



Global Ag Risk Solutions has new approach to insurance

BY KEVIN WEEDMARK

A lot of growing agriculture related businesses on the Prairies started out in a quonset, with farmers taking machinery apart and trying to come up with solutions to some of the shortcomings of existing technology. The people behind Global Ag Risk Solutions believe they have come up with a better farm insurance product, and it started with looking under the hood of farm financials.

"It was actually just an accident. It was in my boardroom here in Moose Jaw and I was showing a friend of mine how we do a farm profitability analysis," says Global Ag Risk Solutions CEO Grant Kosior, originally from Fillmore. "We looked at the gross margin component and just by accident we said 'holy cow we might have an insurance product if we get the data behind this.' So we went out and captured the data to back test our theory. That was in 2009. In January of 2011 we started selling. In the meantime we found capital to try the idea out, and in 2011 we started with 60 farms."

Some people may have noticed the Global Ag Risk Solutions logo on an office in Moosomin. Although the growth isn't as obvious to the passerby as a company like Vaderstad—where anyone driving down the highway has seen the company evolve from a small shop to a huge plant—the company has grown quickly. "We take out a couple of billion dollars of liability," said Kosior. "We're in Canada and the United States. It doesn't take very long for the billion dollar number to be achieved. Even if it was a million dollars of risk per farm, 1,000 farms will get you to a billion. It is a big number, but the amount of production that these farmers grow in Canada is very, very large."

How is the insurance offered by Global Ag Risk Solutions different than traditional crop insurance?

"Crop insurance is only guaranteeing you a yield," says Kosior. "In the Moosomin area they would guarantee maybe a 35 or 45 bushel yield. If the price of the commodity drops, they're not protecting that. If the farmer decides to add a significant amount more fertilizer, seed or chemical inputs, they're not covered for that. Our product is a gross margin product which covers the cost of the fertilizer, seed and chemical, and so as the cost of those go up—in other words as you use more—our coverage goes up and then we cover a margin above the cost of that as well. So if there is a farmer in your area that has \$200 an acre of inputs and he buys another \$100 an acre of margin protection, we cover him for \$300 an acre."

Why have other companies not been offering a similar product?

"The data is very difficult to get," says Kosior. "That is one barrier to entry, and the other thing is, we have a unique combination in our group of ag accountants, farmers, ag finance people, and insurance people. So we have a group of us that all have a farming background but come at it from a little bit different approach."

The company has grown to 42 employ-



Global Ag Risk Solutions CEO Grant Kosior

ees, spread from Moosomin to Moose Jaw to Winnipeg to Red Deer, along with 80 independent sales consultants.

Kristjan Hebert of the Moosomin area has been instrumental in the growth of the company. "He's on my management team. I don't make a major decision without running it by him," says Kosior. "There isn't a day that we don't talk on the phone."

All the shareholders in the privately held company are from Saskatchewan. Kosior sees huge potential for growth in the United States.

"Our business in the U.S. is still in the infancy stage, so our main focus over the next couple of years will be to build out the distribution in the United States," he said. "We have been approached by Australia, Germany, South Africa, Italy, France, and the UK to bring the product there as well, but want to make sure that we take care of what's at home first before we start going too far away."

Global Ag Risk has set up its own sales network in Canada and is working within the existing distribution system in the U.S.

"In Canada we've got 80 sales people in Western Canada and then in the U.S. we utilize the existing U.S. crop insurance distribution force that is already in place down there," explains Kosior. "The difference is in the U.S. they already had a private distribution model already, whereas in Canada we had to build our own distribution model."

Kosior says that farmers using his insurance product end up putting more inputs into their crops, and getting more out of them.

"Farmers that use our product actually change their behavior and how they farm," he said. "They've got a different

kind of product. In the past, if they had an insurance policy from Sask Crop Insurance, for example, and the weather conditions weren't perfect, they might quit spending on their inputs, whereas our policy encourages them to keep spending on their inputs, and as a result of that, they usually end up with better margins. In fact, we did a study and it showed that farmers who were on our product on average grossed \$35 an acre more than farmers who are not on our product."

The way the policies are designed, farmers automatically have more coverage if they have to add more inputs to deal with a situation with the crop, such as disease or insects.

"By putting down additional inputs they are automatically getting additional insurance. If they had \$200 an acre of inputs and bought another \$100 of coverage over and above, they would be at \$300. The policy is for coverage for \$100 in excess of your inputs. If the inputs go up, the coverage increases automatically, and there is no additional premium."

Kosior said when the company began they anticipated rapid growth. "We were so excited because we knew farming as well as we did, and we knew the barriers to a farmer doing a better job was just that fear—what if I put those extra inputs down and Mother Nature still comes and gets me? If we could take away that fear, we knew that farmers would go for it. We knew it would change the farmers' mentality from survival mentality to swinging for the fence every year. I have been enthusiastic and excited about this idea since 2009 and, if anything, I'm even more excited about it than I was nine years ago."

Of course there are potential downsides

in any business.

"We have years like last year where we pay out an enormous amount of claims because it was so dry out west that there were a lot of farmers that really had a tough year, and we wrote some big cheques last year. A lot of people might look at it as a negative but I look at that as a positive because it was proof of concept. We put a minimum floor of revenue underneath those farmers, they kept farming and Mother Nature didn't quit kicking them in the shins, and as a result of that we paid big claims and they are able to continue farming without missing a step."

As the company has grown, the model has been tweaked, but has not been substantially changed.

"We've refined it and we've increased the level of coverage, but it started as a margin insurance product and that is still the foundation of what this company is. We may in the future change our distribution model but the concept of margin insurance to us is like gravity. It allows the farmer in the long run to be richer."

Where does Kosior see the company five years from now?

"In five years I suspect it will have added another couple of countries. I imagine that we will have more of an electronic online presence than we do now and I anticipate by then most likely we would have four or five billion dollars of risk taken on."

Kosior said there are both challenges and advantages to growing a company on the Prairies.

"We've been fortunate thus far that we've been able to attract the talent that we require," he said. "Potentially down the road we may have difficulty. One of the biggest problems is that Regina International Airport is no longer an international airport. For our purposes, having to transfer through Winnipeg or Calgary to get to places in the U.S. is a significant barrier."

Kosior said he enjoys running a growing business.

"It is a wonderful life, it is an exciting career, because we know that we're making a difference. We're able to walk out on a farm and help them realize their dreams, and that's just to farm the best they can and never have to cut back."

He said one challenge has been coming up with the best way to explain the product.

"In the early years, we were building the airplane as we were flying it," he says, "but in recent years our messaging has become more and more refined and that ultimately becomes one of the barriers to entry—even if somebody did try to come in and replicate the model it will still take them a number of years to figure out how to tell the story properly."

Kosior says he has thought about taking the company public, but isn't there yet.

"We certainly have a model that lends itself very well to going public, and we've done some analysis on it. We think it's too soon to take it public right now but it's not out of the question. It's on the radar screen. The fruit might be on the tree, it's just not ripe yet."

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Association hopes to put 'dollars in producers' jeans' for storing carbon

BY LAURA STEWART

Saskatchewan farmers may find ways to get paid for doing their part to sequester carbon to fight rising carbon in the atmosphere. The province's climate strategy, announced in December 2017, could bring that goal closer.

By setting a price for large industrial operations to buy offsets for the carbon they release, the plan will boost the market value for carbon stored in soil.

Cedric MacLeod, the executive director of the Canadian Forage and Grasslands Association, said in an interview, "It comes down to whether or not it's a voluntary or a legislated, regulated market."

MacLeod gave the example of Alberta, where the government set prices to start at \$15 per tonne of carbon dioxide and go up, even though they had been getting only \$2 to \$5 per tonne on a voluntary basis.

But before agricultural producers can get that money, they need a way to prove they have stored carbon in a measurable, meaningful way.

Grains and other agricultural products contain carbon, but most of it cycles quickly back to the atmosphere when humans eat the final food product for energy and breathe out carbon dioxide.

Instead researchers look for carbon "sinks" – places where carbon is building up over time. One promising place to look is agricultural soil.

Historically, Prairie soils lost carbon



Studies are under way to find a way for farmers to unlock the value of storing carbon in cropland and pasture.

when tillage exposed roots and other organic matter in the soil to decay.

But if farmers can reduce tillage and tip the balance so plant growth is putting more carbon into the soil than decay is taking out, then the soil becomes a sink.

The Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association has been collaborating on a study to show how soil carbon has changed since farmers started using zero-till methods in the 1990s.

John Bennett, a farmer and advisory committee member with the association, said early modeling assumed soil carbon would increase for a while but soon reach

a new steady state, or saturation, where no new storage was occurring.

But up to the latest sampling in 2011, at a network of sites across the province, soil carbon was still increasing.

Bennett said, "At the moment, the best data we have, which is the Prairie Soil Carbon Balance Project, is suggesting that saturation is a long way away."

Bennett sees potential for soil to eventually store even more carbon than it had before cultivation, as farmers continue to find new ways to increase plant productivity.

For example, when the soil carbon study started, farmers were starting to move away from tillage.

Later they added more crops in rotation, and moved to zero till methods, which included placing fertilizer better for efficient plant growth.

New revenue from carbon offsets might open up possibilities for further improvements.

Although the study focused on the effects of zero-till, the association wants to expand it to look at other ways of storing carbon.

"We're advocating we need a Prairie Soil Carbon Balance Project II, that has way more facets, and it has to address forages, managed rangelands, a whole plethora of things that have to be brought into

it," Bennett said.

Forages are the focus of a new Canada-wide project.

The Canadian Forages and Grassland Association recently received federal funding under the Agricultural Greenhouse Gases Program to find out how farmers can best store carbon in pastures and hay fields.

But there's a lot of variation across different regions, farm operations, and research findings.

The project will start by sorting out how to calculate carbon storage.

"What we're working on right now is a quantification protocol, which is the very first step," MacLeod said.

At a November technical workshop, researchers agreed they can already show a clear carbon-storing benefit of keeping grassland intact and not converting it to cropland.

The next step is to figure out what farmers and ranchers can do differently to coax their existing pastures and hay fields to store even more carbon.

"The third is actually to fire some pilot [sites] out on the landscape. That allows us to, A) test the protocol, and B) showcase these high-performance best-management practices," MacLeod said.

Soon, MacLeod hopes the project can at least help "get a few dollars in producers' jeans for maintaining the carbon we know they have."

Of course, all that will depend on the price of carbon.

Meanwhile, even if they're not directly paid for it, farmers and ranchers can still see returns for building up their soil.

MacLeod said a pasture with more root mass has more soil carbon, but it also produces more forage and more beef.

And Bennett cited the past growing season as evidence of improved climate resilience under contemporary cropping methods.

"If we went south of the Trans-Canada Highway last year, we had the driest year in, maybe recorded history, or very close to it. We actually didn't have any soil erosion to speak of, and we grew a crop," he said.



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Twenty-year partnership helping thousands in Ethiopia

BY FEDERICA GIANNELLI

Small seeds are powering the goal of feeding tens of thousands in Ethiopia, a country with one of the highest rates of food insecurity in the world. A University of Saskatchewan delegation led by researcher Carol Henry has just returned from meetings in Ethiopia that celebrated the outcomes of a 20-year partnership between U of S and Hawassa University. Mary Buhr, dean of Agriculture and Bioresources, and Maurice Moloney, executive director and CEO of the U of S Global Institute for Food Security, were part of the delegation.

"Farmers face an increasing challenge to feed everyone adequately, safely and sustainably as our world population grows," said Karen Chad, U of S vice-president research.

"International research partnerships



The pulse-cultivated land of farmer Dibawa Amedin, who has joined the project. Almost 36,000 women and their children have benefited from educational campaigns on the advantages of eating pulses

such as these put new knowledge and innovation directly into the hands of farmers who will use it to improve food security for their families and communities."

Since 1997, at least 15 U of S researchers have collaborated with Hawassa University to improve food and nutrition security for thousands of people in southern Ethiopia by providing tools and strategies for sustainable, climate-smart, gender-transformative agriculture based on the production of pulses such as haricot beans and chickpeas.

"For three days we came together to celebrate the success of this 20-year partnership," said nutrition professor Susan Whiting, who also attended the celebrative meetings at Hawassa University.

"Past and current students, collaborators and supporters were there, and while the focus was on the scientific outcomes of improving pulse agriculture and nutrition, there was friendship and a shared desire to continue with this work."

Working with the Ethiopian government and local organizations that focus on nutrition, agriculture and health, the Canadian government has invested a total \$8.65 million through the Canadian International Food Security Research Fund (CIFSRF), administered by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and Global Affairs Canada.

"Our 20-year journey has demonstrated the value of pulses in empowering the healthy future of Ethiopia," said Henry, assistant dean in Nutrition and Dietetics and the principal U of S investigator for the project.

By developing and introducing new varieties of pulses, researchers have provided smallholder farmers with high-protein crops rich in iron and zinc to combat hunger and malnutrition. The cultivation of these plants, which have good nitrogen-fixing capabilities, has also helped improve the extremely degraded Ethiopian soil.

"Literally thousands of men and women farmers are partners, and thousands of households have learned about and are benefitting from better nutrition, more stable income, and their healthier children



Farmer Sefiya Heliso is doing extremely well after participating in a U of S and Hawassa University project that promotes sustainable pulse-based agriculture in Ethiopia.

will be the next generation of change," said Buhr.

An interdisciplinary approach that combines soil management, processing nutrition, seed delivery systems and marketing has led to:

- Benefiting 70,000 Ethiopian households and boosting the local economy with novel soil management strategies and newly developed high-yielding pulses that produce three times more than older varieties. This means diverse sources of income and an increased number of food suppliers, with more women becoming leaders in this sector;
- Benefiting 10,000 Ethiopian house-

holds and impacting directly 36,000 women and their children through educational campaigns on the benefits of eating pulses and on food preparation to preserve the nutritious properties of these seeds;

• Successfully training 200 graduate students at Hawassa University, 40 per cent of whom are female, and having 26 U of S students visit Ethiopia to gain first-hand experience.

Building on these positive outcomes, the U of S and Hawassa University will collaborate with partners in Canada and sub-Saharan Africa to improve food security and sources of income for rural women, youth and their households.

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Understanding Canola Seeding Rates

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Canola seeding rates have always been a hot agronomic topic. With some simple tools and knowledge you can get to the bottom of this topic on your farm.

The Canola Council of Canada recommends 7 to 10 plant/ft square.

There is now discussion around a slightly lower plant density.

This is the result of emerging industry research that takes into account equipment changes, seed cost, seed size and improved vigor of hybrids.

A target plant density could look more like 5 to 7 plants/ft square in certain situations.

We have all seen the power of hybrid canola.

Hybrid canola stands with higher plant populations tend to create more competition within the stand causing thin stems.

This creates a stand more at risk for lodging. As well a dense stand creates a more disease prone environment. However, the industry will still caution against a very low plant density.

Stands lower than 4 plants/ft square can drop yield potential and factors such as reduced weed control and delayed maturity can become issues.

Before you even consider lowering your seeding rate, you must have an understanding of the seed survivability on your farm.

The Canola Council have created a great calculator to help you with this process on their website. <https://www.canolacalculator.ca/>

The calculator sets your target plant density based on a series of questions that relate to your individual field conditions, abilities and appetite for risk.

The calculation also has a component for seeding rate that takes into account your seed TKW and help you understand your seed emergence and survival.

The best way to get an understanding of your canola survivability is to do some square foot counts in your fields.

Counting seedlings in the spring or plant stems in the fall will give you an idea of survivability.



Canola seeding rates have always been a hot agronomic topic—the Canola Council of Canada recommends 7-10 plants per square foot.

TKW and survival play a large part in seeding rate as you can see in the example below.

Seeding rate (lb/acre) = 9.6 X target plant stand density /ft² X TKW (g)

Seedling survival (%)

Example 1 – 9.6 X 10 plants/ft² X 3.6 = 6.91 lbs per acre

50%

Example 2 – 9.6 X 10 plants/ft² X 3.6 = 4.93 lbs per acre

70%

The key in these 2 examples are the difference in seed survival.

Seeding at 7 lbs per acre doesn't seem realistic but seeding at just under 5 lbs does.

Are there ways that on farm you can decrease mortality risk – Absolutely!

Watch depth – canola mortality tends to be lower if seeded shallow into a moist, firm and warm seed bed. Aim for a consistent 1/2"-1" depth.

Limit Seed placed Fertilizer – Salts in fertilizer can harm canola seedlings. Make sure you are following seed placed guidelines.

Seeding speed – Seeding too fast can lead to variable depth.

Every drill and soil type is different so make sure to check often and find the speed that is working best for your situation.

Fan speed – Higher fan RPM rates are often needed to push through the fertilizer and seed needs for a productive canola crop.

This can cause seed damage and seed bounce out of the seed row.

Good luck in your quest for the perfect canola stand! Have a safe and successful seeding season!

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Manitoba introduces legislation on rural development

The Manitoba government is introducing new legislation that would modernize The Planning Act and ensure fair opportunities for economic development in rural municipalities, Municipal Relations Minister Jeff Wharton announced last week.

"Our government has worked extensively with municipalities and industry to see how improvements could be made to our existing regulatory framework," said Wharton.

"This new legislation strengthens our government's commitment to providing a fair say for municipalities on matters that affect their local community."

In addition to modernizing the current municipal zoning by-law review and approval process, Bill 19 The Planning Amendment Act (Improving Efficiency in Planning) would enhance 'fair say' by giving municipalities the option of setting a threshold for conditional use hearings for livestock, according to local needs.

Other changes would include:

- setting timelines for municipal board reviews of development plan by-laws;
- harmonizing hearing process requirements with those established in The Municipal Act;



New legislation on rural development is being introduced in the Manitoba legislature, above.

- introducing the option for members of the public attending planning hearings to opt to receive notice by e-mail;
- strengthening environmental protections by introducing a technical review process for aggregate quarry proposals;
- requiring municipalities to review their livestock operations zoning bylaws within one year;

- improving animal safety by enabling producers to upgrade existing facilities and clarifying this reinvestment does not require a new approval from council;
- dissolving the Interdepartmental Planning Board, which held its last meeting in January 2014;
- expediting the municipal zoning by-law approval process by increasing the minor variance threshold from 10 to 15 per cent; and
- allowing municipal officials authorized by council to grant variances on zoning bylaw requirements such as square footage, height and parking spaces without holding additional council hearings.

"We have seen many examples of the significant economic benefit that livestock development can offer communities in Manitoba," said Agriculture Minister Ralph Eichler. "Our government wants to provide municipalities with the opportunity to achieve that growth and development through a more equitable process. The proposed legislation takes a balanced approach to the livestock review and approval process that improves animal safety and maintains a high standard of environmental accountability."

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NADIA MORI, PAG,
REGIONAL FORAGE SPECIALIST
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Whether conditions will turn dry or not, extremes of weather have become more of a norm than the exception. The best way to manage your pasture or range through these tosses and turns is to A) have a plan and B) keep your forage stand as healthy as possible.

No roots—no Grass

Have you ever strained to grab something from a shelf but despite your efforts, the desired item stayed out of reach? That is how your forage root system feels when it is too short to access a moisture layer which may be just below its reach. Roots are out of sight and often out of mind. Yet, it pays to remember that roughly two-thirds of total plant growth occurs below ground, while the visible above ground portion only makes up about one-

third. This extensive root system forms the lifeline for forage plants and helps ensure long-term survival as well as productivity. Remember that drought stress can reduce or impair root growth even without added grazing pressure.

Resist the urge

It is challenging but imperative to leave residual forage at a height of 3-4 inches (7-10cm). Removing every last blade of grass only leads to a longer road to recovery. The resulting rest period will automatically be longer. The grazing stubble left behind also helps shade and cool the soil, which reduces evaporation and conserves what little moisture there is. Just as important as removing the animals on time, is resisting the urge to put livestock back on a pasture as soon as some form of regrowth has occurred. Grass regrowth needs to reach 8 -10 inches (20-25cm) before animals can return to that paddock. Overgrazed plants will dip into the root reserves and stop allocating

resources to root growth in an attempt to survive short-term. If dry conditions persist into subsequent years, desirable plants will first reduce production and eventually disappear from your stand.

It takes moisture to grow grass

This may be obvious but it is a reminder that there are no miracle solutions to forage growth in dry conditions. The absence of moisture will inevitably result in an absence of forage growth. Adjusting stocking rates and using alternative feeding systems helps protect your pastures, your animals, and your financial bottom line.

Keeping pastures healthy during good weather conditions is an investment in ensuring the pasture will remain more productive during weather extremes and recover quicker in the aftermath. Leaving sufficient carry-over may be the hardest but most critical management tool in dry conditions.



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Learning outside of the classroom leads to industry connection

BY CRYSTAL JORGENSON

A University of Manitoba student has partnered with Manitoba Beef and Forages Initiatives (MBFI) in a unique learning opportunity that brings together academic learning and industry experience.

Mikayla Rouire, second year Diploma in Agriculture student, utilized a special project course offering in the School of Agriculture to create her own project with MBFI last fall.

Over the past year, she interacted with industry members, attended a producer event, developed communications materials and organized an on-campus information booth.

Manitoba Beef and Forage Initiatives is a Brandon-based collaborative effort

between Manitoba Agriculture, the Manitoba Beef Producers, Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Manitoba Forage and Grassland Association, with input and leadership from producers, academia and other industry stakeholders across Canada.

"At MBFI, we utilize science-based research and innovative farming practices within the beef and forage industry to boost producers' economic success and environmental sustainability, and to engage the next generation of consumers on topics of public trust," said Ramona Blyth, MBFI chairperson and a beef producer from MacGregor, MB. "So for MBFI to build this relationship with the University of Manitoba students via Mikayla is a valuable step on all

of our key fronts."

The win-win for both parties was clear to Rouire.

"This project has given me the opportunity to forge valuable relationships with members of the industry that wouldn't arise in a classroom setting. I strongly believe the special project option has allowed me to gain real world experience in the agriculture industry," said Rouire.

One of Mikayla's assignments included planning an information session that will take place Friday, March 16 from 11 am to 12:45 pm in the Agriculture Building Atrium (66 Dafoe Road, Winnipeg). Students and staff will have an opportunity to interact with MBFI representatives to learn more about initiatives, research, and technologies involved in the beef and forage industry and underway

at the three farm sites of the MBFI.

Mikayla noted that public engagement is a critical part of MBFI's mandate. "I quickly learned that the success of this industry in our evolving society relies on having an educated consumer base. Knowledge exchange was at the heart of some of the assignments that I completed as part of this project."

The Agriculture Diploma Special Project is a three-credit hour course which allows a student to make practical application of scientific knowledge acquired to intensify the study of a topic of particular interest.

Students must be active participants in developing the course and project requirements so that it can meet their individual learning objectives.



Mikayla Rouire is in her second year Diploma in Agriculture.

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What's ahead for 2018 balance sheets and income statements?

BY JP GERVAIS

We estimate Canadian farm cash receipts totaled CA \$62.3 billion in 2017. That's a 3.3 percent increase, despite a drop of roughly 1 percent in year-over-year average commodity prices. But although total farm operating expenses are estimated to have also climbed in the same period, we estimate the sector's 2017 net cash income (revenues—operating expenses) at CA \$16.3 billion, or a very healthy 6 percent above the record-high profitability reached in 2016.

Looking ahead, Canadian agriculture revenues should be stable in 2018, growing 0.5 percent from the estimated 2017 level. Stable farm revenues and small increases to expenses yield a bottom line in 2018 that we expect will be roughly equal to the 2016-2017 average of \$15.8 billion.

What this means for you

Driving 2018 revenues will be continued strength in global demand for Canadian exports and a Canadian dollar remaining below the US \$0.80 threshold levels.

However, profitability will face some pressure. Total operating expenses are projected up 2 percent to CA \$46.7 billion in 2018, although they're not likely to increase quickly. Oil prices are expected to average around US \$60/barrel and the prices of key fertilizers aren't projected to climb significantly.

As well, the global supply of agricultural commodities will likely climb faster than demand for many of the commodities Canada produces. But knowing this can help you anticipate the changes you may see in your income statement and identify efficiency gains needed to face revenues levelling out in 2018.

Overall asset values, debt expected to increase in 2018

Land is usually the largest farm asset.

Our analysis suggests that the value of land and buildings climbed in 2017, perhaps as much as 5-6 percent. We project a 2-3 percent average increase in farmland values in Canada in 2018, in line with average annual productivity gains in crops and livestock. This would continue Canadian land values' upward trend, although we expect it climbed at a slower pace than in previous years.

These projections, however, are uncertain until FCC publishes the actual movement in average farmland values on April 23. The ambiguity arises because of the lag between the date the Bank of Canada changes rates and the time when those changes are fully reflected in the economy. Even though the Bank increased rates twice in 2017, both increases occurred in the last half of the year. The timing may not have limited land purchases in that period. 2018 may prove to be a different story.

That anticipated growth in farm asset values in 2017 and 2018 helped push FCC's December 2017 debt projections slightly upward for both years. We expect soon-to-be-released data will show farm debt outstanding grew at least 6 percent in 2017. We expect it to grow 4-5 percent in 2018, a slowing of

the growth rate due to higher borrowing costs.

Debt likely grew faster than asset values in 2017—and it should continue to do so in 2018. However, net worth (owners' equity, or assets-liabilities) across Canadian agriculture is still expected to climb. That's generally good news—and it speaks to the sector's resiliency and optimism. Canadian farm equity has continued to grow despite softer commodity prices, thanks in part to the buffering effect of the dollar on

overall revenues.

I say this with one caution: The lower total net income expected across Canadian agriculture in 2018, combined with the overall sector's growing equity, suggests we'll see a lower rate of return on equity in 2018.

Rising interest rates and declining income can impact the growth rate of equity, especially for farms that are highly leveraged.



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Federal, Manitoba gov'ts invest in soybean-based epoxy lab

An investment of more than \$167,000 in new equipment will help a Manitoba epoxy and resin company increase the renewable content of its products, improve efficiency and create new jobs, federal Agriculture Minister Lawrence MacAulay and Manitoba Agriculture Minister Ralph Eichler announced recently, noting funds will be provided through Growing Forward 2, a five-year federal-provincial-territorial initiative.

"The Government of Canada is committed to supporting innovation and efficiency in the agriculture, agri-food and bio-products sector. Initiatives like these help strengthen our economy and create good middle-class jobs for Manitobans, and will reduce our environmental footprint," said MacAulay.

"Manitoba is proud to support the growth of our ag research and bio-product industries with investments like this," said Eichler. "The important work being done at EcoPoxy advances both our economic and environmental goals in agriculture, and builds on Manitoba's strategic advantages. These include our growing conditions and access to bio-products such as soybean oil, world-class testing and research facilities, and innovative Manitobans who are committed to capitalizing on new ideas and opportunities."

EcoPoxy produces epoxies and coatings from bio-based ingredients such as soybean oil and other renewable materials, which are used for floor coatings, artwork, boat building, countertops, tables and many other applications. The funding will be used to purchase and install lab equipment to test product quality, and automated processing and packaging equipment, improving overall production levels by 80 per cent and reducing packaging costs by 75 per cent.

"EcoPoxy will benefit greatly with the addition of this equipment," said Jack Maendel, chief executive officer, EcoPoxy. "The testing equipment will allow us to immediately test newly developed epoxy samples and get the results within 24 to 48 hours, instead of the current process which is at great cost and takes three to four weeks. The filling equipment will speed up our process to fulfil orders, which is currently being done by hand."

EcoPoxy is based near Morris and currently employs 15 people, and the minister noted two new jobs are expected to be created as a result of this investment. Many of the company's ingredients are grown in the province and its products are manufactured with bio-based materials such as soybean oil, cashew nut oil and recycled eggshells. Currently, some of EcoPoxy's products are considered 53 per cent renewable content. The minister noted this investment will support the company's goal of producing a fully renewable product.

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FCC makes investment in the future of agriculture

Farm Credit Canada (FCC) has committed \$100,000 towards the construction of the Livestock and Forage Centre of Excellence (LFCE) – a world-class facility that will unite livestock and forage research, and allow for enhanced teaching and outreach. Marty Seymour, FCC's director of industry and stakeholder relations, said that FCC was eager to support the project, knowing the positive effects the centre will have not only on the cattle and forage industries, but on students who will have access to the most advanced facilities and best practices.

"We are proud to invest in projects that support agricultural research and enhance the student experience. This will also help attract the best and the brightest into pursuing an education and future career in agriculture."

FCC has been supporting agricultural initiatives at the University of Saskatchewan for more than 30 years, supporting student awards, helping to fund the construction of the Rayner Dairy Research and Teaching Facility, and recently provided the necessary funds to refurbish a study area for agriculture students.

Mary Buhr, Dean of the College of Agriculture and Bioresources at the University of Saskatchewan, said the support of donors like FCC has been crucial in helping bring the vision of the LFCE to reality.

"When we brought forward the LFCE initiative to Farm Credit Canada, they recognized the potential of these facilities and this centre to benefit the cattle and forage industries, to advance research, to help producers gain access to new innovation and to provide the human capacity and leadership that our industry needs," Buhr said. "We are grateful for their support."

FCC's donation will go towards construction of the livestock and food building at the Clavet site, which will house a meeting room and handling facilities equipped with real-time video capability, allowing in-house and distance edu-



Janelle Smith, M.Sc. Candidate in the Department of Animal and Poultry Science, will be one of the first students to conduct research at the newly constructed LFCE facilities once they open in spring, 2018.

cation and outreach activities to be conducted. Two new facilities for the LFCE are expected to be completed in the spring of 2018 and will complement current livestock and forage research sites. The LFCE, a partnership

between the U of S, the livestock and forage industries, and the Saskatchewan and federal governments, will unite livestock and forage field laboratories and science labs in a collaborative centre with a total cost of \$36 million.

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Agriculture groups welcome CPTPP signing

Canadian agriculture groups are welcoming the signing of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

The Canadian Cattlemen's Association was represented in Santiago, Chile for the official signing ceremony for the agreement.

CCA Vice President David Haywood-Farmer and staff John Masswohl witnessed International Trade Minister François-Philippe Champagne sign the agreement along with his counterparts from the 10-member countries. The CPTPP will provide Canada beef producers with competitive access to Japan, Vietnam and other dynamic markets in the Asia-Pacific region, provided Canada implements the agreement quickly.

While in Chile, CCA impressed upon the Minister the urgency for Canada to ratify the CPTPP or risk being left behind.

All that's required for the agreement to come into force is for six of the 11 signatories to complete their domestic ratification procedures. Canada has said it will implement the CPTPP 'expeditiously,' and Minister Champagne had previously pointed to the fall in terms of a timeline.

However, at a news conference following the signing ceremony, Mexico indicated it is slated to introduce a bill by April 30; Chile, Vietnam, Singapore and Malaysia indicated by year end, a time frame that's feasible also for Australia and New Zealand.

CCA is advocating to the Government that Canada must pass legislation quickly to be among the first six to ratify or we will be at a serious disadvantage.

A recent analysis from the Government of Canada indicates that without the U.S., CPTPP is expected to increase Canadian beef exports by \$380 million.

This is a 90 per cent increase from the \$200 million earlier estimated for the original Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) which included the U.S.

Once the CPTPP is implemented, Canadian beef will immediately be imported into Japan at the same preferential tariff as Australian



Canadian Cattlemen's Association VP David Haywood-Farmer at the official signing ceremony for the CPTPP.

beef and will be relieved from the 50 per cent safeguard tariff on frozen beef that had been in place since July 2017.

With the CPTPP, Canada will be exempt from future applications of Japan's beef safeguard tariff.

Importantly, in a time of growing anti-globalization sentiment internationally, CPTPP countries have demonstrated a commitment to deepening regional trade and integration.

International trade is the lifeblood for beef producers as the value of each animal can only be maximized when every part of the animal can be sold to the market that most values it.

Of course, Canada also has potential to realign under the Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade agreement with Europe

as well as massive potential in China. Trade deals like the CPTPP benefit the entire Canadian agriculture sector and the economy, helping to secure a truly sustainable future for the beef industry.

Grain Growers of Canada also welcomed the signing of the new comprehensive trade agreement. Representing some of our most lucrative and fastest growing markets for grains, pulses, and oilseeds, participation in this new trade agreement is an important step in meeting the Government's ambitious target of \$75 billion in agri-food exports by 2025.

"Signing CPTPP, as well as the investments in Asian trade in Budget 2018, show the Government understands the importance of Asian markets to Canadian agriculture," said Grain Growers of Canada President, Jeff

Nielsen. "We look forward to working with Ministers Champagne and MacAulay to ensure that we get the agreement ratified as soon as possible."

"Grain farmers seek a level playing field and rules-based terms when engaging with trading partners," continued Mr. Nielsen. "The tariff reductions and trade rules that have been negotiated in this historic trade agreement will bring growth and real benefits to the Canadian economy as a whole."

SARM also applauded the move. "The NAFTA negotiations appear to be somewhat volatile, creating economic uncertainty moving forward," said SARM President Ray Orb. "SARM is pleased to see that the Government of Canada is working to create more market access that will benefit producers."

"The expansion of Canada's international trade is important as trade with our biggest trading partner, the U.S., continues to face uncertainty," said President Orb. "While these trade agreements are important, we must continue to press for positive changes to the national supply chain so products can get to market."

Cereals Canada Cam Dahl, President of Cereals Canada stated, "the CPTPP agreement will improve access and trading conditions between Canada and key partners such as Japan. The agreement's benefits and influence are also expected to grow as potential new entrants such as Indonesia seek to join." He added, "this agreement demonstrates how like-minded partners across the Asia-Pacific region can continue to work together to promote the benefits of trade."

"Canada's leadership in advancing this agreement will enable a stronger trading environment for Canadian farmers and exporters. To maintain momentum and support the CPTPP, Canada needs to be a 'first mover' as one of the first six countries ratifying the agreement," Dahl says. "Cereals Canada calls on the Government of Canada to introduce ratification legislation before Parliament recesses for summer."

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New screening technique will allow crop breeders to develop drought resistant varieties faster

BY ASHLEY DOPKO
Chithra Karunakaran and Karen Tanino's team developed a simple non-destructive method to screen hundreds of wheat leaf samples in a day, reducing the time and cost associated with traditional breeding programs to select varieties for drought tolerance. Their findings were published in the November issue of *Physiologia Plantarum*.

"Developing these types of tools better enables physiologists to complement breeding programs," said Tanino, a professor of plant sciences at the U of S.

"By identifying key traits of interest, which can be targeted and rapidly screened, we can enable breeders to accelerate crop improvement."

According to Statistics Canada, Canadian wheat production is anticipated to decline by 19.5 per cent in 2017, in part due to the dry conditions experienced in the prairies. As global temperatures shift and rainfall patterns become more erratic, drought will continue to contribute to low yields and loss of food production.

Using the wax of a flag leaf as their test subject, the team members examined the morphological characteristics of the plant, as well as the chemical signatures, comparing the drought-resistant Stettler wheat variety to the Superb, which is more vulnerable to drought conditions. The



From left to right: Ian Willick, Perumal Vijayan, David Muir, Chithra Karunakaran and Karen Tanino.

flag leaf is the final leaf to emerge during plant development and is crucial for attaining high yields.

"The agriculture community knows that leaf wax plays a role in conserving water and acts as a physical barrier to disease," said Karunakaran, manager of environmental and earth sciences at the CLS, "but before this we hadn't understood why

that's happening on a molecular level."

Using the bright light produced at the CLS, Karunakaran and her team were the first to link micro and macronutrients in the leaves in relation to their ability to tolerate drought, finding higher levels of zinc in the drought-resistant Stettler. These results could have significant implications for future breed-

ing programs, and also raise questions about the role of zinc in fertilizer.

Current breeding programs base drought tolerance on crop yields, using field trials to determine results. The new method will allow scientists to characterize drought-tolerant varieties much earlier, resulting in reduced costs and taking the new variety from the lab to the field

much faster.

Now that methods and protocols have been established, this project will extend to new varieties, eventually looking at other crops such as canola, al-

lowing Canadian farmers to stay competitive in a global market.

This research was supported by the Saskatchewan Agriculture Development Fund.

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Diversifying chickpea genetics for better crop performance

BY SARATH PEIRIS

University of Saskatchewan researchers Bunyamin Tar'an and Donna Lindsay at the Crop Development Centre (CDC) are part of an international project that will increase the genetic diversity of chickpea crops by providing plant breeders around the world with access to thousands of seed progeny from wild plants.

"The scale and depth of this study makes it unique," said Tar'an, Agri-Food Innovation Chair at the CDC. "This research generated close to 10,000 progeny from crossing samples from where wild chickpeas grow in southeastern Turkey and crossing them with cultivated lineages."

In a paper published Feb. 13 in Nature Communications, the 49 university researchers, faculty members and

students involved in the five-year project say the seed collection they've developed "contains greatly expanded diversity and a range of traits of potential agronomic importance." The collaboration was led by Doug Cook from the University of California Davis.

The diversity of available materials means chickpea breeders from countries such as Canada, Turkey, India, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Russia, Australia and the United States can select desired genetic traits to address their current problems and future opportunities.

"Characteristics like drought, heat and cold tolerance, seed nutrient density, reduced dependence on inputs and resistance to stresses—many of these are crucial for the sustainability of the chickpea crop in Western Canada," explained Tar'an.



Pictured above is Bunyamin Tar'an—Agri-Food Innovation Chair at the CDC.

Cream of the crop



Pictured above is the U of S Range Team.

Co-ordinated by the Society for Range Management, the exam provides an opportunity for undergraduate students to demonstrate higher order learning skills and synthesis knowledge of the art and science of rangeland management. Individuals and teams are both eligible to compete.

The U of S team is comprised of 15 students from the College of Agriculture and Bioresources, with various

majors and backgrounds. They meet to study and prepare for the exam—on top of their regular course loads, assignments and exams. The team even engaged in a variety of fundraising activities to secure the trip.

In total, 24 teams from across North America competed this year. This is the first time the U of S team has come out on top, placing a very close second last year.

Coaching the team is Nadia Mori, a college alumna.

The CDC, which has developed more than 400 commercialized crop varieties since its inception in 1971, provided the protocols for successful crossing between the wild and cultivated varieties of chickpeas during the early stages of the project.

U of S expertise and facilities such as the greenhouse complex, phytotron, analytical lab and field breeding lab were critical to analysing seed nutrition quality, stress tolerance and disease resistance in chickpea plants.

While the new primary seed material gathered for the project are maintained in a gene bank in Turkey, the progeny lines (more than 2,500 in all) were distributed to member countries of the project. Research at the U of S has now generated more than 650 diverse seed lines that are available for the CDC's chickpea genetic improvement program.

While the new progeny material can be readily used in breeding programs, it could take as many as 10 years until the traits are fully integrated into commercial varieties because plant breeding is a long-term endeavour, Tar'an said.

"The research we describe in Nature truly reflects the value of global collaborations with common goals and sharing expertise among different groups," he said.

Sarath Peiris is assistant director of Research Profile and Impact at the U of S



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The Trump factor and trade agreements

It feels like I have written this before. That I suppose is because in terms of agriculture there are often ongoing storylines to follow, and the latest among those is Donald Trump.

It was in Yorkton in March last year that John Gormley, long-time radio talk show host, and former Member of Parliament, spoke about the then still newly minted president.

"The man takes unorthodox to levels most of us can't understand...He turns every single assumption on its head. From beginning to end it will be a presidency without precedent. There is no playbook for him, no template for this," he said.

John DePutter, founder and President of DePutter Publishing Ltd., speaking at a Farm Credit Canada Ag Knowledge Exchange event held in Yorkton last February also suggested Trump could cause marketing waves.

In crystal balling the commodity prices at the time DePutter said there were unknown influences, one being American president Donald Trump.

"We're talking about a loose cannon, a wild card," he said.

DePutter said he has always termed unexpected shocks in terms of price 'black swans' adding Trump qualifies as one of those.



Calvin Daniels

While noting he is generally on side with Republican ideals, DePutter said he is not sure Trump was a good choice as leader. He pointed to a general trend away from the concept of free trade.

"There's an anti-globalization trend going on too, which is sad. Agriculture needs exports," he said. "The U.S. and Canada both benefit from an open grain trade."

Jump to March 2018, and we see the concerns broached by Gormley and DePutter are most certainly taking place.

A revised Trans-Pacific Partnership, renamed Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, has been hammered out and agreed to by Canada and its partners with one exception, the United States.

The new CPTPP doesn't fit with the vision of protectionist president Trump.

The North American Free Trade Deal is being renegotiated because of Trump, although whether the United States is sincere in wanting a new deal is rather unclear. It seems increasingly that Trump will make sure the deal is never achieved opening the door to the US making unilateral trade decisions that the president believes will only favour his country.

The idea of fairness is far from Trump's way of thinking.

Evidence of his increasingly protectionist thinking Trump signed an order March 8 to impose tariffs of 25 percent on imported steel and 10 percent on imported aluminum.

Trump did exempt Canada and Mexico from the tariffs, although the U.S. government has dropped hints the exception is only temporary, linking Canada's fate on tariffs to the outcome of the NAFTA negotiations. In other words the exemption to the huge tariffs is being presented as the carrot to get Canada and Mexico to sign the new NAFTA deal without making waves, making Trump and his party look better ahead of 2018 congressional elections.

The Trump factor is certainly a chill wind in terms of trade, and is likely to gather force as the president tries to mold the U.S. in his image of what is good for America.



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Slow spring thaw seen

A slow spring thaw is forecast for the Prairies.

"I think it's a matter of biding your time for the next three weeks and then we will see more of a change to warmer-than-normal conditions," says David Phillips, senior climatologist for Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Prairie temperatures could trend slightly above normal getting into May, adds Brett Anderson, senior meteorologist and Canadian weather specialist for AccuWeather.

But Anderson doesn't see much alleviation of Prairie dryness. "March into April, it looks like drier-than-normal conditions, especially across southern Alberta into southern Saskatchewan," Anderson says. "As we warm up in May, we may trend

back toward normal for rainfall."

Phillips notes that the Prairies typically receive 20 per cent of their annual snowfall after the first day of spring. And that snow is generally very wet, providing moisture to upper layers of the soil.

Prairie producers could use it, as prior to snow dumps earlier this month, parts of the region suffered historically low snowfall totals and precipitation since the beginning of September, Phillips notes.

Unlike most years, the dangers of flooding in parts of Saskatchewan and Manitoba are minimal.

"A combination of lower snowpack and slow start to spring, no sun or big warm ups, that threat is below average for this year," Anderson says.

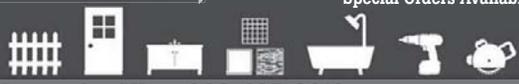


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Thinking small

BY GLENN CHEATER

As eureka moments go, it didn't entirely follow the script.

There was the flash of inspiration and a flush of excitement when a check of the literature showed that, yes, this could be the real deal.

But Fiona Buchanan's exhilarating news wasn't immediately embraced.

"I told my lab manager Kayla Maddler, 'We're going to get into mealworms' and she said, 'Oh no, we're not,'" recalled the U of S professor.

Raising creepy crawlies was, she admitted, not something you'd expect a beef cattle molecular geneticist to do. But she was able to convince Maddler that mealworms aren't "gross" and raising them actually has an upside.

"They're not maggots, the beetles can't fly, and on winter days when it's minus 30 out, she's in a room that's 25 degrees and has high humidity. So, she loves these guys," said Buchanan.

Colleagues were also a bit skeptical at first, but then quick to see how raising the larvae of darkling beetles could be a game-changer for Prairie wheat farmers, who have been hit hard by soaring rates of a disease called Fusarium head blight.

"Last year, 80 per cent of the cereal crop on the Prairies was infected —80 per cent," noted Buchanan. "So, what do you do with all this infected product?"

One possible, but entirely unexpected, answer to that question arrived out of the blue one day when Buchanan and her husband, a grain farmer, were having breakfast with a farmer friend named Dale Hicks. When Hicks mentioned he had heard of an insect that could eat Fusarium-infected wheat with no ill effects, a light bulb went on. As soon as she got back to her office, Buchanan started searching the research literature. Sure enough, there was a paper on a small



Photo by Christina Weese

Fiona Buchanan's research involves feeding mealworms to baby chicks.

study that found mealworms could not only survive, but thrive on what would be extremely harmful doses for mammals.

It was, to say the least, a surprising find. Fusarium head blight, which is caused by a fungus, produces mycotoxins, including one called vomitoxin that causes nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain in humans. In livestock, it's linked with long-term health issues, including decreased feed intake, ultimately impacting growth. Mammals can only tolerate minute amounts—five parts per million (ppm) for cattle and poultry, two ppm for humans, and just one ppm for dairy cows and swine.

Those extremely low tolerance levels mean there's not a lot you can do with Fusarium-infected wheat. Or, at least, until now.

The paper Buchanan found hinted at a solution, but it was a small-scale study on just 30 mealworms given feed artificially infected with four types

of Fusarium, none of which are the major variety causing wheat farmers on the Prairies so much grief. Moreover, two of those types caused high mortality rates in the mealworms.

So Buchanan and masters student Carlos Ochoa Sanabria set up an experiment with a much larger sample (10,000 mealworms) and fed them wheat with a range of mycotoxin contamination from Fusarium graminearum found across the Prairies.

The results were everything the team—which included toxicologist Natacha Hogan, insect physiologist Cedric Gillott, and feed processing expert Rex Newkirk, all from the U of S—hoped for.

"These mealworms eat this infected grain quite happily—in fact, they actually prefer it," explained Buchanan. "It doesn't affect their weight gain, their survivability is actually higher, and they convert it into a sustainable,

safe source of protein and fat."

Just how mealworms manage this feat isn't known. Perhaps there's some sort of detoxifying bacteria in their gut, or maybe it's something in the genetic makeup of the insects.

"Frankly, I don't really care—I'm just happy they are munching up wheat that's currently worth nothing but could now have a value if this pans out," Buchanan said.

Additional studies are planned: Frass (insect poop) will be tested to see if the toxin passes through the mealworms or whether they are somehow able to convert it into something else. Buchanan's team also has to further investigate whether the critters, when given the choice, will choose healthy plump wheat kernels over shrivelled, infected ones.

A study on the effect on chickens is also in the works. But since the toxin levels in the mealworms drops to 0.13 parts per

million (even when the feed has nearly 100 times that level) and the mealworms offer crude protein (with the right amino acid profile) and fat, it shouldn't be a problem.

Neither will production. Buchanan started with 500 mealworms (you can order them online), but now has tubs full of them.

"These guys are very easy to raise," she said. "They like to eat wheat, and they eat it dry. All we have is these big plastic tubs with wheat kernels covered with paper towels that we spritz twice a week. And that's all there is to it."

Many vacated buildings in rural areas (especially if they're near a seed cleaning plant that could supply infected grain and/or screenings) would be suitable for raising these "mini livestock."

"I personally think the chickens would enjoy eating them live and, let's face it, chickens and fish should be eating grubs anyhow because it's part of their natural diet," said Buchanan, although she acknowledged it's more likely they'll be processed into pellets.

It all seems like an odd journey, sparked by a comment over coffee to a cattle geneticist. But it's also a return to a long-held area of interest for the transplanted New Zealander, who came to U of S in 1995. She did her masters on a fungus that infects mosquito larvae, and has a paperweight in her office encasing a giant weta—a mouse-sized insect from her homeland that sports huge mandibles and nasty looking spikes on its back legs.

"They're herbivores but when they fall out of a tree on somebody, you should hear the screaming," she said with a laugh. "I love insects, they're great."

If mealworms live up to their promise, Prairie wheat growers will be saying the same thing.

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NRGene crop research partnership maps lentil genomes

In cutting-edge research aimed at breeding better lentils, a partnership between University of Saskatchewan (U of S) crop scientists and world-leading genomic big data company NRGene of Israel has successfully sequenced two wild lentil genomes—the largest legume genomes ever assembled.

Largely due to advances in plant breeding at the U of S, Canada is the world's leading exporter of lentils, delivering millions of tons of lentils to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh where this vegetable-based protein serves as a critical food source.

The research, part of the \$7.9-million Genome Canada-funded "Application of Genomics to Innovation in the Lentil Economy (AGILE)," is led by U of S scientists Kirstin Bett and Bert Vandenberg. With the help of NRGene's genomic assembly and analysis technology, the research is expected to empower future breeding efforts aimed at enhancing lentil yield and quality.

"NRGene's technology has dramatically accelerated our research, which aims to shed light on lentil domestication and adaptation," said Bett. "Through identifying beneficial traits from wild relatives and integrating them into the genome of the domesticated lentil, we can now develop lentil varieties with much improved vigor, resilience and productivity. Maintaining sustainable lentil production will play an important role in addressing the world's need for an ecologically sound protein source that is also highly nutritious."

Professor Bett's group leads the international lentil genome sequencing initiative which has resulted in the release of a "reference genome" (a complete genome sequence) for a Canadian-cultivated lentil variety. Now with additional genomic information from the wild species, the researchers have a much broader view of genes and pathways that enable lentils to thrive in volatile climatic conditions.

She noted that to date, breeders have only been able to access a small fraction of the total germplasm diversity in existence, which hinders Canadian producers' ability to meet growing global demand. With its focus on wild lentil genomes, the project is aimed at introducing genetic diversity with great precision and speeding up the breeding cycle to provide breeders with faster access to better lentil varieties.

The U of S Crop Development Centre (CDC), which to date has developed 400 commercial crop varieties, is working with NRGene to sequence several of the world's major crops. A huge step forward in crop genomic research was the release this year of the wild Emmer wheat genome sequence generated using NRGene technology and involving U of S scientists. Emmer

wheat is the wild form of all the domesticated wheat in the world. The work was published in Science in July of 2017.

Knowledge gained from this innovative research is expected to have an immediate effect on the world food supply since the scientists at the CDC are directly applying genomics to breeding of superior varieties grown on millions of acres. NRGene data provides the underlying understanding that can lead to breeding seeds for higher yields with fewer resources.

"Our partners at the University of Saskatchewan are aggressively pursuing the quest to identify essential traits that strengthen the genetics of the crops that feed the world," said NRGene CEO Gil Ronen. "We look forward to our continued partnership to disrupt the cycle of world hunger by offering harder, more nutritious plants."



Crop scientists Kirstin Bett and Bert Vandenberg examine lentil plants.

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¹ Beckie and Rebound, 2009. Selecting for Weed Resistance: Herbicide Rotation and Mixture. Weed Technology, 23: 363-370
² AgData 2016, Glyphosate BPI Report
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Mealworms may turn infected wheat into cash

BY FEDERICA GIANNELLI

The potential solution discovered by University of Saskatchewan researchers for producers stuck with unsellable fusarium-infected wheat may actually put cash in the farmers' pockets and open up a new worm-based niche market in the feed industry.

"We want to help producers by making use of grain that is worth nothing and that no one knows how to dispose of safely," said Fiona Buchanan, animal and poultry science professor.

Buchanan and her master's student Carlos Ochoa have found that yellow mealworms can eat wheat infected with the fungus, whose mycotoxins are harmful. The worms remain unaffected after eating the grain, regardless of the level of mycotoxins which usually cause vomiting and abdominal pain in humans and affect the growth of livestock.

The fattened mealworms, the offspring of a flightless beetle, could be a new, nutritious source of protein for chickens or fish.

"Yellow mealworms are a safe, more sustainable and cheaper feed, and can eliminate a contaminated product from the environment at the same time," said Ochoa.

Buchanan added that farmers usually bury or burn



Carlos Ochoa (left) and Fiona Buchanan have found use of crawling critters to get rid of salvage wheat

the contaminated wheat, but these are not great options. Burying the grain does not eliminate the fungus and it may spread to next year's crops, and burning it causes pollution, worsening the environmental impact.

Buchanan got the idea of using mealworms for wheat disposal after talking over coffee with a farmer friend, who referred to a small study that showed a few mealworms eating contaminated wheat.

Using 10,000 mealworms, Buchanan and Ochoa proved that, regardless of the level of contamination in the wheat the crawlers ate, they always showed only 0.13 parts per million of mycotoxin in their bodies—way below recommended safety levels for animal consumption.

Ochoa, who presented his research at a U.S. conference last summer, said he and Buchanan bought a tonne of contaminated wheat from a farmer, then used a machine to concentrate the mycotoxin levels and fed it to mealworms.

If additional funding becomes available, Buchanan would like to test even higher toxicities to determine the threshold of the mealworms for consuming infected wheat and start trials on chickens by feeding them crawlers grown on contaminated wheat.

The project was funded by the Saskatchewan Agriculture Development Fund. If all goes well with the research and if the researchers get approval from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, their goal is to start a company selling worms to chicken farmers in four or five years.

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NSERC awards \$1.65 million for fertilizer remediation training program

Soil researcher Steven Siciliano has been awarded \$1.65 million over six years by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council's (NSERC) to train a new cadre of scientists in sustainable environmental remediation of fertilizer sites. The funding is part of NSERC's Collaborative Research and Training Experience (CREATE) program.

"Fertilizer is key to a safe and sustainable food supply," said Siciliano, NSERC/Co-op Industrial Research Chair in In Situ Remediation and Risk Assessment. "However, the incidental release of fertilizers during distribution can cause environmental damage. The program will focus on ways to minimize the damage, restore ecosystems adversely impacted during fertilizer distribution, and develop cost-effective methods of remediation."

Including \$432,000 in funding from the U of S, \$432,000 in internship stipends from four industry partners, and \$239,000 from other participating universities, the Sustainable Applied Fertilizer Environment Remediation (SAFER) graduate training program is worth a combined total of about \$2.7 million.

Siciliano has assembled a 10-person team of academic and industry experts in soil science, renewable resources, land and food systems, indigenization, toxicology, fertilizer management, and agriculture for the SAFER program.

"Through this major public-private investment, we will work with industry to address a global problem involving fertilizer distribution that has particular relevance for Western Canada," said Karen Chad, U of S vice-president research,



Soil researcher Steven Siciliano.

"This tremendous collaboration among universities, academic disciplines and industry will train scientists who will safeguard the environment and help industry and communities with cost-effective remediation solutions."

In collaboration with the European Union's International Masters in Applied Ecology (IMEA) program, SAFER will train 29 master's and 13 PhD students from Western Canada and Europe, providing them with a unique learning opportunity that transcends disciplines and borders.

"The goal of SAFER is to integrate training with addressing the scientific and practical challenges of remediation, and help students transition into research and

industry careers," said Siciliano.

Canadian students will spend nine months in France and Portugal learning about applied ecology before returning to apply their knowledge at home, while some of the best European students have the chance to work in Canada not just at universities but also at paid internships in private sector companies.

The international experience and internships encourage students to develop communication, project management and leadership skills in academic, industrial, and Indigenous settings.

Production, warehousing and transportation of fertilizer can harm the environment if the nitrogen, phosphorous,

potassium, and sulphur are accidentally released. Sustainable remediation of these sites is a pressing agro-economic challenge in Canada and elsewhere, said Siciliano.

Major changes in recent years to environmental regulations require companies to clean up fertilizer sites, Siciliano said. Remediation is important because the high concentrations of fertilizer can pollute groundwater. But remediation costs can often surpass \$1 million per location, often far exceeding the property value of bulk fertilizer plants, requiring the development of more cost-effective solutions.

The Canadian component of the program includes collaboration among researchers from the U of S and three other universities (University of Alberta, University of Manitoba and University of British Columbia), and private-sector companies—consulting engineering firm Amec Foster Wheeler, Federated Co-operatives Limited Ltd. (FCL), United Farmers of Alberta (UFA), and CHS Inc. Also collaborating is the International Minerals Innovation Institute, jointly funded by industry and government to provide education, research, and training partnerships to support a world-class minerals industry.

FCL, UFA and CHS are founding members of the Sustainable In-situ Remediation Co-operative Alliance (SIRCA), which promotes the development and implementation of sustainable environmental management practices. SIRCA asked Siciliano for help in training professionals in Western Canada who could address fertilizer remediation in ways that take into account the needs of the industry and affected communities.

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Tyler Fewings
Watershed Co-ordinator
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Spring AGRICULTURE 2018

THE WORLD Spectator

Section Two • Page C25

APAS raises transportation issue with government

BY KEVIN WEEDMARK

Agriculture Producers Association of Saskatchewan Vice-President Ian Boxall travelled to Ottawa last week to make a presentation to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food.

In an interview with the World-Spectator following his presentation, he said he had seen the crisis coming.

"I think anyone who followed the issue knew early in the fall from the projections that the railroads had done on car supply that we were going to be short, and then the car supply targets that the railroads had set for themselves, they couldn't even achieve, which has caused a huge backlog in Western Canada."

He said APAS has been raising the issue for a long time.

"I think we've been pretty vocal about it right from the start and during the week of the CFA Canadian Federation of Agriculture we had a big push with senators and MP's and parliamentary staff, making sure that they understand that it has gotten critical on the Prairies as far as farmers being able to cash flow their operations because of the lack of the movement of grain. That was at the end of February when we had that big push, and I believe we got some reaction and we got some stuff done. I believe CN dropped the ball and we need some management changes in their operation based on that, and they have made some commitments to increase capital investments to try and alleviate some of this."

He said he sees this year's crisis as a rail-way management issue.

"We've heard stories of it being a rail car shortage, but that is not the case. This is a locomotive and manpower shortage. That is what has caused this issue this time. I think in 2013 and 2014 it might have been somewhat different, but the railroads have done some layoffs and got rid of some locomotive power and it's come back to bite them to the point where it has really affected our business. I believe this time around it is absolutely a management problem on



Transporting Prairie agricultural products to market has become an issue, and the Agriculture Producers Association of Saskatchewan's vice-president went to Ottawa last week to raise the issue.

the side of the railroads. They use weather as an excuse but they've operated a railway line in our country for 100-plus years. Winter comes every year. They should be able to figure out to manage that risk."

How did the presentation to the parliamentary committee come about?

"From our push we had out there in February I was asked to be a witness to the standing committee to explain just how critical the situation is in the West," Boxall explains. "We were asked, and we decided to absolutely take advantage of the opportunity to tell our story."

Boxall said he felt the MPs listened to what he had to say.

"I feel I was listened to, and I think any time that the committee members can hear from a producer, it's a good thing. Lots of times they hear from the railroads and hear from the stakeholders, but when you can go and present as a producer I think it is important. It's good when they are hearing from the producer about how it is affecting us."

"It was a good experience. It was nerve

wracking to say the least, but it was a good experience and I think all the stakeholders and all the people that presented that day, we had the same message: Pass Bill C49.

"We understand that is not the home run we are looking for to fix rail issues, but it's a piece of legislation that we feel we can work with to get things better so we're not having to have this conversation every four years on lack of rail service."

Boxall said he's optimistic that his presentation had an impact.

"I believe I, and all the people that presented there, had an impact on getting the House and Senate to get this moving forward."

"Part of the issue is that it is a big bill. It includes air, water, sea, land and rail. It's a large bill but they need to get it together and figure it out and get it passed this spring sitting so that we have legislation in place for next year's crop."

"The weather will fix the back log this year because it's getting warmer and they can pull longer trains, and things will im-

prove on that side of it to fix this year's backlog. But we need legislation in place so that going forward we have adequate rail service every year."

Boxall feels there is a 50-50 chance of the bill passing this spring.

"I think it's 50-50," he said. "There's an aspect in there on air passenger rights that is somewhat holding it up as well. When you get all those aspects it's hard. We're hoping that it will pass this spring so that it's in place, and I believe for it to be effective for next year's crop it needs to be passed this spring."

Following is the full presentation to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food presented on Monday:

Good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity to present to this committee. I am here today to explain how poor rail performance affects my industry, my community, and my family business and why we need Parliament to take immediate action.

Continued on page C36



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Habitat Trust: Adopt an Acre Initiative

BY DARREN NEWBERRY
HABITAT COORDINATOR

SASKATCHEWAN WILDLIFE FEDERATION

Native prairie and parkland are among the fastest disappearing wildlife habitats on the planet, and that the rate of habitat loss is at an all-time high. Not only does this deprive wildlife of the essentials for survival, but takes away the opportunity for people like us to enjoy all the natural wonder our province has to offer.

That is why the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation is proud to announce our new Adopt an Acre initiative, which aims to secure 100,000 acres of habitat land for Saskatchewan's wildlife by 2028.

"100 percent of donations to Adopt an Acre will stay in Saskatchewan, and go directly toward habitat securement for wildlife in Saskatchewan, with dollars being matched by additional funding through the Fish and Wildlife Development Fund" Said Darren Newberry, Habitat Coordinator.

For \$50 per acre a year people like you can pave the way. You can choose to adopt one acre for now, one acre for numerous years, or several acres over numerous years—it's all up to you! People who contribute to this initiative will receive a charitable tax receipt, certificate of adoption, copy of the Annual Habitat Report, and have your name listed in Outdoor Canada West!

"We're proud to offer the people of Saskatchewan the opportunity to give back locally in a way that has a true impact," said Heath Dreger, SWF President, "with an initiative that will not only provide habitat for wildlife, but will offer health, wellness and quality of life benefits for the people of our province."

Even at this early stage, more than 300 acres have been adopted. If you are interested in learning more about SWF's Adopt an Acre initiative, visit our website at www.swf.sk.ca for perks of adoption and to download an adoption form.

CBSA pilot Q1 results yield promise

Cargill last week released the first quarter results of the Canadian Beef Sustainability Acceleration (CBSA) pilot and the results are positive. The one-year pilot, a collaboration between Cargill, the Verified Beef Production Plus (VBP+) program, and the Beef InfoXchange System (BIXS), was launched in October 2017 to test the systems needed to meet the requirements of a certified sustainable beef supply chain established by the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (CRSB).

The data shows producers earned \$10/head financial credit for all cattle qualifying through the certified supply chain. For cattle to qualify they must have gone

through a fully certified sustainable supply chain from the cow-calf operation to processing facility.

For a cattle operation to be eligible for their cattle to qualify they must:

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- Be a member of BIXS
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Current customers for the pilot include McDonald's Canada, Loblaw's, Swiss Chalet and Original Joe's. Payments will be awarded quarterly for a full year beginning in Q1 of 2018.

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Alberta Wheat Commission presses for quick action in passing amended Bill C-49

With the grain backlog reaching critical levels in parts of Western Canada due to poor rail service, the Alberta Wheat Commission (AWC) continues to press for quick action in passing Bill C-49 – the Transportation Modernization Act – with amend-

ments to long haul inter-switching.

In testimony during an emergency meeting of the House of Commons Standing committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food moments ago, AWC said Bill C-49, as amended, will offer a long-term solution

to the ongoing rail failures that continue to cause serious implications for farmers.

AWC's testimony pressed for the bill to be passed with amendments by the Senate and sent back to the House of Commons before its April break.



AWC also urged the House of Commons to pass the bill as quickly as possible to ensure the process does not drag into the summer months.

"As farmers start to prepare our operations for seeding, we are feeling the impacts of the current backlog in the system.

"With my own contracts pushed back, I am several months behind on my deliveries and therefore several months behind on being paid," said Warren Sekulic, AWC Director.

"The resulting challenges in cash flow from these delays will roll into the upcoming growing season."

Rail car fulfillments recently fell to a new low, with a combined 32 per cent between CN and CP, reaching the critical levels experienced during the backlog in the fall and winter of 2013-14.

Country elevator stocks, at 4.4 million tonnes, are higher than in the same period of 2014 and will take months to clear.

Amendments to long haul interswitching will allow grain companies the maximum ability to take their business elsewhere if the primary rail carrier cannot provide adequate service.

"We appreciate the commitment of Ministers Gar-

neau and MacAulay in demanding better service from the railways, but we need Bill C-49 in place now since it contains measures such as reciprocal penalties that will hold the railways to account for service failures," said Sekulic.

AWC appreciates the government's commitment to legislation that will ensure a more responsive, competitive and accountable rail system in Canada. AWC believes that Bill C-49 is in fact a historic piece of legislation that paves the way for permanent, long-term solutions to the rail transportation challenges that Canadian farmers have faced for decades.

Saskatchewan exported \$13.5 billion in agri-food exports in 2017

BY ASHLI ANDREAS

Saskatchewan continues to be one of Canada's leading agri-food exporters with sales of \$13.5 billion in 2017, the fourth largest total on record. Agri-food exports account for almost half of Saskatchewan's total exports and continue to be a cornerstone of the province's trade-based economy.

In 2017, Saskatchewan exported over \$1.5 billion in each of our key sectors; oilseeds, cereal grains, pulses and edible oils. Year after year, we have seen canola seed exports increase and 2017 was no different. Canola seed exports increased 23 per cent totaling \$3.6 billion in sales. Canola seed remained the province's top agricultural product in 2017. Other top products included: non-durum wheat, canola oil, lentils, durum, peas, canola meal, oats, barley and soybeans. Canola products (seed, oil and meal), contributed an impressive 44 per cent to Saskatchewan's total agri-food exports.

Due to challenges in other top markets, the province experienced a decline in exports in three of our top 10 markets: India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Saskatchewan pulse exports to the Indian market were significantly affected due to India's fumigation requirements and tariffs on Canadian pulses. Overall, pulse exports to India decreased 34 per cent, with pea and lentil exports experiencing a substantial decline of 30 per cent and 39 per cent respectively. Despite this drop, India remains Saskatch-

ewan's top market for both lentil and pea exports valued at \$316 million and \$390 million. In part due to these challenges, Saskatchewan diversified its pulse export markets. Lentils to Algeria and Mexico saw an increase of 42 per cent and 141 per cent, respectively. Pea exports increased to the U.S. by 25 per cent, now valued at \$53 million.

Saskatchewan saw an increase in a number of our top export markets, including China, Japan, Mexico, the United Arab Emirates, Algeria and Morocco. Agri-food exports to the United States (U.S.) had a slight drop of one per cent, but still continue to be Saskatchewan's largest market with sales of \$3.6 billion. Durum and non-durum wheat exports to the U.S. market increased substantially. The U.S. remains Saskatchewan's largest market for both canola oil and canola meal with exports of \$1.2 billion and \$497 million in 2017. China continues to demand Saskatchewan grown canola seed as sales reached an all-time high of \$1.4 billion, an increase of 44 per cent. Barley exports experienced a relatively large increase to China of 54 per cent. This is due to China sourcing more Saskatchewan barley to be processed in market for beer consumption.

Despite challenges in some of Saskatchewan's agri-food export markets, the world's growing middle class consumers still demand the world class agricultural products that Saskatchewan has to offer.



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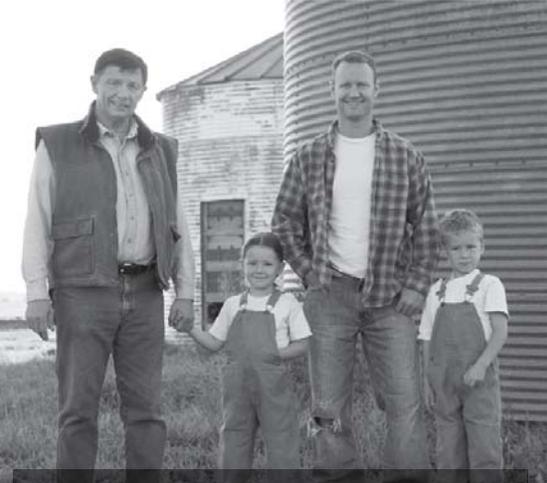
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Online versus traditional cattle sales—which fits best?

BY CRAIG LESTER

Selling cattle used to be done the same way across the board. Typically, farmers would take animals to a traditional auction market and sell them. But in the last couple of decades, there's been a growing trend of producers moving to online marketing.

A leading online marketing expert believes there is still a place for the traditional auction market, leaving the question which one works best for your operation?

Jason Danard is the general manager with TEAM Auction Sales, part of the Calgary Stockyards based out of Strathmore, Alta. He says they have done sales on the Internet for 20 years and have seen growth every year.

Advantages to online sales

He says medium and large operations benefit most from online sales since they can put together groups of animals that work for online trading.

He says there are several advantages to marketing online, including efficiency for the sellers and buyers. It's also better for the cattle.

"You get less stress on the animal and less shrink," Danard says.

On top of this, he adds, the Internet provides exposure to new buyers not apt to show up at traditional auctions.

Traditional auctions still work

Still, Danard sees advantages to traditional sales methods.

"I think the market will be there for the purposes of selling the groups that don't fit any online platform," he says.

Danard says producers with smaller herds aren't going to fit into an online auction platform. Producers with herds under 100 cows are likely too small to do market on the Internet, at least in terms of commercial cattle.

He says he typically only sees producers with smaller herds succeed online if they market during quieter times during the year, like June or July, not like this month where sales are at their peak.

Reg Schellenberg is the owner of Perrin Ranches, located along Lake Diefenbaker, in southwest Saskatchewan. The farm markets their steers every October, while the heifers are backgrounded and sold in the spring.

He says they like to use both online and traditional markets to sell cattle.

Bottom line

Weighing the pros and cons of online versus traditional cattle sales depends on the size of the beef herd and how much time producers have to market the animals ahead of the sales.



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Consumers want greater transparency in food production

The Beef InfoXchange System (BIXS) is an answer to the needs and demands of consumers and their trusted retailers.

With the launch of a new generation of BIXS, which is a web-based data management system that operates a value-added traceability system, transparency, traceability and verification in beef production is a reality.

Recognizing that ease of data sharing and data entry are more important to cattle producers than ever before, producers were asked what they needed BIXS to do. With those suggestions and a group of keen cattle producers, our beta testers test drove the new system for close to a year. It's better than ever, intuitive and efficient, and free for producers to use.

It's been dubbed the "cloud for cows." BIXS will support the integrity of the beef supply chain, providing transparency for all participants while protecting privacy, moving the industry from the disconnected supply chain of yesterday to true value chains of tomorrow. Using blockchain technology, BIXS will increase efficiencies, building robust integrated blockchain solutions that will work alongside the web-based traceability system, which tracks cattle via RFID (radio frequency identification tags) through their lifetime.

The Canadian Beef Advantage is the future of the cattle industry, featuring traceability, transparency and sustainability. This supports a socially-responsible, environmentally-sound and economically-viable beef production system that prioritizes the planet, people, animals and progress.

The Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef makes Canada the first country in the world to launch a producer framework for sustainable beef production, to certify cattle operations and track chain of custody. Our country is considered one of the world leaders in sustainable beef production.

With enhanced Canadian traceability regulations in place, the integration that BIXS has with Canadian Livestock Traceability System (CLTS) will become more important, making it easier for producers to comply. CLTS is operated by Canadian Cattle Identification Agency, which is tasked by Canadian Food Inspection Agency to



Hubert Lau

track animals in respect to food safety, animal and human health.

The BIXS team believes that a producer should only have to enter data one time, and be able to have that data flow to whatever system needs or requires it. The data flow only can happen with the permission of producers, by registering on BIXS, to protect privacy and established business models. The new generation of BIXS allows customization to suit multiple situations, including the utilization of blockchain technology, which is poised to revolutionize the agri-food industry.

To facilitate certification of cattle operations and electronically track the cattle from those operations, through the production chain, Verified Beef Production Plus (VBP+) and BIXS have completed an integration that tracks cattle automatically. Once an animal is born on a VBP+ audited operation and moved or sold, the VBP+ designation is attached to the animal's history in BIXS, provided the producer has registered with BIXS. If it moves into a VBP+ grass operation, backgrounding lot or feedlot, the recognition of that production history carries with the animal via the RFID tag, again that operation must be registered on BIXS.

When the animal reaches the harvest facility, it's recognized as meeting all the requirements to be considered sustainably raised, which explains why chain of custody is so important. This allows the meat from these animals to be certified as sustainable beef, either on a mass balance approach or even extended to full or partial identity preservation.

For processors and retailers, it's important that a neutral third-party, like BIXS, can track the movement of the animal through certified sustainable operations.

The desire for sustainably raised animals is becoming more prevalent among consumers. Sustainable is not just a feel-good word. Sustainably-raised beef in Canada is defined by the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (www.crsb.ca), which is aligned with the Global Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (www.GRSBeef.org), but customized specifically for Canada following ISEAL guidelines. ISEAL represents the global movement of sustainability standards, establishing a code of ethics and credibility principles.

Consumers want to know more about what they're eating. That the meat they're feeding their families came from animals that were treated in an ethical, humane manner, raised in an efficient, environmentally friendly way.

It may seem like a tall order, but Canadian farmers and ranchers are already there, for the most part. All that's needed is an audit certifying that the operation is sustainable, and the ability to attach and track that information to the animal through its lifetime.

BIXS plans to support and advance a socially responsible, environmentally sound and economically viable beef production system, part of the Canadian Beef Advantage. Canadian producers have the tools to make our beef the most desirable in the world. High quality, sustainably raised with traceability and transparency. These are the things that will ensure Canadian beef is one of the proteins that consumers choose at meat counters all over the world.

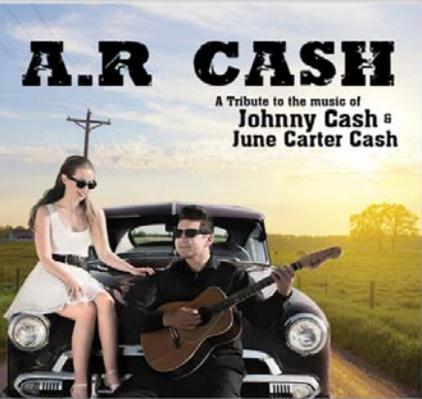
BIXSco Inc. is a member of the Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef and invites everyone to visit www.crsb.ca to understand more about sustainable beef production. BIXS and VBP+ were chosen to support the Canadian Beef Sustainability Acceleration pilot project, www.cb-sapilot.ca, in which major retailers reward producers for contributing to a fully certified sustainable beef program. The major retailers contributing and supporting this program are Swiss Chalet, Original Joe's, McDonald's and Loblaw.

Hubert Lau is the President & CEO of BIXSco a partnership between the Canadian Cattlemen's Association and Alberta's ViewTrak Technologies Inc.



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Local ag professionals

Grain buyers: Helping farmers get their grain to market

Grain buyers play an important role in helping producers get their grain to market. The grain buyers at Louis Dreyfus in Virden—Andy Klippenstein and Darrell Barker—both have years of experience behind them, and look forward to working with producers daily.

“We are the front line for the customers with respect to farmers when they are marketing grain,” says Andy Klippenstein. “Farmers phone us for marketing insight, so we are the direct contact with the farmer, be it on the farm, or when the farmers come to us.

“As the farmers produce the grain, we are the ones that, early on, even now already with the new crop, are talking to farmers with the intent of getting a marketing plan in place. And when the market rallies, or when there are situations where the market is doing good or bad, we are the person who communicates that to the farmer.

“We both come with years of experience. We started in the grain industry 30-plus years ago.

“I received my diploma in agriculture from the University of Manitoba in 1984, then entered the workforce with a Manitoba grain company after that. Then from there I went straight into the grain business and went the grain marketing route



DARRELL BARKER



ANDY KLIPPENSTEIN

and started at the bottom with a Manitoba grain company. After 14 years I went to the Canadian Wheat Board. I worked there for 17 years and then I came to Louis Dreyfus and have been here for two-and-a-half years here now. The last 25 years I've been directly in the marketing side.”

Why does Andy think the job of a grain buyer is important?

“Marketing is the key to success,” he says. “Every

crop year is different so you approach every crop independently.

“The farmers are the producers of the grain. They have a very physical and emotional attachment to their commodity, but every year is different so they need to have a marketing plan to capture the best return they can, and we're there to help them with that.

“My goal is to get farmers the most money, but also to mitigate some of

their risks.

“The industry has changed dramatically over the last 15-20 years. At one time a farmer could just pick up the phone and say ‘I want to sell grain, I want to deliver grain, can you take it today?’ Now that happens a little bit, but for the most part, grain is marketed three to six months out. So to capture the best values you really need to be forward marketing.

“And that is the goal we play, in helping farmers

with that plan to manage their delivery opportunity as well as their pricing opportunity.”

Darrell Barker says he has been working in the ag industry since 1978.

“We basically work with farmers daily, and marketers in Calgary, usually daily,” he says. “We try and get the best deal possible for the producers.

“I was raised on a farm in the Oakville-Portage area, and started with Manitoba Pool Elevators

in 1978, and have been in the grain business since then.”

Barker says the most important skills for a grain buyer are strong people skills.

“You need people skills, you need to be able to talk to people. I like to work with people and I have a lot of knowledge.”

What is his ultimate goal when dealing with producers?

“I'm trying to find the best deal for them,” he says. “Everybody wants all that they can get. When a farmer comes in here and asks what his wheat is worth, I say ‘what do you want’ and then they say ‘as much as I can get.’ If I ask that question 100 times, I'll get that answer 100 times. I'm trying to find the best deal for them and the best deal that fits where they are sitting at, whether it be protein levels on wheat, or bushel-wise for canola.

“Farmers want the most but they are scared to take the risk, so we take the time to read the market, talk the traders, and read reports.

“A lot of the farmers today don't have much time. They can talk to us and we are kind of like an advisor for them.”

Barker says it's working with people that he loves the most about the job.

“I like being around farmers, the people, it is fun,” he says.





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What we stand for

BY CAM DAHL
PRESIDENT OF CEREALS CANADA

It has been said by quite a few people that organizations are best defined by what they oppose versus what they support. That seems like too cynical of a view of the world. I want to talk about what we stand for.

Canadian agriculture stands for science-based regulations and rules of trade. Why? Because farmers across this country depend on access to international markets for their livelihood. A farmer in Mortlach Saskatchewan must have access to Japan, Indonesia, Algeria and about 100 other countries in order to ensure their farm is economically viable. If countries are free to set up trade barriers in response to the latest internet trends with no reference to evidence-based health or safety concerns than our friends farming in Mortlach will soon find themselves without any markets to sell into.

What is this "science" that we stand for? This is the science behind Canada's regulatory approval process for pesticides. Pesticides that are registered for use in Canada have been tested and found to be safe—safe for human health, safe for animal feed and safe for the environment. This applies even to pesticides like glyphosate that the "experts" on the internet might not like. This assessment of safety is built upon rigorous research, scientific peer review and studies that have been replicated around the world.

Modern Canadian agriculture also stands for sustainability. What is "modern agriculture?" Modern agriculture makes use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers.

Modern agriculture is often large in scale. Modern agriculture makes use of cutting-edge technology to deliver new plant varieties that give higher yields, are more resistant to disease and have superior quality. Modern farmers use GPS, satellite imagery and big data to precisely place seeds and crop nutrients.

Many might think words like "modern", "large scale", "pesticides" and "chemical fertilizer" do not belong next to "sustainability." But these words do belong together. Modern Canadian agriculture has a fantastic sustainability story to tell. And yes, I am going to use a bit of science to tell that story.

Between 1981 and 2011 (the last year for which we have data) the amount of energy needed to produce a tonne of wheat in the prairies declined by 39 percent. Back in 1981, soil organic matter was being depleted. But because of modern agriculture, such as conservation tillage, organic matter in prairie soils is increasing every year. What does this mean? Well, it means soil is healthier today than it was in 1981. Soil is more productive, it is less susceptible to wind and soil erosion and farms across the country are sequestering carbon dioxide every year.

If you happen to live near Mortlach, Saskatchewan you will know that the summer of 2017 saw record low rainfall in the region. In many towns, there was less rain than the famous droughts of the 1930s. And yet farmers in Mortlach did not have a complete crop failure. Nor did Saskatchewan soil blow into Ontario all summer long like it did in the "Dirty '30s." I find it hard to think of more graphic demonstrations of the sustainability of modern

agriculture.

Modern agriculture stands for science, we stand for innovation and we stand for sustainability. Some try to say that this means we stand against other approaches, like organic or natural production. This is not true and is a false conflict that is harmful to farmers who utilize both production systems.

There is room for many different ways of producing food, provided these production systems are safe for the people who eat what is produced, safe for the livestock that depends on the feed grown and is safe for the land and water. These are scientific questions that are a matter of evidence.

What we do not stand for is governments deviating from scientific evidence because of pressure from activists who do not believe the scientific consensus on modern agricultural practices. Deviating from an evidence-based approach, such as banning or limiting pesticides that have been shown to be safe or limiting the use of modern biotechnology, will limit the tools available to farmers. This will reduce the environmental gains that we have seen in the last twenty years. Deviating from science-based rules of trade will limit agriculture's ability to access markets around the world, deliver jobs to every region of the country and support our economic health.

So I guess in the end we are defined a bit by what we are against. But this is not fellow producers who are trying to make a living meeting varying demands coming from consumers.

That's what we stand for.

APAS raises transportation issue with government

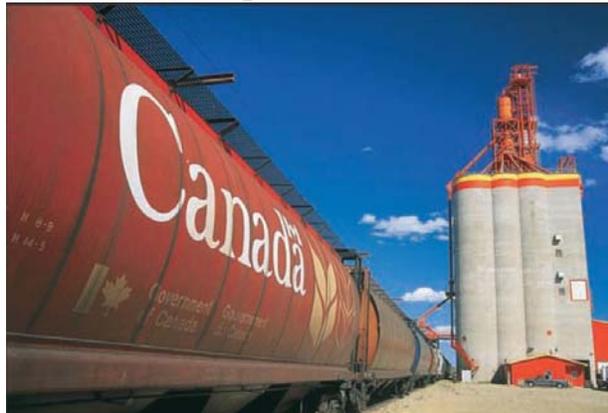
Continued from page C25

My name is Ian Boxall and together with my wife Lisa my brother and sister-in-law we farm 8300 acres of grains and oilseeds in north east Saskatchewan. I am also the vice-president of the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan. We farm about as far from port as you can get and on an average year, our farm pays \$360,000 in rail freight to get our products to our customers.

The backlog of grain in the prairies has had a huge effect on the ability of producers to cash flow their operations and is making things extremely difficult for farmers going into their most expensive season. In the north east, we are sitting with three-month-old grain contracts undelivered due to the shortage of timely and sufficient rail car service to the elevators.

At the end of February personally, we were sitting with an outstanding wheat contract from December that we had been unable to deliver. This was leaving us in an extremely tough financial position. Lucky for us our local elevator, that is one of only four in Canada dual serviced by both CN and CP, found some room to take our product and help us out. They didn't have enough room in the elevator and weren't able to take the entire contracted amount, just enough to give us the money we needed at that time. We don't get paid on a contract, until we can deliver, and these delays add financial and personal stress on us as producers for something that shouldn't be a concern.

Two of the short lines that operate in northeast Saskatchewan have also felt the pinch of lack of rail service this season. They have had very poor and inconsistent supply of cars this shipping year and this started in October, long before winter showed up again in Canada. They have also had several cases where cars have been loaded and then not picked up for weeks. Producers do



Transporting Prairie agricultural products to market has become an issue, and the Agriculture Producers Association of Saskatchewan's vice-president went to Ottawa last week to raise the issue.

not get paid for the product loaded in these cars until it's received by the end user. So again, adding unnecessary financial and mental stress on producers. A lot of the highly sought-after oats grown in North East Saskatchewan are loaded on these shortlines in either dealer or produc-

ers. I grow 2200 acres of these oats every year and with poor rail service the market for these oats is in jeopardy. The processors need to find alternative sources for their oat supply since our rail roads have dropped the ball on shipping our product in a timely manner. My little

boys want their oatmeal most mornings. I want them to eat Canadian oats from Tisdale, not oats from Australia.

This rail issue isn't just affecting grain deliveries. Our local fertilizer dealer has been trying to put fertilizer in place for us its customers since last fall and

due to rail logistics have to pull fertilizer by truck out of Redwater, AB instead of Clavet, SK. That is an additional 1000 km per tip. So far this season they have had to pulled roughly 60 loads of fertilizer from Alberta and that is only half of the product they require, so if things continue like this we are looking at an additional 120,000km of trucking freight. That's added man power, truck power, wear and tear on the roads, and on equipment and cost and carbon emissions that we as end users are going to have to pay for. Spring road bans will be coming into effect very soon, and we could be short of fertilizer in Western Canada for seeding this year's crop. All of this due to poor management and

planning on the side of the railroads.

Farmers need to get the rail service that we pay good money for. Bill C-49 was drafted because of the disastrous shipping crisis of 2013/14, and its outrageous that we are even talking about this again.

In closing we need all parliamentarians from both the house and the senate to come together and pass Bill C-49 NOW for the sake of the shippers, the processors, the retailers, our economy, our farmers, and all Canadians. Farmers already deal with so many unreliable factors, weather, crop prices, and input costs. Reliable rail service should be something we can depend on. EVERY YEAR!!!

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CCA was in Mexico for NAFTA talks

Canadian Cattlemen's Association (CCA) representatives were in Mexico City for round seven of the North American Free Trade renegotiation discussion February 25 to March 5.

CCA Director of Government and International Relations John Masswohl was on site the first three days for the agriculture session discussions.

CCA Past President Dave Solverson arrived March 1 for the Ministerial sessions and was able to meet with officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs including chief trade negotiator, Steve Verheul and staff from Minister Chrystia Freeland's office.

Upon arriving at the negotiation site, Solverson was scrummed when Mexican media noticed his Farmers for Free Trade NAFTA lapel pin. Solverson took the opportunity to talk about the importance of NAFTA and the integrated agricultural supply chains in North America.

The round was the latest in the series to modernize and renegotiate the NAFTA. Subjects of concern to beef producers include tariffs, rules of origin, dispute settlement mechanisms, regulatory practices (both technical barriers and sanitary phytosanitary requirements), government procurement and review vs sunset for the NAFTA agreement.

So far, we have not been advised that there is any proposal to impose a customs duty on cattle or beef trade so long as the NAFTA remains intact. However, we have expressed concern over the possibility of the U.S. proposing a "border tax" across the board.



CCA Past President Dave Solverson in Mexico City telling media about the importance of NAFTA to the North American beef industry.

NAFTA's "rules of origin" determine which products are eligible to be traded duty free amongst the NAFTA countries. Under these rules, either beef that is "wholly produced" in the NAFTA territory or transformed from a live animal into beef in a NAFTA country is eligible for NAFTA treatment. It also means that importing beef from a non-NAFTA country and shipping it to another NAFTA coun-

try does not provide a back door. The CCA has advised the negotiators of our strong desire to ensure the existing rules of origin for beef remain as they are and so far, we expect they will.

There has been good exploratory discussion amongst the negotiating teams regarding streamlining regulatory practices to remove cumbersome procedures for cattle or beef crossing the border, but so

far, no concrete commitment for change.

We also understand that the government procurement discussions have so far consisted of the U.S. seeking to scale back the limited access Canada already has to U.S. government purchasing rather than being receptive to allowing better access for Canadian beef to U.S. federally funded purchasing.

The CCA also wishes to maintain dispute settlement provisions in the NAFTA and seeks to improve enforceability of NAFTA panel decisions.

The Canadian beef sector has from time to time relied on dispute settlement, typically under the World Trade Organization (WTO), and strengthening the NAFTA option would provide a meaningful alternative to the WTO.

The outcome of these and the sunset/review issues remain unresolved, but with common ground being sought.

Masswohl said overall, round seven had positive discussions and the hope is that progress will continue into round eight, to be held in the U.S. in early April.

Obviously, that timeline would extend the negotiations beyond the notional deadline of March 31.

As we have seen time and again in previous negotiations, deadlines can come and go, but if progress is being made, the parties are likely to continue to meet with a view to reaching an agreement. We do note that as we approach closer to the Mexican federal election in July, the parties will have to make a decision regarding how, when or whether to keep negotiating.



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The lighter side of life...down on the farm

BY DONNA BEUTLER

The biggest indicator to me that spring is in the air is not the warmer temperatures or the bright blue skies, but the day you notice the days are longer! I know, I know, some will say it's a gradual thing but it doesn't seem that way to me. And the day that it stays brighter longer is the day I feel it—spring. Of course spring can actually be three months off but it's all about the hope and the promise of spring. Or possibly the feeling of entitlement—I deserve spring after what I have had to put up with all winter. Snow. Cold. Colder than cold (that would be the wind chill). Wind. Wind. And more wind.

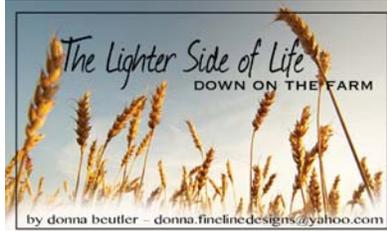
And before you tell me spring can be windy too, I will just ask that you don't spoil the moment, okay? Besides, wind and warmth is a whole lot different than wind and cold. Which brings me to a cool, damp, windy, spring day a couple of years ago. I share this with you as part of a larger safety message and I hope you will take it to heart or encourage those you love to take it to heart.

My husband (who usually hears something about this column when he hits the elevator or the grocery store after ag issue is printed—I always know because he comes in with a bit of a frown asking, 'Now what did you write about me?') was working on the air seeder or technically, the air drill, hammering away one ugly spring day (I know, I know, I alluded to beautiful spring days above but that's not always the case) when a piece of steel struck his eye.

This little incident meant a trip to emerg one evening, then another the next morning for an x-ray followed by a late-in-the-day trip to Yorkton to see an eye specialist. We weren't overly anxious, after all, doctors can do amazing things right? In fact, so sure that we would be taken care of and be able to return home right away, we picked up our five year old granddaughter from daycare and took her along for the ride. I drove so my husband could keep dabbling his tearing eye (no, he wasn't crying) and we arrived in Yorkton just before supper.

The news was not good. The piece of steel was so close to the cornea that one wrong move could mean blindness. Hoping my driving (in the pouring rain no less) was not going to be the one wrong move the doctor referred to, we headed for Saskatoon. I grabbed some snacks for our little passenger and for myself, reminding said husband of the doctor's stern warning—surgery was very likely on the horizon therefore no eating allowed.

I love a nice rain. I hate driving in a heavy rain going into evening hours on single lane highway I am unfamil-



iar with. Thankfully, I didn't jar the eye and we arrived at the hospital just before midnight. Hospitals in the near-dead of night seem really eerie. Nearly people-less. Quiet. Stark. Lonely, even. But the lady up on the ophthalmology ward was very nice. We thought she was an 18-year-old receptionist. Turns out she was the eye specialist. And she tried, and tried again, and then again, to get that steel out of the eye. "What the hell were you doing," she asked my husband. "Working on the air drill," he answered. "Power drill?" she asked. "Yeah that could do it." And so went the explanation: "Actually, no, just a hammer on a piece of steel machinery called a drill that seeds crops." Her perplexed look told us she didn't have a clue, not that it mattered. The only thing that mattered was that there was steel in my husband's eye and it needed to come out.

Finally, the doctor confirmed our worst fears. That steel was definitely stuck in there; it was likely going to require surgery. I could read my husband's face—no super tonight!

It was now two in the morning and the eye surgeon had been paged. He was just coming out of the O.R. and I could see him coming down that long hallway. He was dressed in scrubs and was flipping a bag of BBQ potato chips up in the air and catching the bag as it came back down. Over and over again. It was likely his supper. As he approached me I realized there must be some mistake. While the eye specialist looked about 18, the surgeon looked like he was 16. I felt like I should ask for his credentials but of course I didn't.

Two minutes later, it was all over. No surgery required. The surgeon removed the steel, opened his bag of chips in front of my starving husband and told us we could go. The story doesn't quite end there though because it took us an hour to find a 24-hour drug store that carried the

eye drops that hubby needed to use hourly for the next 24 hours. At four a.m. we sat down for supper. At five a.m. we got a hotel room and settled in for the night, if you can call it that.

Now if you are wondering if we picked up a few pairs of safety glasses that day, let me assure you we did. And that is your safety lesson for this spring season farmers! Wear your safety glasses when working on machinery.

There's also something to be said for ear protection, something I should have been wearing when I took the grandkids to the Science Centre during winter break. When you take the kids off the farm to a place like that, I can guarantee you they will be pumped! And when I told them we had a couple of hours to spare before meeting the cousins for supper, there was one united and very loud voice from all five kids in the back of the car and that was, "Cowtown!!" The place where calf halters and Levi jeans and toy cows and cowboy boots and hats abound. My six-year-old twin grandsons felt it would be important to get some new halters for their 4-H calves but I suggested we wait—til spring were my exact words.

It's always great to see the love these kids have for rural life and I love that their rural roots are growing strong. Some years, the twins are big into machinery or big into calving season and it dominates what they say and how they play. This spring (if I can say that yet), it's auctioneering. Utube replays of a cattle auctioneer to be exact. Hours of replays. Their eyes and ears are literally glued to the ipad as they watch live cattle auctions. When I go to bed at night, the sound keeps playing in my head even though the kids have long since gone home.

Oh the heart of a farmer! And especially the young ones in training. It reminds me of all we enjoy about this rural life we live—a love for our land, our livestock, and our way of life. To farmers and auctioneers alike, may 2018 be one to remember!!



Donna Beutler farms at Whitewood, and writes the occasional newspaper story!

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Don't skimp on the pre and post calving minerals

If a cow is to calve every 365 days, she must be pregnant again within 83 days after calving. That can only happen if she comes through calving in optimal health and body condition. From calving until the uterus is again in condition for pregnancy is about 40 days. That leaves only two heat cycles for cows to rebreed on time. Cows that are short on nutrition are slower to return to normal heat cycles, and have lower conception rates.

Researchers estimate that eggs begin maturing about 100 days before they are actually released, so the process of achieving the next pregnancy starts even before the current pregnancy ends. Minerals play a key role in enhancing fertility. Although beef cows only require three to four ounces of trace minerals in their daily diet, this little bit of supplement helps ensure that cows will rebreed and produce a healthy calf. The availability of free choice minerals is critical in the three months prior to calving and during lactation, when the cow has increased energy and protein requirements.

To provide minerals cost-effectively, mineral supplements need to be matched to your forage base, which varies in nutritional content each year. Thus, an annual forage analysis should be conducted on your ranch.

A cow's phosphorus and calcium requirements are high during the winter and spring due to fetal development. Phosphorus will likely be the primary mineral needed because it is generally lower in dried winter forages. Matching a mineral supplement to your forage base can be done using the rule of thumb that cows need a 2:1 ratio of calcium to phosphorus in the diet. Since legume type forages tend to have higher levels of calcium, a 1:1 or

2:1 mineral would be the best fit. Grass type forages are low in both calcium and phosphorus, so a 3:1 or 2:1 with added limestone would fit the bill in this case. Including a vitamin A and E supplement is also very important as dry forages are often deficient in these as well.

Table 4. Guides to Selecting Minerals of Suitable Trace Element Content

Mineral	Recommended Range (mg/kg)
Copper	2,000 - 3,000
Zinc	10,000 - 12,000
Manganese	8,000 - 10,000
Iodine	70 - 200
Cobalt	40 - 60
Selenium*	30 - 80

Minerals, other than trace-mineralized salt, intended for free-choice feeding, under current federal regulations can contain no more than 30 mg of selenium/kg of mineral. If higher levels are required, a mineral may be manufactured as a "customer formula feed" or under the prescription of a veterinarian.

The result of proper nutrition will be healthier, more profitable calves, from cows that will breed back in the first few cycles.

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Deluxe Pack - 60 lbs

- 10 lbs Rib Eye Steak
- 10 lbs New York Steak
- 10 lbs Boneless Pork Chops
- 10 lbs Pork Back Ribs
- 20 lbs Lean Ground Beef
- \$450

Economy Pack: 65 lbs

- 20 lbs Sirloin Steak
- 12 lbs Beef Burger Patties, 4oz or 6oz
- 8 lbs Smokies
- 10 lbs Bone in Pork Chops
- 12 lbs Beef Round Roast
- 3 lbs Bacon
- \$375

Variety Pack - 108 lbs

- 10 lbs New York Strip Steak
- 10 lbs Sirloin Steak
- 12 lbs Beef Round Roast
- 10 lbs Bone-In Pork chops
- 12 lbs Boneless Pork Leg Roast
- 8 lbs Boneless Skinless Chicken Breasts
- 4 lbs Bacon
- 6 lbs Pork Back Ribs
- 6 lbs Farmers sausage
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- 20 lbs Lean Ground Beef
- \$595

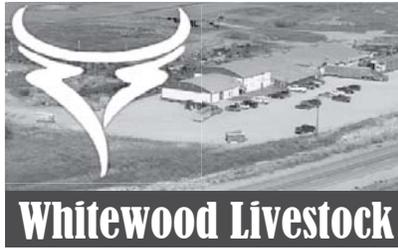
Thrifty Pack - 50 lbs

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- 10 lbs Bone in Pork Chops
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- 4 lbs Bacon
- 4 lbs Wieners or smokies
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Mandatory front of package labelling

BY TOM LYNCH-STAUTON

In addition to revisions and updates to the Food Guide, Health Canada is also proposing mandatory Front of Package (FOP) warning labels for foods that have higher amounts of saturated fats, sodium, and sugar.

According to Health Canada, these labels are intended to make people aware of these "nutrients of concern" so that they can make appropriate and healthy food choices when buying groceries.

However, in my view, warning labels such as these could actually have the opposite effect and detriment healthy eating, if people don't understand them or the risks involved with eating too much or too little of the foods in question.

Specifically, Canadian Cattlemen's Association is concerned about a proposed saturated fat label as there is a significant amount of new evidence that suggests saturated fats may not be the cause of afflictions like cardiovascular disease, and that reduction in foods that contain saturated fats may be more detrimental to one's health than the risk of these diseases, especially if people are substituting saturated fats with foods high in sugars and carbohydrates.

There is a potential for these warning labels to steer people away from eating whole, nutrient rich foods like beef and milk, and substitute other foods that don't provide the essential nutrients they need.

Putting a label on saturated fats presumes that people know what they are, what foods they are in, and what they do to their bodies. I think a lot of people are confused by nutrition to begin with and the focus on saturated fats compared with all the other fats out there may complicate the issue further.

Regardless of whether saturated fats are good, bad or neutral, implementing these labels is predicated on the fact that we are overeating saturated fats in the first place. Canada Beef and the Canadian Meat Council have analyzed Statistics Canada consumption data for meat and found that in 2015, Canadians consumed about 120g of total meat per day, of which 61g is red meat.

This is less than the current recommended amount in the Canada Food Guide. For reference, the Food Guide recommends 150g-225g (2-3 servings per day at 75g serving sizes).

Health Canada estimates that Canadians' average intake of saturated fat is only about 10% of the energy consumed (about 20g).

Since their threshold for labelling is 15% of the daily value, it seems we are not overconsuming saturated fats at all, which raises the question of why are they being considered in the first place?

Luckily, there are exemptions already in place for some wholesome foods.

The labelling will exempt "single-ingredient foods" like red meat, poultry, fish, vegetables and fruit, which would also include whole beef cuts like steak, roasts, etc.

However, foods that require a Nutrient Facts table, will require a FOP label for saturated fats if they are over the threshold.

This means ground meats, because they fit under this regulation, could be subject to a saturated fat warning label.

Of course, the meat that is in ground beef is the same meat that is in a cut of beef (a single ingredient), so there is a good case for keeping ground meats exempt as well.

In previous columns about the revisions to the Food Guide, I had referenced some letters that were submitted to Health Canada by a consortium of over 2,000 doctors, dietitians, nurses and nutritionists that urged Health Canada to "stop steering people away from nutritious whole foods such as whole fat dairy and regular red meat."

They went further to say that "although we understand that it is difficult to overcome 4 decades of teaching and long held beliefs of the harms of dietary saturated fat, we have overwhelming evidence now that saturated fat is not harmful in the diet and does not cause heart disease, but rather that the low fat dietary pattern has very likely caused harm."

Further they go on to say "While we do not suggest Canadians seek out large quantities of saturated fat, there is no good evidence of its harm and as such there is no need for a cap or any caution related to eating the saturated fat found in whole food."

It is concerning to me that Health Canada is still targeting saturated fats, as it does not seem that they are looking at the latest research.

Health Canada is holding a public consultation process on FOP labelling until April 26, 2018. If you are concerned as well, I would encourage you to make your thoughts on the proposed labelling recommendations known by filling out the form in the hyperlink above. If you are looking for additional information to help in your response, Canada Beef has some fact sheets at <http://thinkbeef.ca/the-thinkbeef-position/>.

It is not a bad thing that Health Canada is working on the Healthy Eating Strategy.

It is important to update health recommendations as new evidence and knowledge becomes available, and as our diets evolve and change.

A well-balanced diet, which includes a variety of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, meats, eggs, and milk, is essential to getting the nutrients needed to support human health.

It is important that any recommendations made support proper nutrition, and do not unfairly malign foods with 'nutrients of concern' where it is debatable there should be any concern at all.

Sure, you may further reduce consumption of saturated fats (which also seems to be unnecessary) but what are the health consequences of Canadians not getting those very important and beneficial nutrients they need like iron, vitamin B12, and zinc that meat can provide?



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6 FRIDAY	BRED COW SALE	11:30 A.M.
9 MONDAY	BUTCHER SALE	9 A.M.
11 WEDNESDAY	PRESORT FEEDER SALE	10 A.M.
16 MONDAY	BUTCHER SALE	9 A.M.
18 WEDNESDAY	REGULAR FEEDER SALE (PEN OF 5)	9 A.M.
19 THURSDAY	SHEEP & GOAT SALE	12 NOON
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25 WEDNESDAY	PRESORT FEEDER SALE	10 A.M.
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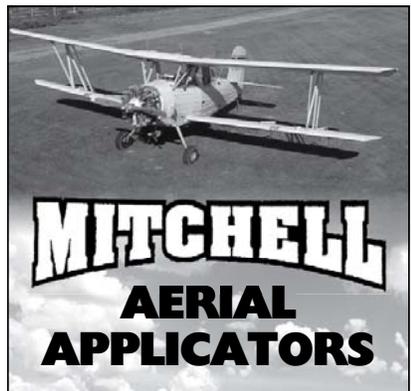
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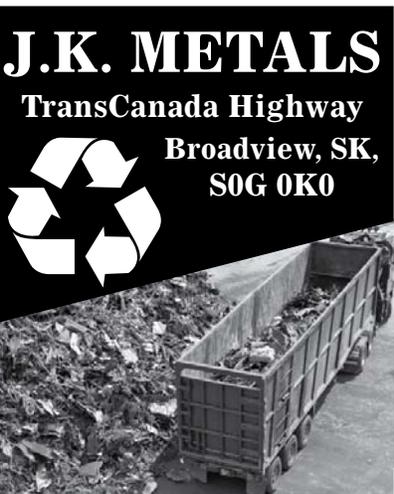


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Changing demand for durum has market stalling

BY MIKE JUBINVILLE

Modest demand activity has held the durum market steady in recent weeks.

Values for top quality durum remain sideways with prices wide-ranging, generally between \$7.10 to \$7.50 per bushel depending on location.

We have seen the odd bid as high as \$8 per bushel in southeastern Saskatchewan on very tight quality specifications.

The price most Prairie farmers targeted for No. 1 Canadian western amber 13 per cent protein durum ahead of Christmas was \$8 per bushel. Today, it's more like \$7.50 per bushel.

Throughout North America, pasta manufacturers appear to have their needs satisfied through the spring timeframe, taking advantage of the lower durum prices, good quality and large Canadian supplies.

Export sales steady

Durum export sales from Canada are running about the same as last year. We have seen curtailment of business into traditional markets such as Italy and Algeria, but some increase in sales to the United States and Morocco.

It remains a challenge to market old crop durum into parts of North Africa. There was a pretty strong European crop this past year and the export market is seeing increased competitive pressure from Kazakhstan and the Black Sea region.



The last record of export sale we have into Tunisia during the latter part of February indicated an ongoing soft price for durum, suggestive of a \$6.25 a bushel return at Saskatchewan elevator on a No. 3 CWAD grade. At least some portion of that product was sourced from Iran—the first time we have ever seen the Iranians as a durum exporter. There are also exports from the Former Soviet Union states, and soon Mexico.

Changing market

The structure of the durum demand market has irreparably changed. With an increasing number of smaller participants

contributing to the global blend (and with increased tonnage), PFCanada senses that durum is now being treated increasingly like a generic bulk commodity.

Previous years of higher price and limited high-quality product availability forced durum importers to become masters at blending with lower quality. The clamour for top quality is no longer the same, nor is acquiring product solely from top supplier Canada. Users have since discovered they can get along just fine with a lower grade durum rather than No. 1.

Now, there doesn't seem to be much enthusiasm to move durum prices higher, and there's no real additional premium

for protein. There is some concern that a continuation of dry conditions across the northern United States and the southern Canadian Prairies amid unknown 2018 acreage intentions might threaten new crop production prospects.

It remains premature for prices to respond to such outlying conditions, though it will be watched closely once we are into spring planting. For the time being, the durum market doesn't appear to be going anywhere, maintaining kind of a buyers' market where prices range from stable to maybe slightly under pressure.

What's the fix? Short-term, it would require a yield or quality wreck. Otherwise the fix only comes with time via sustained relative soft durum pricing and a halt in production expansion elsewhere.

Bottom line

Western Canada growers are not enamored with today's pricing opportunities and some, as a drought hedge, will choose to hold back supply into the new crop marketing year, or hold back some high quality supply for possible blending purposes should 2018 crop quality turns out to be substandard.

Mike Jubinville of Pro Farmer Canada offers information on commodity markets and marketing strategies. Call 204-654-4290 or visit www.pfcanada.com to find out more about his services.



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NAFTA: Canada's agriculture industry hangs in the economic balance

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) has been on life support for some time. America is embracing a new era of economic nationalism—even Hilary Clinton vowed during her campaign to kill the deal. And now President Donald Trump has moved to withdraw the U.S. from the trade deal. Some partners, notably Japan and Australia, say the TPP can be salvaged without the Americans. Canadian officials are significantly less hopeful.

The loss of the TPP will certainly be a missed opportunity for Canadian agriculture, particularly the cattle, hog and maple syrup sectors.

Now all eyes are on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). As Washington rethinks its economic relationship with Mexico, Canada hopes not to become collateral damage, particularly in agriculture.

But first, let's just assume the Trump administration cares about Canada. Agrifood trade between the two countries is worth nearly \$50 billion a year. Food ingredients and finished products are traded daily.

Any hamburger sold in North America is a symbol of the integration of the two agricultural economies, from Saskatchewan wheat to make the bun to Alberta beef to B.C. mushrooms to California tomatoes. The mix is astounding.

Trump's secretary of agriculture, former Georgia governor Sonny Perdue, was named just days before inauguration. That may show how unimportant agriculture and food policies are to Trump.

A veterinarian by profession, Perdue was a Democrat who became a Republican before becoming governor. He understands the cattle industry quite well and once worked in the fertilizer industry.

So it's difficult to see how his vision for American agriculture could hurt Canada, no matter what happens



Sylvain Charlebois

with NAFTA. But anything is possible. Just look at the silliness of the Country of Origin Labelling rule, known as COOL, which haunted our livestock industry a few years ago. COOL is consistent with Trump's America first approach, so it could return.

Can Canada's point person when it comes to international trade handle that kind of pressure?

Chrystia Freeland's recent appointment as minister of Foreign Affairs speaks to her ability as a good communicator and an astute politician. But her negotiating skills remain unproven (she walked out of talks for the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement last fall while in her former post as International Trade minister). And while Ottawa was appointing Freeland, who is banned from Russia, Washington was endorsing Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, an astute businessman who has close ties in Russia.

The news of Freeland's appointment earlier this month most likely passed unnoticed in Washington. And that's a problem. Combined with our government's immigration, marijuana and climate change views, tensions could mount quickly between Ottawa and Washington. And that would not go unnoticed.

Given that most of its wealth comes from trade with the United States, Canada must find ways to be more

relevant to Americans.

While America resets itself, Ottawa is getting busy. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau met this week with Stephen Schwarzman, head Trump's Strategic and Policy Forum. Schwarzman sounded a calming note, saying trade between the two countries is largely balanced.

And Ottawa has repealed or amended almost 200 tariffs on food ingredients imported from the United States. The list includes fruits and vegetables, cereals and grains, spices, fats and oils, food preparations and chocolate products. All are now duty-free. This equates to about \$48 million worth of tariffs, a significant amount for the food industry. The list, however, did not include anything from our highly protectionist supply management regime in the dairy, egg and poultry sectors. This could be more ammunition for U.S.-based dairy groups requesting the end of our quota system and high tariffs on imports.

The good news is that the tariff changes mean it will cost less for Canadian processors to buy from American suppliers. It won't do much to bring down Canadian food retail prices, but it will certainly help our food manufacturing sector, which desperately needs help.

And the decision sends a clear signal to Washington that Canada wants to buy American. That's Ottawa's most important trading position right now.

Ottawa's recent tactics should set us up well for talks on NAFTA.

But Washington still needs to give some sign that it cares about Canada's economic role as a key trading partner.

Troy Media columnist Sylvain Charlebois is dean of the Faculty of Management and a professor in the Faculty of Agriculture at Dalhousie University.



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Smarter than you think

U of M Ag Diploma students learn the business of agriculture

When Colin Penner enrolled as a student in the University of Manitoba's agricultural diploma program 10 years ago, he had to prepare a business plan for his farm. Today, he is back at the U of M as an instructor, teaching other students how to complete today's planning assignments, which are miles ahead.

Preparing a farm business plan is part of the capstone courses in management planning in today's ag schools. At the end of their U of M diploma course, for instance, students defend their plan to a panel of farmers, agronomists, bankers, lawyers, scientists and teachers.

"The objective is for them to understand the farm," says Penner. "A lot of students that come from the farm know how to drive the tractor and do the labour side of things well, but lack knowledge in the management and financial areas. We want to bring them up to speed about how to be a good manager and understand how the farm's finances work."

Ag students in the diploma program at Olds College in Alberta also have to prepare a business plan, but they aren't allowed to base it on their home farm. Instead, students have a choice of farm operation such as a grain or mixed farm, cow/calf operation or value-added or quota-based farm, but they must begin from scratch.

"The students choose what type of farm they want to start and then we give them the land base that they're going to use," says Mark Fournier, an instructor at Olds College. "They can't take over their own operation because they know that one already, so they have to research the area, land prices, the equipment that they're going to need and the loans and programs that are available to get started."

"We wanted to make sure that there are no shortcuts for any of them," says Fournier. "They actually have to research everything from scratch."

Fournier says students not only gain the knowledge to research a brand new farm operation, they also understand the costs and amount of funding required, and the risks involved in starting a farm from scratch. The completed business plan also provides direction. "The value of a business plan is that everybody knows what's happening and what the key priorities are, so when they're making decisions, either as a farm family or as individuals, they know what those decisions should lead towards," says Fournier.

There are many vital components to any business plan and Penner's students focus first on defining the goals and objectives of the farm. "The first-semester students have to work on the overall vision and a mission statement," says Penner. "We ask them where the farm is going and what do they need to do to get there. What are their two-, five- and 10-year goals? Maybe for some the short-term goal is to get a job or graduate from university. The five-year goal may be to establish themselves in the ag industry, and take over the farm 10 years from

now. Because things change so much, they need to do crop budgets and plan for the future every year, but if they have an over-arching vision of where they want to go, that helps to steer them into making informed decisions in the future."

Understanding the finances

Finances are another big focus in preparing budgets for enterprises that become more diversified as students look at different ways to add value to farm operations. "We're seeing the traditional enterprises like wheat, canola, soybeans, oats, corn and cattle, but we are also beginning to see some unique budgets coming forward," says Penner. "I recently marked a budget on a maple farming enterprise as part of the farm. The objective is to figure out if something will fit on the farm. Will it be profitable?"

Fournier also focuses heavily on financial planning, and makes sure his students understand the differences between the types of plans, such as funding proposals for operating versus enterprise plans for new initiatives such as land purchases, new farming methods or technologies, or different crops or livestock.

"There are also plans that are designed to help struggling farms, so if they are at a point where they're not overly profitable and it's going to be a bit of a crisis, then they'll need to work their way out of it," says Fournier. "At that point they're not looking from scratch, they're looking from a point of usually very high loans and they need to plan for how they're going to cope with that."

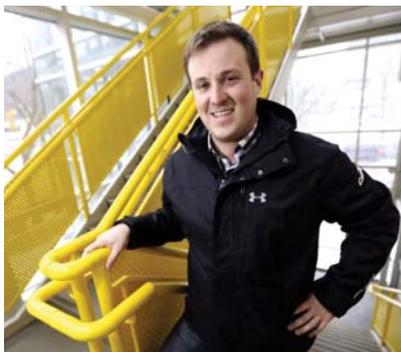
Cash flows play a big part in these financial pictures and Fournier encourages students to do a 36-month rolling cash flow so every month they are looking at least two years out. "When we are doing our business plan in class I have them do a 36-month cash flow statement, and at all points, they have to have money in the bank, including a line of credit, just so they can eat," he says.

What's interesting is that often, halfway through the semester, students realize that out of their team of three, only one person can work on the farm full time and the other two have to go get full-time jobs just to make a go of it.

"That's quite an eye-opener for them," says Fournier, who doesn't award any marks for profit in his course. "Grades are awarded on the best researched and most realistic plan, not the most profitable plan. If their final conclusion says that here's the entire plan and as we have it thought out, it's not going to be a profitable farm, and we cannot advise starting it, there's full marks for that because that's why we do business plans."

"If it's not feasible on paper, if they can't get it to work in black and white, then why would they risk millions of dollars and years of their life to run something into the ground. If the plan shows it's going to be successful, fair enough, but what do you need to do that's different if it's not?"

In most cases, getting



Colin Penner

a farm enterprise off the ground involves a high demand for cash. Fournier recalls a former graduate whom he ran into who figured out he'd be better off working at Tim Horton's than getting into a quota system as he'd hoped to do.

"He did a full business plan and realized he would need about \$250,000 to put down in equity before he could actually make a living wage off of the farm," says Fournier. "At that point in time, he was going up north to try and make his \$250,000."

The bigger picture

Looking at the bigger picture and how everything on the farm ties together is something that Penner's students often struggle with. "They come to realize that it's not just driving tractors, or hauling grain, or buying fertilizer. It's the whole picture and how everything ties together," says Penner.

That often extends to the industry as well. Fournier says he's surprised at how little students pay attention to the larger agricultural industry and how they fit into it. "It amazes me that

that," says Fournier. "So it's breaking them out of that mindset to not look just at their particular farm, but to look at the overall industry that's probably the biggest hurdle I've come across. To see that, yes, their farm is important but it's part of a bigger system and we have these micro/macro trends that will have an impact on them."

Part of the reason for planning is to try and anticipate the unexpected, which is why Penner includes a stress test as part of his students' business plan project.

"We tell them to think of something that they don't think is ever going to happen on the farm, and consider how the farm would handle this stress," Penner says. "As an example, what if the neighbour decides to sell their farm and it's the same size as theirs; can they afford to double in size? What happens if they have a crop insurance year? What

happens if they have another year like we had this past year, where crop yields in some areas were through the roof? How does that affect the farm? It's about looking at what they're doing now, but planning for the future, and for a best-case scenario, and a worst-case scenario, and for things that come out of left field."

Fournier's program also tries to prepare students for some unexpected pitfalls, and he says one of the biggest fears he has is increasing interest rates. "Our students have never known a period of rising interest rates. They've always known incredible low interest rates so for them this is the norm," he says. "In all probability they will, over their lifetime, see interest rates at least double and if they don't factor that into their long-term loan payment decisions, we could definitely see some struggling farms in the future."

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