



# THE WORLD-Spectator AG NEWS

FEBRUARY 2021



Canadians are buying more Canadian food products since the Covid-19 pandemic hit. Above, cauliflower being harvested and eggs being processed in Saskatchewan.

## More Canadians buying Canadian food through pandemic

BY SPENCER KEMP

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Farm Credit Canada (FCC) conducted a survey that found more Canadians actively looking to purchase Canadian-produced food through the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey, conducted between January 8 and 12, 2021, saw six out of 10 Canadians say they are more likely to purchase Canadian-made or grown food.

"We had surveyed 2000 Canadians across the country, reflective of how the country is divided, and the reason we did it is in advance of Canada's Agriculture Day, this one day a year where we celebrate Canadian food, we just wanted to know what consumers were thinking," said Marty Seymour, Director of Industry Relations with FCC.

Seymour's family comes from Carnduff where they grew canola and raised cows.

The survey showed around 56 per cent of Canadians are more likely to look for Canadian-made or grown food while 50 per cent are more likely to think about how their food is grown.

"I think this means opportunity, in the last ten years in agriculture we've been talking about trust in food and for me, it's somewhat inspiring to see that six in ten Canadians, since the pandemic, are more likely to buy Canadian-grown food. That to me is a clear demonstration that consumers trust Canadians and I think part of it infers the idea that we are supporting Canadian companies. We see that in retail we see that in food and we see it everywhere."

In the same survey, eight out of 10 Canadians say that Canada's food system and agricultural sector have adapted and responded well to the pandemic, a total of 94 per cent of respondents say they support Canada's agricultural sector.

Seymour noted an ongoing discussion regarding producers and their appreciation. Before the survey, Seymour claims that many producers did not feel that they were appreciated by the public. The survey found that 91



FCC Director of Industry Relations, Marty Seymour

per cent of respondents agreed with this sentiment.

"I think there's always tension within the farm community whether farmers feel appreciated or not. I think that's fair. Maybe what this research does is validate with a third party that these farmers are appreciated. I think it's also interesting that 80% of people are just now learning more about how their food is produced. I don't care

what industry you're in, when people want to understand how you make or grow your food, that just brings you closer to your customers and I think the outcome to that loyalty to the Canadian food production system," Seymour explained. "In the early days when we were looking for N-95 masks and everybody was trying to get their PPE for food processing, people were unsure about the Canadian food system but now nine out of ten Canadians in our research said that we should celebrate the industry. I think that's pretty cool when there are these people who aren't even connected to the food industry saying we should celebrate them."

Seymour noted that despite all the hardships brought on by the pandemic, the increased awareness to the Canadian agriculture industry is a silver lining.

"I don't see any downside to this heightened awareness and heightened interest in the Canadian food system. Whether it lasts or not, the idea that we've invited more people to the table and they're curious about how their food is produced has no downside. Whether it lasts or not doesn't matter to me today, I'll take advantage of this time to help people learn more," Seymour said. "If that's a win from the pandemic, as much downside as we've seen, if Canadians feel more supportive of Canadian farmers? I'll take that."

The survey was done to help promote February 23, which is Canada's Agricultural Day.

Seymour says that this day is the one day a year that producers are celebrated across Canada.

"We did the research because on February 23 we will be celebrating Canada's Agriculture Day, and that's just one day of the year where we can stand up and say we are proud of our food sectors."

"The events over the past year have shown us that in times of crisis, the Canadian agriculture industry continues to provide safe and reliable food. Canadians have noticed and are responding with appreciation for the agriculture and food industry's ability to adapt, even under difficult circumstances."

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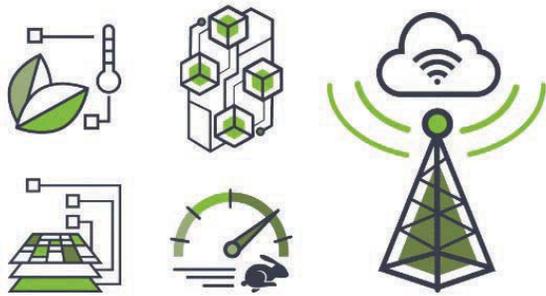
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# Why 5G connectivity matters to agriculture

BY PETER GREDIG, FCC

The evolution of wireless connectivity has allowed us to do more and more with our smartphones. The next big leap forward in speed and capacity is called 5G, but what does this technology offer us beyond making it easier to stream video to your phone or tablet? What about agriculture and 5G?

Let's start with an explanation of how 5G is different from what we have now, then consider why this may be important for agriculture.

### WHAT IS 5G?

The term 5G refers to the fifth generation of cellular networks, which began deployment in 2019. Most Canadians currently use 4G LTE, and some may still get only 3G connection, depending on where they live.

Devices in a 5G cell are connected to the internet and telephone networks via radio waves that come from local towers and antennas. There's nothing new on this front—it's similar to the way 3G and 4G LTE work.

What is new is the boost in bandwidth and download speed that 5G can bring. Without getting too deep into connectiv-

ity speed jargon, 4G LTE download speeds max out at one gigabit per second – 5G has the potential to reach speeds as high as 20 gigabits per second. The key word is potential. It will take time to get the 5G networks to the point where these impressive speeds will be commonplace. But even lower-performing 5G is still a big step up in terms of speed.

And it's not just speed. Latency is a measure of how long it takes an action request or data to travel from one device to another and return. The promise of 5G is to get that lag time down to one millisecond: essentially instantaneous.

5G offers more bandwidth, higher speeds and less latency. That's the good news. The trade-off is that because it uses higher-frequency radio waves, the range of these waves is shorter so more towers are needed. The initial rollout of 5G will have towers that use a range of frequencies delivering three different speeds. This will ensure coverage across the cell for each tower. It will take years to fully switch to the highest-performing 5G capabilities.

*Continued on Page B6*



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# Improvements made to Kirkella Community Pasture

BY SPENCER KEMP

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

A 3,250-acre community pasture in the RM of Wallace-Woodworth is ready to shine once more following a much-needed facelift that was completed in 2020. The Kirkella Community Pasture received funding through The Conservation Trust, a fund made available through the Manitoba Climate and Green Plan Initiative which is delivered via the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation.

The funding was brought to the attention of the RM of Wallace-Woodworth thanks to the Manitoba Forage and Grasslands Association (MFGA), according to Garth Mitchell, CAO of Wallace-Woodworth.

"It was brought to our attention through the Manitoba Forage and Grasslands Association that we would be a prime candidate to access some development funds. So it was through a three-way relationship that we made this development," Mitchell explained.

He says that the MFGA played a key role in helping guide the RM through the application process, as well as throughout the rest of the project.

The Kirkella Community Pasture is located near the Saskatchewan-Manitoba border, a short way north of the Trans-Canada highway and is made available to producers in the RM to utilize. Producers can pay a fee and book cattle into the community pasture where they will be able to graze.

Thanks to The Conservation Trust, the community pasture was able to receive improvements that helped resolve some concerns around the grazing area and water supply.

"The Wallace-Woodworth Kirkella Community Pasture has been operated by the municipality for a number of years, and we've always been looking for ways to improve and provide a better community pasture. We were fortunate enough to access some funds through The Conservation Trust. We partnered with The



RM of Wallace-Woodworth photo

Conservation Trust group and the Manitoba Forage and Grasslands Association to do some renovations. A lot of scrubbing for fence areas and improving some better pasture area, as well as the creation of some more stable water supplies, then some fencing to isolate and allow the usage of those in the pasture throughout the year," said Mitchell.

The biggest concern that was tackled was the issue with the water supply. In past years, there have been dry spells that have proven difficult for producers. To remedy this, three dugouts were installed in the pasture.

"I think the secure water supply, these are three very large dugouts and they're

"The Manitoba Government rolled out a program called the Conservation Trust which is essentially an endowment fund based on an investment which allowed groups like Manitoba Forage and Grasslands Association to partner with others, in this case, the Rural Municipality of Wallace-Woodworth," Morrison explained.

The project saw multiple improvements made on the pasture which included major scrubbing of woody pasture species that affected grazing and the construction of three dugouts to provide water for cattle and wildlife. Additionally, new fences were installed to help streamline the process of grazing rotations.

"They were concerned about drought. They knew they wanted to get water onto the pasture. They strategically placed three 1,000,000 gallon dugouts to help, and then that became the foundation for their other work. They were able to plan better fencing etcetera." "The focus on water management in the pasture was a very key driver," Morrison said.

The encroachment of the woody species was also a key driver in the project, according to Morrison.

"There was quite a bit of encroachment and woody species that were coming into the pasture, and it was affecting the quality of the pasture certainly from a grazing perspective. They did a massive mowing process to push back the shrubbery and open up large amounts of previously non-grazed acres."

MFGA also provided the project with a review on the pasture through experts in rangeland health and from Assiniboine West Watershed District, who looked over the pasture and suggested different enhancements that could be made.

Morrison explained that this project was extremely important to them as grasslands are shrinking and this area not only benefited cattle and producers but also the wildlife as well.

"It's going to be great for grazing, it's going to be great for wildlife, and it's great for the producers who are going to use it."



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# Let's pitch food waste

Every year, over half of the food produced in Canada is wasted. Crops are left unharvested in the field. Food spoils during transportation. Reusable by-products are cast aside during processing. Retailers and consumers fall short on selling and eating food before it spoils.

According to the experts at Second Harvest, it's like building 95 CN towers out of wasted food every year. Uneaten food often ends up in landfills and creates methane, a powerful greenhouse gas. A staggering eight per cent of all greenhouse gases worldwide are the result of food waste.

Food waste is a major challenge—and a major opportunity.

We've all heard the saying: "Reduce, reuse and recycle." Well, it turns out those three 'Rs' are all key to taking on this mountain of a problem.

The team at Enterra Corp. is more than up to the challenge. Enterra runs a large state-of-the-art facility just north of Calgary. Every day, they gather 130 tonnes of surplus fruits, vegetables and other food from local farmers, grocery stores and food processors. They bring the waste back to their facility and feed it to large colonies of black soldier larvae. The larvae are then dried and offered as a nutrient-rich pet food and plant fertilizer in an attractive packaging.

Altruism isn't driving Enterra's success—it's a viable business model to recycle food waste. Our government recently announced an investment of \$6 million to help them expand.

We need more Enterras. A lot more.

Last November, our government launched the \$20 million Food Waste Reduction Challenge, offering cash prizes to innovators with solutions to prevent or divert food waste at any point on the food supply chain, from farm-to-plate.

We launched the challenge, not knowing what kind of response we would get.

We were thrilled at the response. Already, 343 proposals have poured in from all across the country, from



Marie-Claude Bibeau

start-ups and entrepreneurs ready to tackle this issue in Canada. A first round of winners will be announced in the coming months and another round of applications will be open in the spring, this time focused on new technologies that extend the life of food or transform food waste into new foods or value-added products.

While we're making good progress on re-using and recycling waste, the biggest challenge remains waste prevention—preventing food waste before it ever happens. And we can all start with a simple solution right in our own homes. Some of us are unsure about whether to eat food after the best-before date. The best-before date indicates to consumers that if the product has been properly handled, the unopened product should be of high quality until the specified date. Best-before dates are about food quality and not food safety.

Being confined at home during the Covid-19 pandemic has helped us all discover (or rediscover) the joy of cooking. Personally, I enjoy the challenge of cooking a delicious meal using the forgotten ingredients in the back of my fridge.

Tackling food waste is a challenge for all of us. It's a key focus area for the Food Policy for Canada, which our government launched two years ago. Reducing food waste can save us money, support those in need, create new business opportunities and reduce GHG emissions. Whether it's a multi-million dollar business venture or a back-of-fridge stew, let's keep working on solutions.

*The Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau is Canada's Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.*



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# What you can do now to prevent conflict on the farm



BY REBECCA HANNAM  
Conflict is part of every-day life. Sometimes it's relatively minor and easy to handle, but other times, a more deliberate resolution strategy is required. Either way, how farm business managers deal with con-

know how to address conflict, so they avoid it or ignore it, which causes issues to fester," Moore says. "We should be looking at differing views as an opportunity to come up with better, long-lasting solutions."

*Most people don't know how to address conflict, so they avoid it or ignore it, which causes issues to fester.*

Conflict can dictate the attitude and approach to handling disagreements within the operation.

Richard Moore, founder of MDR Associates Conflict Resolution Inc. in Ottawa, Ont., knows conflict can be a barrier but says it can also be an opportunity to engage and understand what is important to those involved.

"Most people don't

Communication is key  
After 30 years as a mediator, consultant and coach, Moore stresses that most conflict boils down to poor communication.

Therefore, conflict management needs effective communication and the willingness of all parties involved to work through the issues.

His top management tip: conflict is easier to prevent

than to resolve. "Engaging with people well, on a continual basis, prevents conflict, so it's important for managers to talk to partners," Moore says.

Use mediation techniques  
Disagreement typically begins when a problem arises, and one person's solution differs from that of another person.

Early identification of potential conflict is the ideal time to initiate dialogue rather than try to solve it. Moore recommends using these mediation skills to start the conversation:

#### Adjust your mental attitude

It's important to enter dialogue without prejudices. Be open and curious. Avoid assumptions.

Ask good questions  
The conversation should involve asking the other person questions about how they view the situation. Ask them to expand their perspective.

#### Listen

Allow the other person adequate speaking time without interruption. Actively listening to their answers is crucial to understanding their viewpoints and emotions.

Reverse roles and repeat the conversation so both parties can ask questions and share perspective.

"This process opens up a conversation so that both people get a fuller picture of the situation - and that's really important," says Moore.

The dialogue also provides validation and a deeper understanding of the problem. As well, new information could result in an even better solution to the issue.

Farm managers can also watch for warning signs that conflict is beginning, such as reduced engagement, less chatting and frustrated or angry behaviour. Conflict excluding management can be signalled by strained communication between employees and tense body language.

#### Ask for support

Business advisors skilled in mediation can provide

objective views and facilitate communication, including helping everyone prepare for tough conversations about the ongoing conflict. But this doesn't mean external resources will always be needed - sometimes, a few facilitated sessions help managers sharpen their conflict communication skills that they can use moving forward.

#### Bottom line

Good communication

among farm managers and staff can help prevent conflict before it arises, experts say, and help resolve conflict if it does occur. Watch for signs that conflict may be brewing, such as tension, reduced conversation or engagement or frustrated behaviour. If talking through the conflict doesn't resolve the issue, it may be time to bring a professional mediator to help staff work towards a resolution.

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# Why 5G connectivity matters to agriculture

Continued from page 2

### WHAT ABOUT 5G IN AGRICULTURE?

Theoretically, 5G will help agriculture make better use of the internet of things, artificial intelligence and robotics. It's all about data and how fast it can be processed. We hear more and more about connected sensors in barns, greenhouses, fields and on equipment – this is part of what's called the internet of things where anything and everything will be collecting data and connected to the internet. The 5G-enabled sensors will be able to collect and aggregate the enormous amount of data being collected and, in real time, push it through artificial intelligence algorithms to enable complex real-time decisions.

A robotic weeder is a good example. The sensors on the weeder are looking for weeds while recognizing that the crop must not be disturbed. The sensors are gathering a lot of data that needs to be processed to let the robot decide what is and isn't a weed. A 5G connection enables the weeder to make decisions and work faster. If you think about any robot or autonomous vehicle moving at high speed, decisions have to be made instantly for safety reasons.

The bottom line is, if agriculture is to fully benefit from the internet of things, artificial intelligence and robotics, data must move and be processed instantaneously. And 5G is touted as the best way to accomplish this.

### WHEN WILL WE GET 5G?

Some telecom providers have initiated a 5G rollout in major urban centres like Toronto, Ottawa, Vancouver and Montreal. This initial launch will see the 4G network augmented by 5G capability. It will take time for fully dedicated 5G coverage to expand beyond densely populated urban areas because more towers need to be installed. Rural Canadians may have a significant wait before full 5G capability is available to them. The other speedbump is that you'll need a new phone to use it. There are some 5G-enabled smartphones and tablets, but not all are supported by Canadian carriers. If you're buying a new device and want to be 5G enabled, check with your carrier to make sure it's on the supported list.

While the promise of 5G to enable the artificial intelligence and robotic revolution in agriculture is exciting, many rural Canadians are still waiting for functional mobile connectivity and basic internet service for their

homes. It will be at least a couple of years before we really start to see 5G availability and functionality in rural areas.

### WHAT ABOUT HIGH-SPEED SATELLITE DELIVERY?

Rural Canadians may have access to high-speed internet for their homes from satellites well before 5G mobile becomes established. New providers of satellite internet services are eyeing rural Canada as a good potential market for their services. The good news is that you can access satellite internet anywhere – it's not limited by the number and location of towers. The downside is that satellite internet speeds are significantly slower than what 5G is promising and historically, the cost has been higher than other options.

Satellite services require a dish to be installed on or near your house that exchanges signals with a satellite and communicates with your router to create a wireless environment. It doesn't provide the speed or mobile service that 5G promises, but it's definitely worth looking at.



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# USask livestock research receives significant investment to advance industry

Saskatchewan's Agriculture Development Fund (ADF) will provide more than \$6.5 million to support livestock research efforts at the University of Saskatchewan (USask).

This includes operational funding for the Prairie Swine Centre (PSC) (\$1.9 million) and the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization (VIDO) (\$1.58 million). A total of 19 individual USask research projects were also awarded approximately \$3 million, including almost \$332,000 for forage crop breeding development at the Global Institute for Food Security (GIFS) at USask.

"This investment helps ensure producers directly connect with the work being done at the university, and also allows new projects to move forward and influence the success of livestock operations," said USask Vice-President Research Karen Chad. "Agriculture is one of our signature areas, and we know advances in research and technology form a foundation for economic growth in this vitally important sector in Saskatchewan."

The ADF program is supported through the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a five-year \$388-million investment by the federal and provincial governments in strategic initiatives for the sector in Saskatchewan.

"This funding will directly benefit the Saskatchewan pork value chain," said PSC CEO Murray Pettitt. "In the past 15 years, our research program has contributed an average return on investment of \$4.10 per pig/year to the Saskatchewan industry, and



Plant molecular geneticist Andrew Sharpe at the Global Institute for Food Security at the University of Saskatchewan.

Dave Stobbe photo

the funds received from the Agriculture Development Fund enable Prairie Swine Centre to attract additional research funding for the benefit of the industry."

A total of almost \$7.6 million from ADF was announced Jan. 27 for 26

agriculture projects in Saskatchewan and across the country, supplemented by an additional \$323,000 from industry partners.

"We are thankful for the ongoing support from ADF," said VIDO Director Dr. Volker Gerdt. "Infectious diseases continue to threaten animal health and production. This funding helps ensure our cutting-edge research and development benefits producers."

Highlights include:

**Acquiring and applying knowledge (\$1.9 million):** Prairie Swine Centre will continue to generate and deliver novel research results from our engineering, nutrition and ethology research programs. These results will continue to support the success and sustainability (economic, environmental and social license) of the Saskatchewan pork industry.

**Connecting and communicating with producers (\$1.58 million):** VIDO will aim to improve animal health and production through enhanced scientific communication, knowledge exchange and vaccine development. This ongoing project will help ensure the development and communication of solutions that benefit Sas-

katchewan producers and protect animals from infectious diseases.

**Improving forage crops (\$332,000):** Genetic improvements in brome grass, an essential forage crop for cattle, have been low due to the complexity of the genome and the lack of efficient analysis tools. Led by plant molecular geneticist Andrew Sharpe, director of genomics and bioinformatics at GIFS, this project will produce a catalogue of genetic variation for brome grass along with predictive models for the breeding process. The resulting information will have a direct impact on the ability of breeders to select the most nutritious varieties of brome grass that produce the largest yield.

Continued on page B13

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# Manitoba Ag Days gives back \$28,000, even during pandemic

Manitoba Ag Days is giving back to the communities where their patrons and exhibitors live.

Ag Days is one of the last not-for-profit farm trade shows that are left on the circuit. Their mission is to provide a platform to connect and educate producers, exhibitors and the public.

Traditionally they host an annual three-day trade show with complimentary speaker theatres, but in 2021 were unable to host their event due to the pandemic.

"It was a none discussion at our board table, it was unanimous that everyone wanted to see our Ag Days Gives Back program continue, even during a pandemic" says Hannah Minshull, Manitoba Ag Days board member and chair of the Ag Days Gives Back Committee.

Ag Days says they wanted to make sure that they were still able to give back to the ag community, so they hosted an on-line 50/50 raffle. Thanks to the support of Manitobans they say they had the most successful 50/50 they have ever had. The total pot grew to \$35,560. The winner, Okšana Iwanchysko, took home \$17,780 and \$17,780 was added to their Ag Days Gives Back Community Giving Fund.

"Even with no show, we wanted to give back some of the show's success to the communities which our exhibitors and patron's call home. Over the course of the last nine years we have given back over \$316,000 to assist many amazing projects that are helping to grow our communities along with supporting youth agricultural education throughout the province," said General Manager Kristen Phillips. "Since 2020/2021 was anything but normal we wanted to really focus on communities and what makes those communities thrive and grow, so you will see all \$28,000 in 2021 will go to youth education and grow-

ing our future generations."

Here is who will take home the money in 2021:

- \$10,000.00 will go to Agriculture in the Classroom - Manitoba to create a virtual Manitoba Ag Days Adventure. With no show they still wanted to deliver this important program to youth throughout the province and with their grant money they will launch the program on Canada's Agriculture Day - February 23, 2021.
- \$3,000 will go to three annual scholarships

-ACC Diploma Scholarship - Paige Freitag

-U of M's Diploma Scholarship - Eunseo Hwang

-U of M's Degree Scholarship - Jill Martens

- \$15,000 will go to 15 Early Learning Centers across the province including:

-Melita Early Learning Centre: To purchase toys and ride toys for their outdoor play space, including bikes and scooters

-Elkhorn Early Learning Centre: To purchase a water chlorination system for drinking water for the children and staff

-Minto Nursery School Inc: To purchase a new rug for their library area, an adult-size chair so the reader does not have to sit on a child's chair, a new shelf and some new books

-Waskada Wee Ones Early Learning Centre: To enhance their outdoor play area with sandbox bench seating and storage, and install a sunsail for shade, as well as a reading nook with benches and plants

Early learning centres in Emerson, Langruth, Carman, Altona, Wawanessa, Morden, Ste. Rose, Brandon, and Erickson are also receiving part of the funding.

In total there were 67 early learning centers that applied from all over the province.

It was an overwhelming response to their program and Ag Days says they wish they had enough money to give each of the centers a \$1,000 grant as every single application pulled at their heart strings.

"The board of Manitoba Ag Days is very passionate about educating the future generation, making sure that children have access to and learn about agriculture," they said in a news release. "We also know that early learning centers enable

our farm families to be able to farm while their children's minds and bodies learn, grow and develop. Congratulations to all of the recipients of this years' grants. And to all 67 centers please keep up the great work; you are essential to the success of our province."

The board of directors says they look forward to hosting their annual event in 2022. The dates are set for January 18-20, 2022.

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# Sask ag exports up 2.5 per cent in 2020

BY SPENCER KEMP  
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

In 2020, Saskatchewan was the only province in Canada to have a positive increase in exports for the year. Saskatchewan saw an increase of 2.5% while Canada's total exports dropped by 11.8%. World-Spectator reporter Spencer Kemp had the opportunity to speak with Saskatchewan's Trade and Export Partnership President, Chris Dekker. Below is the full interview with Dekker.

## Saskatchewan saw an increase of 2.5% in exports through 2020, can you put this number into perspective?

That's a very good first question. It's important to put these numbers into context for Saskatchewan. The fact of the matter is that Saskatchewan is an export-dependent province. In fact, we're one of the most export dependant provinces in one of the most export dependant countries in the world. In fact, anywhere between one in three and one in five jobs rely on our export-based economy. The reason for that is pretty simple. We only have around 1.2 million people in Saskatchewan, and that is tiny. Our domestic market is very small. So we have to sell the incredible array of goods and services that we produce in Saskatchewan on the international stage to grow and to succeed economically.

So these numbers are really important to us and to families and to working people around the province.

## What makes Saskatchewan so much different than the rest of Canada that we saw this increase?

Well, the latest increases are interesting in a number of aspects. First, we didn't anticipate any of this heading into the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions that were imposed to manage it. What we found is that countries and companies and people around the world realized that Saskatchewan has what they need. Not necessarily what they want, they may want iPhones, but they need what Saskatchewan has to offer. We call them the three Fs. Food. Fuel. And fertilizer.

In this case, the need to feed the world did not pause for the pandemic. In fact, it increased substantially. So most of these export highlights are the result of the incredible volumes of exports and the prices for our commodities in the agriculture industry.

## Going back to the pandemic, how has the pandemic affected exports in Saskatchewan?

There's been no greater adversity for international engagement than that which has been generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Flattening the curve meant ever-expanding levels of restrictions to international engagement. Whether that be travel or gathering at tradeshow and whatnot.

We had to pivot very quickly. We reallocated our resources to virtual and web-based opportunities. Since March, STEP has organized 59 virtual trade missions, seven virtual trade shows, and we've attended four virtual trade conferences.

In addition to that we've hosted our first online virtual trade show platform called Sask Trade Showcase at the end of January, we had well over 1,500 national and international guests attend. We had 250 booths and 22 webinars that we held for informational purposes.

All this activity made sure that Saskatchewan's products and services and our exporters were still front and center on the minds of international buyers.

And that helped to show the world that Saskatchewan was still open for business. And it really translated and helped produce the export numbers we're seeing in the

news release.

## Which Saskatchewan markets saw the largest increase in exports?

Interestingly our number one market in terms of growth was in China. China's market and economy has actually increased during the pandemic. It is one of the few markets that actually saw a GDP increase during the COVID-19 pandemic and the exercises to manage the pandemic.

We felt significant increases into China. 33% to about \$4.14 billion in 2020. Japan, India, and Brazil rounded out the top five markets after China.

## With these increases into China, was it due to an increase in products being shipped or an increase in price on the goods currently being exported to China?

It's a function of both. Total exports are a function of two basic characteristics. One is of the volume and one is of the price.

In the case of China, we saw an increase to both. It really is just both.

## We also saw a decrease in exports to the USA, is that a cause for concern, or a by product of the ongoing pandemic?

Anytime we see a drop in the market it's a cause for concern, so we have to monitor and make sure we understand why that is, and if there's anything we need to do to change our mix of allocated resources and products, we need to manage that very closely.

In the case of the US, the drop in exports is almost exclusively due to the drop in the value of our oil exports into the United States.

In Saskatchewan, most, if not all of our oil is ultimately shipped and pipelined and trucked and trained into the United States. Of course, we all know the price of a barrel of oil has substantially plummeted over the past couple of months. So you're seeing that as a reflection of price as opposed to volume.

It's always problematic and it's an international phenomenon.

## Forecasting moving forward, are there any concerns or anything that's at the forefront of your mind?

Well, sure. There's always issues and risks when you're dealing with international markets and indeed the over 150 different countries that we sell goods into on an annual basis.

Canada-China relations continue to be strained, we look to the US and the Biden administration has its own eyes on a number of key issues that we need to monitor very closely, including 'buy America' provisions.

Overall, we remain very bullish about exports onto the main international stage, and we're predicting a continuance of those export growths into 2021, anywhere between three and five per cent.

## In regards to the cancellation of the Keystone Pipeline project, which was going to be a huge project for exporting crude oil down the US, what are your thoughts?

It's very unfortunate, we were very disappointed. The Biden Administration hadn't signaled that leading through the election and into the first days of administration.

The key difference for us, as it relates to exports in Sas-

katchewan and the oil industry, is the inability to get a better price for our oil on an international level. The difference between international prices and domestic prices can be substantial.

The provincial government knows that we're missing out on hundreds of millions of dollars on royalties and taxes and other revenues because of it. So that gives us a substantive to the treasury and a substantive hit to the oil industry, which of course is significant in Saskatchewan.

The growth seen was largely due to increased volumes of agricultural commodities shipped to international markets. Saskatchewan agri-food exports increased by 31.4% to \$17 billion in 2020.

Highlights of these increases include a 15% increase in wheat, a 32% increase in durum, 47% additional canola seed being exported, a 63% increase in pees, and a 96% increase in lentils.

Forest products also saw an increase with dimensional lumber exports increasing by 29% and oriented strand board increasing by 95%.

Exports to the USA dropped by 18.2% to \$13.1 billion, largely due to the price of oil dropping.

Oil exports dropped by 32.3% and potash by 7.7% as well, largely due to the downward trend in prices.

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# Life down on the farm

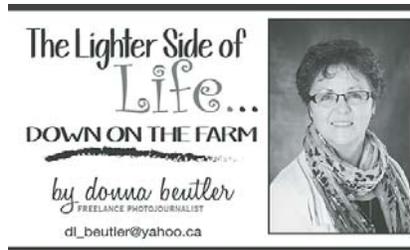
There's nothing quite like a stretch of serious cold temperatures to make you appreciate a good-working furnace and, yes, the fuel that runs it. As for the people who keep the world turning despite brutal outdoor conditions, I have nothing but respect, no matter what the job it is that they do, including my guys who, like other livestock producers in this weather must ensure tractors are running, cattle are cared for, cows due to calve are in the barn and cows that are calving are in the "warm" barn. And the bane of every cattle farmer—the untawing of the watering bowls on the coldest days of the year.

I was never more grateful to be removed from hands-on 'on-the-farm' duties than these -50 wind chill days that we have experienced this February. I feel I did my part by wishing my husband a good day when he left for the farm every morning to help with feeding, bedding and calving duties (before settling into my comfy chair under the electric blanket I might add). The fact that the "new-to-us" farm half-ton has remote start (unlike the one stolen from in front of our house one year ago) is a bonus and is not taken for granted, I assure you.

I had the opportunity this past week to reconnect with some school chums from my days in elementary school in Northwestern Ontario and as I shared some old black and whites on the Facebook memory page, I was reminded of what a shock to the system it was for me, at the age of 12, to leave the forests I was so accustomed to and arrive on a Southeastern Saskatchewan farm.

At the time, I probably would have been more inclined to call it a traumatic experience. After all, my biggest decisions up until 'the move' had been whether I would to-boggan or skate after school. And here I was, totally out of my element, in a world filled with days that were too short to get the to-do list done and a workload that had no end in sight. And holidays? Yeah, unheard of.

But of course, life is all about adaptation isn't it? I learned how to drive the car that first year (standard of course), then the tractor, learned how to work summer-fallow, feed cows, harrow fields, haul meals to the field in harvest time (I skipped the part about how to make them) and do the farm books (and yes, with a pencil, ledger book and adding machine). There was little down-time



in this new world I had been plopped into, but there was little time to complain either so do or die became the new motto.

Now that I have grandchildren growing up on the farm, it's always fun to say, "When I was little, we did it like this..." and have them look at me with disbelief. I mean, can you really feed and bed a hundred head of cattle with little square bales and dozens of pails of chop all handled manually of course. And how can you do farm books without a computer? Ahhh yes, much has indeed changed.

Talk like this generally leads to some questions about when Grandma and Grandpa raised cows back in the 'olden' days,—you know—25 years ago. I recognize these farm kids have definitely grown up on a much more modern cattle farm than I did and they are way more into it than I ever was—they always know exactly how many calves are now on the ground, how many are in the barn "under watch," which ones had trouble calving, which ones didn't. The calf record book is always at the ready on the corner of the kitchen table and they are totally in tune with what's written in it.

We stopped at the farm house the other day to pick up some eggs and told the twins that their chickens were laying pretty big eggs these day and that a couple of eggs

broke just by closing the lid on the egg carton last time. Without blinking an eye, one responded, "You can buy eggs at the Co-op you know." Well, alrighty then. I guess he means we have options and not to complain about their 'big' farm eggs.

Those big farm eggs are coming in right handy these days. I mean, what do you do in lockdown but bake and send the end result off to the grandkids? Baking may not be my forte, but at least it's something to do. Besides, if I bake, it allows me to procrastinate on finishing off my year end farm books.

In my great quest to find "things to do" this winter, being that a pandemic is somewhat limiting, I decided that perhaps pulling the carpet out of both bedrooms and replacing them with laminate would be a great plan. It started with a trip to the flooring store and a two-week deadline to get ready for room number one. My husband was half-way on board with the whole idea and by the time we had emptied our walk-in closet, he was no longer even remotely enthused. By the time the furniture was out, the walls touched up with paint, the new flooring down and the baseboards back in, there was only one conclusion. Room number two is permanently on hold!

I have been in daycare mode over February break (yes, care-giving is allowed) and have had the pleasure of the company of my grandchildren from time to time. Though I am not at home in the kitchen, I have fond memories of my Grandma and the goodies she would make us as kids and so, as I whip up another batch of waffles or crepes or beaver tails or whatever it might be for my own grandchildren, I cannot help but think of the things that they will one day recall about life in general, Grandma's kitchen, and particularly about life on the farm back 'in the day.'

And so, as the days get a little longer (and hopefully warmer) and the calves keep coming (or whatever is happening in our respective worlds), my wish for us all is that, despite the challenges we face, that we will stay strong and that we will look more at the positive in life than the negative. Here's to our readers—on-farm and off—hope you can bank another memory today!

## Risk management survey: 3 big opportunities to take back to the farm

BY CRAIG KLEMMER

PRINCIPAL AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIST WITH FCC

Farming success is partly based on the ability of an operation to mitigate key risks.

Like everything else in agriculture, risks are continually evolving.

Adjusting strategies accordingly is thus vital. Given knowledge and limited resources, what are the most appropriate strategies for long-term success?

FCC Vision Panel surveyed over 2,000 farm operations across the country representing all areas of agriculture to select the risks they feel are most concerning and what strategies they have implemented to manage the risks they have identified. Overall risk tolerance was another variable accounted for.

We focused on five key themes:

1. Production risk
2. Marketing risk
3. Financial risk
4. Human resource risk
5. Legal risk

Each theme includes multiple specific risks. For example, within financial risk, we consider the following risks: interest rate, working capital, debt repayment, and operating costs.

We constructed a scorecard that measures how producers within a sector match their level of concern (on a scale of 0 to 3) and overall risk attitude with available risk management tools (for example, I have a business plan, off-farm income, utilize accrual accounting to make decisions).

A score of 100% would indicate that, for every risk identified, there is an appropriate strategy to mitigate. Conversely, zero would indicate there is no appropriate strategy to mitigate the identified risk.

Here are three takeaways from the survey.



### 1. Overall risk management response in Canadian agriculture is impressive

Canadian farm operations have implemented strategies to mitigate 87% of the risks they have identified on their operation, an impressive score.

Not surprisingly, the agriculture sector has achieved the greatest score when identifying and mitigating production risks.

Some of the strategies to production risks involve government programs, industry specialists (agronomists, nutritionists, and veterinarians) or production diversification.

Conversely, human resource is an area for which more work can be done.

### 2. Opportunities to deploy risk management strategies greatest in livestock sector

The livestock sector (beef, hogs, sheep and goat) production have implemented the fewest risk mitigation strategies in relation to risk concerns.

This observation is consistent for each of the five risk

categories, signaling a higher risk tolerance, learning opportunities and adjustments in available strategies/tools to meet the industry risk management needs.

That there are large differences between risk mitigation strategies of hog operations within the livestock sector compared to beef, sheep and goat.

### 3. Human resource risks score the lowest from a risk management standpoint

The human resource risk score is highest for supply-managed industries and greenhouse, vegetable, and fruit operations.

This seems a possible reflection of a greater dependency on hired labour and solutions implemented around recruiting/retaining labour in these sectors.

Conversely, grains and oilseed and livestock operations are overall more dependent on family labour.

Canadian farming operations have success implementing risk management strategies for the risks they identify.

However, in our increasingly interconnected and digital world, risk management strategies and the sophistication of these strategies continue to evolve.

Agriculture producers will need to detect and understand these new risks and adopt them.

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# Betting on the booming plant protein food market

Many consumers are revisiting their relationship with animal proteins, both at the meat counter and in the dairy products section

Think plant protein is just a passing fad? Think again. You likely noticed that the plant-based counter at your favorite grocery store is growing. There's good reason: people are buying.

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic and the chaos surrounding containment and vaccination rules, consumers are quietly enjoying products made from plant proteins and milk alternatives.

According to recent data offered by Nielsen, since the start of 2020, sales of vegetable protein products have increased by 31 per cent.

At the retail level, the market for plant-based protein substitutes is worth almost \$300 million in Canada. That's an impressive figure considering where the category was a few years ago. By 2025, along with food service, this market could easily exceed \$1 billion.

Some may be surprised to learn that Beyond Meat, the 'darling' of plant-based proteins, is far from dominating the market in Canada. Indeed, American brand Yves de Hain Celestial Group is most popular in Canada. The Yves brand has existed since 1985 and stands out for its innovative product development. The company offers all kinds of products for a variety of tastes.

In second place is Sunrise and in third place is Gardein. Beyond Meat is ranked fourth in sales by brand of plant-based proteins.

Twenty brands in Canada have generated sales exceeding \$3 million in the past 52 weeks. Several large companies like Maple Leaf and Kellogg now offer products



Sylvain Charlebois

without animal meats. So there's a lot of traffic in an area that remains relatively new.

Consumers are interested in these products for three important reasons.

First, animal welfare is a concern for all those who support local agriculture and who are concerned about animal exploitation.

There's also health. Several studies suggest that plant protein products are a better choice from a nutritional perspective, although some of these studies are heavily disputed by the livestock industry.

Finally, the environment. More consumers see the planet on their dinner plate and claim that animal production emits too many greenhouse gases. The livestock sector also disputes such claims as it tries to change practices to become a greener sector. The Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef is a good example.

These factors appear to be motivating consumers and Nielsen's sales numbers confirm that consumers are looking beyond meat for sources of proteins.

Of course, some may believe the movement towards

plant proteins is disrupting traditional sectors such as cattle and dairy. Even though these sectors provide consumers with high-quality, all-natural products, the threat is certainly real.

Its no coincidence that Agropur Dairy Co-operative just sold its yogurt division to the major French dairy group Lactalis. But given what's going on with the pandemic and American politics, the announcement was largely unnoticed.

Many consumers are revisiting their relationship with animal proteins, both at the meat counter and in the dairy products section. But the Agropur dairy farmers' co-operative was never ready or willing to make the switch to plants. So the dairy sector in Quebec is moving on, with a good portion of its dairy processing capacity going foreign.

Giving consumers more choice is critical. Livestock and dairy producers may feel threatened, thinking food business is a zero-sum game. Some win and some lose. And it may have been like this for years but since consumers are looking for value, everyone has a place and role to play.

Animal and vegetable proteins are complementary. With a more sophisticated consumer looking for novelty, and value, companies must bet on a growing market and not the other way around. This is what Agropur never wanted to do and paid the price.

Dr. Sylvain Charlebois is senior director of the agri-food analytics lab and a professor in food distribution and policy at Dalhousie University.

## USask livestock research receives significant investment to advance industry

Continued from page B7

Examples of other innovative crop-related projects with potential economic impact include:

**Decontaminating eggs without the use of chemicals (\$260,000):** USask researchers Lifeng Zhang (Engineering), Shelley Kirychuk (Medicine), and Karen Schwean-Lardner (Animal and Poultry Science) will develop chemical-free surface decontamination methods for table eggs. The proposed research will help the egg industry in Saskatchewan to be economically, socially and environmentally sustainable.

**Detecting respiratory viruses (\$212,000):** USask Professor of Veterinary Medicine and research chair Cheryl Waldner will explore how DNA sequencing can be used to better detect respiratory viruses in feedlot calves. This study will enhance animal health while also reducing risk and minimizing economic losses for beef producers. New diagnostic tools for respiratory viruses will inform how we control disease and evaluate the effectiveness of on-farm vaccination programs.

**Easing pain in cattle castration (\$150,000):** Western College of Veterinary Medicine Assistant Professor Diego Moya

will assess the efficacy of a novel mechanism for delivering pain control during castration of calves of different ages. Using a combination of behavioural and physiological traits indicative of pain and discomfort, this research will help to develop and promote a strategy that can be widely adopted by the beef industry to improve the health, and welfare of castrated calves.

Industry funding for USask projects of \$258,000 is provided by a wide range of organizations and agencies including: Saskatchewan Cattlemen's Association (\$117,725), Saskatchewan Alfalfa Seed Producers (\$85,000), SaskMilk (\$31,504), Alberta Milk (\$15,000) and Saskatchewan Forage Seed Development Commission (\$9,130).

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# 2020 a record year for agriculture exports in Saskatchewan

BY ROB PAUL  
LOCAL JOURNALISM  
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2020 was a record year for agricultural exports in Saskatchewan, helping the province lead the nation in growth of overall export sales over the previous year.

Saskatchewan produced \$16.9 billion in agricultural exports last year, a 31 per cent increase from 2019 and a new high for the province. This represents more than 55 per cent of total provincial exports in 2020, which were valued at \$30.4 billion.

This helps bring the province closer to meeting its Growth Plan goals, which include growing agri-food exports to \$20 billion and increasing agriculture value-added revenue to \$10 billion by 2030. These strong export numbers also reinforce Saskatchewan's global reputation as a dependable source of safe, high-quality resources, goods and products.

Overall merchandise export sales in 2020 were more than \$30 billion, up 2.5 per cent over 2019, the highest percentage increase among the provinces. On a national basis, exports were down 12.2 per cent over the same period.

Leading agriculture exports in 2020 continue to be canola seed, non-durum wheat, lentils, canola oil and durum wheat.

"The global Covid-19 pandemic has hit all economies hard worldwide, but these export numbers are strong signs our province

is in a positive position for economic recovery in 2021," Trade and Export Development Minister Jeremy Harrison said. "With our world-class and growing export base, we have what the world wants and needs, and it will continue to drive investment and jobs for communities right across Saskatchewan."

In 2020, major increases in exports were seen in farm and intermediate food products, forestry products and building and packaging materials, and industrial machinery, equipment, and parts. Saskatchewan's top international markets for 2020 include the United States, China, Japan, and India—top markets for Saskatchewan agri-food exports in 2020 were the United States, China, Japan, India and Mexico.

"Saskatchewan producers grow safe, high-quality food that the world needs and our agriculture exporters remain committed to providing the world with these products," Agriculture Minister David Marit said. "I want to commend our producers on their hard work and resilience, which led to a new record in agri-food exports for 2020."

Increases in primary production as well as a growing value-added sector have contributed to the record agri-food export growth in Saskatchewan. In 2020, value-added exports were \$3.2 billion. Canola oil, canola meal and processed oats were Saskatchewan's top value-added products.

Currently, the Government of Saskatchewan is working to open three new trade offices in Singapore, Japan and India in 2021 to support increased export diversification. The new offices will complement the existing trade office in China, and continued access to Asian markets will benefit our key economic sectors.

Saskatchewan's 31 per cent increase in agricultural exports since 2019 has been in large part to increased demand which has led to increased prices of high quality products.

"In 2020, Saskatchewan had more product available to service international markets. In 2019 and 2020, Saskatchewan recorded its second and third largest crops ever, with both years producing over 38 million metric tonnes of crop," said a spokesperson for the Government of Saskatchewan.

"Many Agriculture commodities experienced increased prices due to increased world demand and some production problems in other parts of the world (Australia and Europe) as a result of adverse weather conditions. Other factors include prices in canola, pulses, barley and other crops increasing, Canada's grain handling and transportation system performed well during the year, and all of Saskatchewan's main field crops saw exports increase in 2020, with cereal grains, oilseeds and pulses increasing 21, 42 and 78 per cent respectively."

As a result of the pan-

dem, the province saw increased demand in Saskatchewan produced agri-food products due to its strong reputations around the world.

"In 2020, Saskatchewan's reputation as a trusted, safe and stable supplier of high quality agriculture commodities and value-added products was strengthened," said the spokesperson. "There was an increased level of demand/dependence on Saskatchewan agriculture commodities as essential food staples in local diets around the world, including pulses and canola seed. The Saskatchewan government remains committed to supporting open and stable global supply chains by ensuring agri-food products can move efficiently, without disruption, through our transportation system."

With Covid-19 having a negative impact both in Canada and globally on economies, Saskatchewan's agriculture sector has been as important as ever in helping support the country as its backbone both through creating jobs and bringing in money.

"Saskatchewan is an export-dependent province and agri-food production continues to be an impor-

tant part of the province's economy, which is driven by fuel, fertilizer and food," the spokesperson said. "Saskatchewan's top exports are: fertilizer (\$6.1 billion), cereal grains (\$5.5 billion), mineral oil (\$5.3 billion), oilseeds (\$4.6 billion), pulses and vegetables (\$3.5 billion), and animal/vegetable oils (\$1.8 billion). The agri-food sector is a cornerstone of the Saskatchewan and Canadian economy, with agriculture and related activities accounting for approximately 10 per cent of Saskatchewan's GDP and 35,000 jobs. In 2020, the value of Saskatchewan's top 10 exports increased by 3% from \$24.2 billion in 2019 to \$24.9 billion in 2020. The top ten exports accounts for 82% of the total Saskatchewan exports and agriculture exports accounts for 56% of the top 10 exports in 2020, an increase from 43% in 2019 and accounts for more than 40% of overall merchandise exports in 2020."

The success of Saskatchewan's record agricultural exports is expected to continue in 2021—though nothing is guaranteed in the sector because of a number of factors, the Government of Saskatchewan is optimistic they will hit their Growth Plan goals for

2030.

"Agriculture production is weather dependent and can therefore be difficult to predict, however, over the medium term, we expect agri-food exports to reach new record levels. In 2020, the Government of Saskatchewan released its new growth plan," said the spokesperson. "Two notable targets for 2030 include increasing agri-food exports to \$20 billion and crop production to 45 million metric tonnes. In 2020, Saskatchewan had additional product to service international markets and we expect that capacity to increase in the years ahead. In 2019 and 2020, Saskatchewan recorded its second and third largest crops ever, with both years producing over 38 million metric tonnes of crop. Global demand for food, due to a growing population and rising incomes, is creating additional export opportunities."

"There are many factors that influence exports from year to year, for example crop prices. The Government of Saskatchewan will continue to work on and nurture trade relationships in priority markets, as well as seek growth opportunities in the agri-food industry."

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# From ag waste to green energy source: USask researchers build better biomass pellet

Countries in Europe and Asia are increasingly relying on biofuel—products made from wood and plant residue—as an alternative to fossil fuels in power generation and home heating. The most common form is biopellets, small, finger-sized pellets produced by compacting waste material from the forestry industry and farming.

A recent discovery by researchers at the University of Saskatchewan (USask) could help hasten use of cheap and plentiful agricultural waste as the go-to material for producing this environmentally friendly energy source.

Tumpa Sarker, a PhD candidate in USask's department of chemical and biological engineering, has found that heating canola meal, canola hull and oat hull before compressing it yields a higher quality pellet with lower moisture content and volume, and higher energy content and density. The resulting product has a heating value similar to coal, Sarker found.

"We have all this carbon stored in forests, and plant and agricultural residue," said Sarker. "We are looking at how to use it in place of fossil fuels to generate energy"

Many farming byproducts are currently left in the field to rot. The resulting methane releases large amounts of greenhouse gas. Compacting plant material into small pellets increases its density up to 10 times, making it much more economical to transport and store.



As part of her doctoral studies, USask student Tumpa Sarker has discovered a method for creating a better biomass pellet.

Canada currently exports up to four million biopellets to Europe each year, the majority of which

are manufactured using forestry byproducts. While some Saskatchewan companies use agricultural waste in animal feed, none

are converting this material into biopellets.

"There is a really huge market for this (biofuel)," said Dr. Ajay Dalai (PhD),

Sarker's PhD supervisor and Canada Research Chair in Bio-Energy and Environmentally Friendly Chemical Processing. "The world is hungry for reducing carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions and increasing use of non-fossil fuels for generating power and heat. These pellets are a great solution. They have low net CO2 emissions. This could bring money for (agricultural) producers and generate local employment."

The treatment process Sarker and Dalai used, called torrefaction, involves heating the biomass at temperatures between 200 and 300 degrees Celsius in an inert environment (an environment free of oxygen and CO2). Their work was done at the Catalysis and Chemical Reaction Engineering Laboratories (CCREL) in the USask College of Engineering and analyzed at USask's Saskatchewan Structural Sciences Centre (SSSC), with testing performed using beamlines at the Canadian Light Source (CLS).

Dalai said the objective

of the research—which is supported by Agriculture and Agri-food Canada as part of the Biomass Canada Cluster and by Saskatchewan's Ministry of Agriculture—is to develop a technology that can be picked up by a local company then used to produce high-quality biopellets for energy applications.

"Europe is very aggressive in reducing their emissions," said Dalai. "So that would be a major market if we had a local company making these pellets and exporting them abroad."

Dalai and Sarker are now turning their attention to finding an environmentally friendly binding agent that will make the pellets more durable and more resistant to absorbing moisture during shipping.

The Saskatchewan Structural Sciences Centre (SSSC) is a \$14M laboratory located in the Thorvaldson Building that university and industry scientists use for research in the fields of agriculture, medicine, engineering and natural sciences.

**Saskatchewan agriculture helps feed the world and helps fuel our province's growth.**

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