was down by roughly 50,000 head between June and October, boosted by an even faster decline in the U.S. And new StatsCan/AAFC pricing forecasted revenues for some of the largest grains and oilseeds crops in 2020 to increase year over year by almost two billion dollars—a rather astonishing 7.5% gain.

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