



Kevin Weedmark photo

Harvest is well under way across southeast Saskatchewan and southwest Manitoba. Kevin Weedmark took this aerial photo with the help of local pilot Rob Austin last Wednesday.

Harvest 2020 off to a strong start

BY ROB PAUL
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Last year with the rain it was a tougher harvest that lasted deep into October and put many farmers in tough situations as the winter approached.

This year, with harvest well under way and September just around the corner, things are looking up.

It's been almost perfect harvest weather for farmers in the area with how dry and warm it's been while not dealing with many problems created by pests. If this type of weather keeps up, harvest could be done in just a few weeks.

Thanks to the weather, Moosomin area farmer Sean McTavish says everybody will likely be on pace to finish this harvest much earlier than last year.

"The weather is ideal right now while the sun stays out," said McTavish. "I would say most people have got a good start with this weather. Dry and warm would be the best weather."

"If the weather stays like this, I think most people would be done by the end of September. Most people are doing barley and wheat right now."

Coming off great seeding and growing conditions, the perfect weather has rolled into harvest conditions says

McTavish and he hopes it holds through the next few weeks.

"Right now the combining weather has been fine," McTavish said. "Some of the fields I've combined so far, the hills haven't been very good, but the low spots have been very good. We got the rain when we needed it. Right now this is ideal harvest conditions other than some muggy mornings, the humidity is still pretty high. There's been no problems really so far. There hasn't been much issue with pests. The perfect weather would be 25 degrees and about 40 per cent humidity."

Continued on page B4

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Fundraiser to help restore grasslands

BY MICHELE LE TOURNEAU
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The Manitoba branch of the Nature Conservancy of Canada has launched a fundraising campaign to restore native prairie grasslands on a newly acquired addition to its Fort Ellice property.

The property, called Fort Ellice 3, is roughly an hour and a half northwest of Brandon, near St. Lazare.

Kevin Teneycke, the conservancy's regional vice-president in the province, likens the new 644 acres to the hole in a doughnut. The private, non-profit organization already owned the land around it, except Crown land to the south, which is managed by the Association of Manitoba Community Pastures.

"All the land together creates a large block of unfragmented native habitats," Teneycke said.

The Nature Conservancy of Canada partners with individuals, corporations, foundations, Indigenous communities and other non-profit organizations and governments at all levels to protect natural areas. It secures properties through donation, purchase, conservation agreement and the relinquishment of other legal interests in land and manage them for the long term, according to its website.

Teneycke said the conservancy has already purchased the land and the fundraising goal of \$350,000 is to pay that debt



The Nature Conservancy of Canada in Manitoba has launched a fundraising campaign to help pay for the expansion of protected prairie grasslands on Beaver Creek, east of the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border near the Assiniboine and Qu'Appelle rivers, to add to its existing Fort Ellice property.

down, as well as finance the restoration and ongoing management of the property.

The habitat restoration work will include reseeded land, recently used for farming, with grassland species.

"It's recognized that once native prairie is broke, you'll never get the same native prairie back," Teneycke said.

Nevertheless, the conservancy will reseed 50 to 60 or more species.

"It's not an easy thing to do it. It does carry some expense, but it is trying

to put it back," Teneycke said.

Because the land was converted to farmland not so long ago, there's hope there may be grassland seeds in the soil that, given the opportunity, will start to come back. All told, that process could take three to five years, after which the area will be managed with prescribed grazing by cattle.

The conservancy said in a news release that more than 90 per cent of Manitoba's prairie grasslands have already been lost, and that grasslands are

one of the most endangered ecosystems in the world.

"It is estimated that we continue to lose an additional 147,000 acres every year," it stated.

"The conservation of Fort Ellice 3 will complete 5,411 acres of a species-rich land block, comprised of mixed-grass prairie, aspen forests, riverbank and floodplain forests, sandhill prairie and sand dunes, wetlands, streams, freshwater springs and willow shrublands.

"Large mammal species like, elk, moose and Cana-

dian lynx, roam the property. Threatened birds, such as Sprague's pipit and Chestnut-collared longspur depend upon the unique grassland habitat for survival."

Teneycke said it takes thousands of years for such an ecosystem to evolve.

The conservancy has partnerships with Waywayseecappo First Nation, Park West School Division and Birtle Collegiate. The partners have used the Fort Ellice property for some of their educational programming. Waywayseecappo has used it for after-school education programming.

"With Park West, we've done everything from wildlife track identification and winter survival. We have a number of trail cameras that are out there and the students collect

the video cards and take the information back to the classrooms. They and identify what species have been found on it. It was part of a wildlife technician course that the Park West School Division had offered," Teneycke said.

The organization is not only helping to relieve threats and stresses on nature, but it also offers humans the opportunity to experience nature.

"There certainly is documentation saying there are lots of health benefits to providing places and opportunities for people to go out and experience nature," Teneycke said.

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15 per cent of crop combined in Sask 19 per cent of crop combined in Southeast as of last week

Warm, dry conditions continued last week which allowed crop development and maturation to progress and farmers in all regions of the province to make some harvest headway. Fifteen per cent of the crop was combined, up from four per cent the week before, and ahead of the five-year average of 12 per cent (2015-2019) for this time of year. An additional 16 per cent of the crop was swathed or ready to straight-cut, slightly behind the five-year average (2015-2019) of 17 per cent.

Eighty-nine per cent of fall rye, 82 per cent of winter wheat, 59 per cent of lentils, 56 per cent of field peas, 20 per cent of barley, 15 per cent of durum, nine per cent of oats, five per cent of spring wheat and two per cent of canola had been combined. An additional 16 per cent of canola had been swathed or is ready to straight-cut.

Harvest progress was most advanced in the southern regions. Farmers in the southwest region had 31 per cent combined, the southeast region 19 per cent, the west-central 12 per cent, the east-central nine per cent, the northeast four per cent and the northwest two per cent.

In Southeast Saskatchewan, warm weather and dry conditions helped crops ripen in the region and allowed farmers to make good progress combining. Nineteen per cent of the crop was combined last week, up from five per cent the week before, and slightly behind the five-year average (2015-2019) of 21 per cent. An additional 16 per cent of the crop was swathed or ready to

straight-cut, behind the five-year average (2015-2019) of 22 per cent.

Ninety per cent of fall rye, 87 per cent of field peas, 82 per cent of winter wheat, 73 per cent of lentils, 35 per cent of barley, 14 per cent of spring wheat, 12 per cent of durum and four per cent of canola was combined in the Southeast. An additional 21 per cent of canola had been swathed or was ready to straight-cut.

Most of the southeast region received trace amounts of rain last week, but some of the northeastern parts of the region received over a half of an inch. The Grenfell area received the highest amount of rain with 46 mm. The Tantallon area received 42 mm, the Whitewood area 19 mm, areas north of Weyburn 10 mm, the Odessa and Briercrest areas two mm and the Carnduff area one mm. The Tantallon area has received the most precipitation

in the region since April 1 with 305 mm.

Warm, dry conditions in most of the region last week depleted topsoil moisture ratings. Cropland topsoil moisture was rated as 46 per cent adequate, 46 per cent short and eight per cent very short. Hay and pasture land topsoil moisture was rated as 29 per cent adequate, 54 per cent short and 17 per cent very short.

The majority of crop damage last week was due to lack of moisture, wind and heat, as well as insects such as grasshoppers and aphids. There were concerns about the high fire risk in the region due to the hot, dry conditions. Pasture conditions in the region were rated as seven per cent good, 68 per cent fair, 20 per cent poor and five per cent very poor.

Farmers are busy swathing, desiccating and combining in the region.

We wish the Agriculture Sector the very best during the harvest season!



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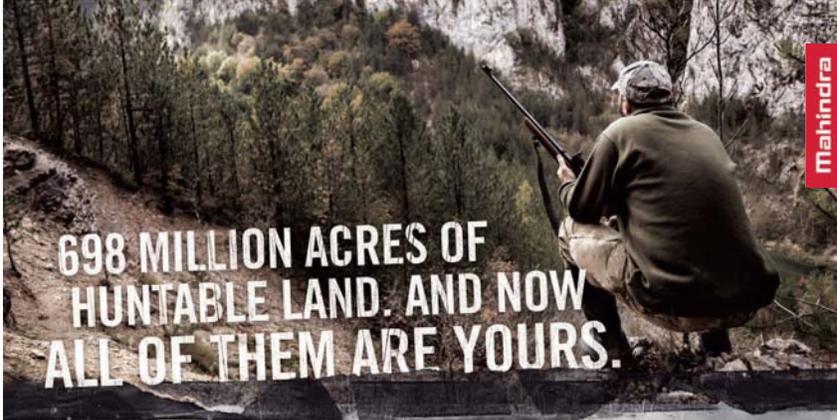
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It's been an ideal start to the harvest this year with warm and dry weather.

Harvest 2020 off to a strong start

Continued from front

With plenty of different factors impacting the markets for farmers this year, McTavish says it's looking like there will be some negatives, but he's pleased with the way the canola market is shaping up.

"Wheat's not very good right now," McTavish said. "But canola looks promising." Moosomin area farmer Jason Dobson says he can't complain with how things look early on in the harvest, but the unpredictability of weather has him unsure of when it could be completed.

"I think everybody will be pretty happy with the weather," said Dobson. "We're probably 20 per cent along so far. Right now we're taking off barley, wheat, and canola, I have no idea when harvest could be done by."

The lack of rain in recent weeks has been a pleasant surprise says Moosomin area farmer Nancy Jaenen.

"The weather has been pretty good," said Jaenen. "Because we haven't had a lot

of rain since we put our canola and stuff down. Barley is done and we're about a third done our canola. Everything is looking decent at this point."

Coming off some of the toughest harvest conditions in recent memory, Jaenen says this year looks infinitely better.

"It's been average dryness," Jaenen said. "Last year was such a horrible year because we had so much rain at harvest and we ended up not getting all of our crop off, which has never happened before. It's much nicer this year than last."

As long as the warm and dry weather holds, Jaenen thinks this harvest could be done weeks earlier than last year.

"We could be done harvest in a couple weeks if the weather holds up like this," Jaenen said. "I can't speak for anybody else, but this looks good for us. We've got the barley done and we're just working on the canola. Pests haven't been more of a problem than normal, we've not really encountered many problems. We've got

good health and everything has been going quite well. It's just got to stay sunny and hot to finish up. Everything looks good."

Sharpe's Moosomin agronomy lead Wendy Leeds says it looks like favourable conditions for producers early in the harvest and it should lead to higher quality product.

"Harvest is just kind of getting go," said Leeds. "But we've experienced some great weather early to help the crop dry out over the last 10 or so days. I think guys are just starting to get into it and it's a great start with this weather."

"Warm dry weather helps the producers get the crops off quicker and they keep their quality. Last year for instance we had rain in the fall and we lost quality out of our wheat samples and thinks started to sprout. Whereas with this warm dry weather, it's perfect for quality."

Different weather conditions can lead to different pest problems, says Leeds, but so

far this year she says they haven't been a problem with the ideal harvest weather.

"Sometimes dry warm weather can build up certain pests, like for instance, a diamondback moth worm or a bertha armyworm," Leeds said. "So far we've seen very low numbers for both of those. Even aphids can sometimes be a bit more problematic if it's hot and dry, but in our area insect pests have been very low."

One of the biggest differences for harvest this year compared to last year will be the speed in which the work can be done thanks to the dry weather, said Leeds.

"Last year it started raining like every three days," said Leeds. "It was really hard to get the crop off because of that. If we have a nice run of really warm weather, or even sunny weather, it helps them so much because their crops are drying as they're waiting for them to go to the next field and it allows them to just do things in a quicker fashion. It's a good follow up year."

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Watch for farm equipment on highways this harvest

With harvest underway, please be aware of slower moving farm machinery on provincial highways.

"Agriculture is the foundation of Saskatchewan's economy, so we understand the importance of getting the crop off and safely into the bin," Highways and Infrastructure Minister Greg Ottenbreit said. "We all need to do our part to keep highways safe for everyone, so please be aware of slower moving equipment."

In addition to farm equipment, drivers also need to be

aware of construction taking place on highways around the province.

Plan ahead and be patient when entering a highway construction work zone. There may be cases when workers are not present that require you to slow down. A sharp pavement drop-off or loose stones are examples of hazards that warrant a slower posted speed. If you have concerns about highway work zone signing problems, please call 306-244-5535.

The Government of Saskatchewan will improve

more than 1,000 kilometres (km) of provincial highways this year, the first of its 10-year Growth Plan goal to build and upgrade 10,000 km of highways.

The Government of Saskatchewan has invested more than \$9.8 billion in highways infrastructure since 2008, improving more than 15,800 km of Saskatchewan highways. Another \$300 million in highways stimulus funds will be invested over the next two years to stimulate Saskatchewan's economic recovery.

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The benefits of starting a peer advisory group



Forming a peer advisory group with like-minded businesspeople is a simple but effective approach to professional development for a farm operation.

The small groups meet regularly to inspire and learn from each other. The groups tend to be more informal than a grower meeting, but the benefits can be just as significant.

Danny Klinefelter, a farm management specialist, based in the United States, says peer advisory groups can tackle any business issues members are dealing with on the farm.

"Maybe it's technology. Maybe it's people issues. Maybe it's due diligence on entering a new business. Maybe it's succession, development and planning, or dealing with an issue that I'm having with a bank or with a firm who's supplying the input," Klinefelter says.

"There are always issues that come up. I need a place besides just my own family that has been there and can see it from a different perspective. I need somebody with a fresh set of eyes and not with a vested interest."

How to get started

To start a peer advisory group, invite four to eight people to meet. Perhaps everyone runs the same type of operation or all have similar business goals, or maybe everyone is around the same age. Not all need to be involved in farming, they could be outside of agriculture but still have a keen interest in participating.

Keep the conversation focused on the reason for gathering and decide how often to meet – perhaps book the same day and location every month for it to be a regularly occurring event in everyone's calendar.

What happens at the meeting - stays there

Open conversation and trust are a big part of peer advisory groups, so make a rule that what's said in the group, stays in the group. Open conversation is also nurtured by

Bounce ideas off people. A peer advisory group can become a sounding board to react to plans and help with due diligence.

the group remaining closed, bringing in new members by invitation-only.

As the group gets to know each other, discussions can evolve and be as general or as focused as the group wants. Over time, it will likely become a comfortable place to do some informal benchmarking.

Bounce ideas off people. A peer advisory group can become a sounding board to react to plans and help with due diligence.

Klinefelter points out that peer advisory groups are a great arena to brainstorm about business challenges.

"Bounce ideas off people. Maybe I want a sounding board to react to what I'm thinking about doing or to help me do the due diligence. Have I thought about the what-ifs?" Klinefelter says.

He refers to one peer advisory group with such an open, long-term relationship that when one of the members unexpectedly died, the rest of the group operated as a mentor for the surviving family members in transitioning the farm.

"They knew enough about the business and this person to help make the transition much smoother," Klinefelter says.

Sort out the operations and logistics

When forming a peer advisory group, members should take turns chairing the meeting, whether that means selecting the topic for discussion, inviting a guest speaker with the expertise of value for the group or getting to the coffee shop early to reserve tables.

Some groups choose to bring in a professional facilitator to run the meetings, in which case, there would be costs associated with the group.

Peer advisory groups can operate in a variety of ways, depending on the group dynamic and goals. They are a low-tech and simple approach to professional development, but when working effectively, they can produce huge benefits and be a rewarding experience.

Bottom line

Participating in a peer advisory group is an excellent way to bring together like-minded, experienced business-people to work for the good of the entire group. Maintain structure, discipline and frequency to get the most from your meetings and ensure they become a permanent part of members' calendars.

Keep conversations focused on the topic at hand, and stick to the rule that what is said, stays at the meeting. Creating trust in the group is vital for open, honest discussion.



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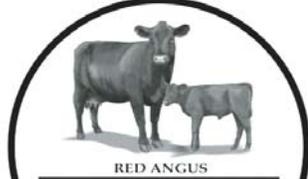
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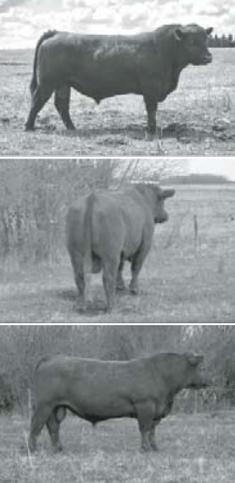




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Saskatchewan Invests \$15 million In Agtech

The Government of Saskatchewan announced recently it will provide \$15 million to help develop new technologies in agriculture and position the province as a global leader in the agtech sector.

Through Innovation Saskatchewan, funds will be invested in a privately-managed fund targeted exclusively at agtech companies that require venture capital to develop past the startup phase and scale up their business operations and manufacturing.

"The proper support, combined with strong research in agricultural innovation and the success of agtech startups, can make Saskatchewan a global force in agtech," Minister Responsible for Innovation Saskatchewan Tina Beaudry-Mellor said. "This investment will bring jobs and new growth to our province and equip farmers and producers with game-changing technology."

This investment will accelerate the province's economic recovery from COVID-19 and build upon a record year for venture capital investment in Saskatch-

ewan. Deals worth \$114 million were made in 2019, more than the previous five years combined, and most of those investments were made in Saskatchewan's tech sector. Once a partner is found, the \$15 million investment is expected to leverage millions more from private investors, complementing Innovation Saskatchewan's existing programs which support agtech startups but are not designed to scale companies to full business capacity.

Innovation Saskatchewan will issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) in the coming weeks to begin exploring fund options with the private sector.

"Saskatchewan is rising to the challenge of feeding a growing world population and innovation in agriculture technology plays an important role in meeting that growing demand," Agriculture Minister David Marit said. "This investment will ensure producers have made-in-Saskatchewan technology that supports their efforts to grow high-quality, sustainable food."

With global demand for food anticipated to rise 70

per cent by 2050, Innovation Saskatchewan is helping farmers gain a competitive edge to meet the future by building upon a significant and historic economic driver.

The agency's new investment, combined with its Saskatchewan Advantage Innovation Fund, Saskatchewan Technology Startup Incentive and the \$1 million Agtech Growth Fund announced in July, will work with the rest of the province's agricultural infrastructure to help stimulate the provincial economy, add value to Saskatchewan's agricultural products, and grow the technology sector—all important objectives in Saskatchewan's Growth Plan 2020-30.



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Kevin Weedmark photo

Harvest is well under way across southeast Saskatchewan and southwest Manitoba and the fields are looking beautiful from the air. Above, combines lined up for the harvest on the Crossley farm near Moosomin Lake. Below left, the Pipestone Valley and ravines cut into the pattern of fields. Below right, fields on the edge of the Qu'Appelle Valley. Kevin Weedmark took this aerial photo with the help of local pilot Rob Austin last Wednesday.



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Plant scientist wins national pathology award

By CRYSTAL JORGENSEN
FACULTY OF AGRICULTURAL AND FOOD
SCIENCES, PLANT SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND
INTERNATIONAL, UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Dr. Dilantha Fernando has been named the recipient of the 2020 Canadian Phytopathological Society Award for Outstanding Research. Considered the Society's most prestigious award, the honour recognizes outstanding research involving new concepts, the discovery of new phenomena, or principles in plant pathology or novel application of existing principles.

The citation reads:

**2020 CPS Award for Outstanding Research:
Dr. W. G. D. Fernando**

Dr. Dilantha Fernando joined the Department of Plant Science at the University of Manitoba in 1998 and was promoted to full professor in 2006. Dr. Fernando's research has made a tremendous impact on Canadian agriculture and the discipline of plant pathology. He has demonstrated innovative research in plant disease management and exceptional productivity, with 145 peer-reviewed articles, 15 book chapters, 78 proceeding papers and 240 abstracts. He has received more than \$33 M in external funding for his program, and is regularly consulted by grower groups and government agencies for disease-related issues associated with both crop production and international trade. He is known nationally and internationally as a leader in epidemiology and disease management, especially on blackleg of canola. He has supervised 31 graduate students, 80 highly qualified personnel and taught many plant pathology courses. He was the president for CPS in 2018-2019, and was recognized by APS as a Fellow in 2019.

Dr. Fernando is a world authority on blackleg of canola. His research on black-



Dr. Dilantha Fernando

leg pathotypes led to industry-wide efforts on R-gene rotations in canola production to reduce the risk of resistance breakdown, and helped seed companies select effective R genes for breeding new blackleg resistant canola cultivars. His lab contributed substantially to the development of 37 canola or HEAR (high erucic acid rape-

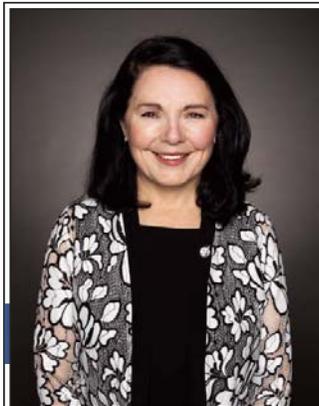
seed) canola cultivars with excellent resistance to blackleg, white rust and Fusarium wilt. The team effort and the achievement in developing the first Round-Up Ready HEAR cultivar was honoured by the Canadian government with a Canada Post stamp in 28 February 2002. By providing sound disease management advices based on his research, Dr. Fernando has built a reputation in the canola industry and among producers. Dr. Fernando's stature in blackleg research is also respected internationally. Dr. Fernando's research and collaborations with other scientists in

Canada was instrumental in dealing with the challenge of blackleg associated with Canadian canola export to China.

His research on Fusarium head blight of wheat has also had tremendous impact. In 1993, Dr. Fernando's pioneering studies on the dynamics of ascospore release, dispersal and ensuing infection substantially increased the knowledge of epidemiology of this important disease in Canada. Several novel findings in the epidemiology, population genetics, populations structure, genotypic diversity and genetic variability have been published following Dr. Fernando's earlier studies. His recent efforts to understand the population structure of *F. graminearum* on the Canadian Prairies have led to improved focus on the detection of toxin-producing strains. This work has increased the level of vigilance in grain inspection and improved safety of the food and feed industry. Dr. Fernando's lab was also instrumental in setting up the first wheat nursery for FHB resistance screening in Canada. This nursery, along with a blackleg nursery in Carman, Manitoba, has helped breeders screen new materials for disease resistance efficiently.

Dr. Fernando is also a pioneer in advancing biological control of crop diseases in Canada. One of the seminal papers stemmed from Dr. Fernando's discovery of unique organic volatile compounds in *Pseudomonas chlororaphis* PA23 that inhibit sclerotium formation as well as spore production from overwintering structures of the pathogen. His studies on the mechanisms of biocontrol have led to many novel discoveries, including antibiotic and its differential efficacy against different plant pathogens, gene expression/regulation mechanisms, and biofilm formation in biocontrol.

In recognition of his outstanding research in plant pathology and crop disease management, far-reaching impact in research on crop industry in Canada, exceptional teaching and mentorship, services and leadership provided to CPS and APS, as well as extraordinary outreach, Dr. Fernando is the recipient of the 2020 CPS Award for Outstanding Research.



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USask Global Institute for Food Security partners on supercluster project to help lower crop pesticide use

University of Saskatchewan (USask) digital agriculture researchers are part of a new Protein Industries Canada (PIC) consortium that will develop technology to help lower pesticide use across Canada, making crop protection more efficient and providing economic benefits for farmers.

BY USASK RESEARCH PROFILE AND IMPACT, AND PROTEIN INDUSTRIES CANADA

PIC is one of Canada's five innovation superclusters. The \$26.2-million PIC project into using artificial intelligence to target weeds and other pest crops is led by Precision.ai Inc., Sure Growth Technologies, Exceed Grain Marketing, and the Global Institute for Food Security (GIFS) at USask. PIC is investing \$12.8 million in the project, with the partners investing the remaining \$13.4 million.

"Collaboration between industry, government and universities is critical to accelerate agtech research and advance Canada as a global leader in plant protein innovation to help feed a hungry world," said USask Vice-President Research Karen Chad.

"We are pleased to be the first university to participate as a full partner in a project with this important supercluster, and we look forward to contributing our expertise in digital agriculture to help make crop production more efficient in Canada and around the world."

USask participation in the project will be led through the university's Plant Phenotyping and Imaging Research Centre, managed by GIFS. Lead researcher is USask computer scientist Ian Stavness, an expert in artificial intelligence and machine learning applied to agriculture.

"The aim is to develop new ways to spray weeds or other pests in a targeted way," he said. "The university's role is to develop a way to find out precisely



USask computer scientist Ian Stavness (right) and his team in a plant greenhouse.

where the weeds are so that they can be sprayed more efficiently to reduce pesticide use and help protect the environment. We will develop software to automatically sort through drone images of fields to identify weeds."

Estimates are that the new technology could reduce pesticide use by up to 95

per cent while maintaining crop yield, saving farmers about \$52 per acre per growing season. The technology can be retrofitted to existing pesticide sprayers, as well as to new sprayers, creating a product suitable for producers across Canada.

PIC CEO Bill Gruel said the new tech-

nology will have a tremendous effect on Canada's plant-protein sector.

"Consumers want plant-protein products that were grown sustainably, without sacrificing quality or economic value. This is particularly true in international trade where, despite Canada's reputation as a supplier of high-quality agri-foods, our products are facing increasing testing," he said. "Thanks to the work being done by Precision.ai, Sure Growth Solutions, Exceed Grain Marketing and GIFS, Canada's plant proteins are one step closer to being the highlight on the plates for consumers around the world."

To strengthen market opportunities, commodities grown using the technology will be tested for international pesticide tolerance, protein content and flavour quality.

"At GIFS, we recognize the value of collaboration, so we work with partners to discover, develop and deliver innovative solutions for the production of globally sustainable food," GIFS CEO Steve Webb said.

"We also serve as a catalyst for innovation within the USask community and industry partners. By joining forces with PIC, Precision.AI and other partners on this exciting project, we are developing innovative technologies to precisely target crop inputs only when and where needed, making production agriculture more efficient and more economically, environmentally and socially sustainable."

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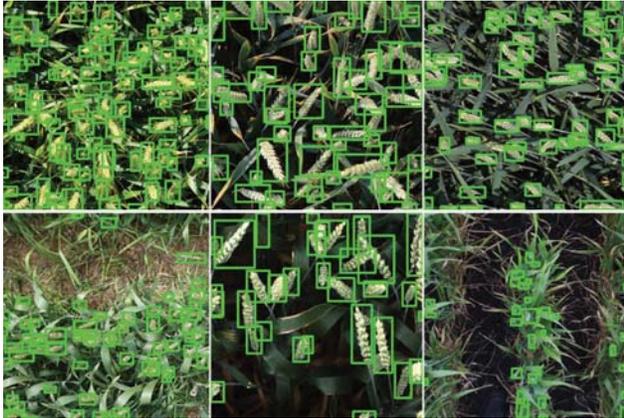
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USask and GIFS host global software competition to advance digital agriculture



Sample images from the Global Wheat Head Detection Challenge, with the wheat heads highlighted with green boxes.

Etienne David image

BY USASK RESEARCH PROFILE AND GIFS
Accurate determination of the number of wheat heads (the grain-bearing tip) in a field is vital for estimating yields in wheat crops, but the usual method—manual counting from digital images—is a long and tedious job.

To address this problem, University of Saskatchewan (USask) computer scientist Ian Stavness and international partners at eight other research institutions organized a competition, the Global Wheat Head Detection Challenge, to develop a computer software model for more effectively counting wheat heads using image analysis—an advance that will benefit agricultural producers, breeders, and researchers studying plant traits (phenomics) for ge-

netic improvement. USask's Global Institute for Food Security and Plant Phenotyping and Imaging Research Centre (P2IRC) together offered US\$15,000 in total prize money for the top three winners. The challenge was to design a software model for accurately counting more than 190,000 wheat heads (also called "ears") from diverse digital images from around the world.

"Competitors had to analyze pictures of wheat plants and identify all of the wheat spikes (heads) in the images," said Stavness, a member of the P2IRC team.

"We collected images of wheat fields from around the world and the main challenge was to find a solution that works across all these different wheat varieties and images," Stav-

ness said. "We wanted to make sure that the software created from the competition will work not only for the university wheat fields in Saskatoon, but that it will work just as well for a farmer in Herschel, Saskatchewan or one in Lampman, Saskatchewan, or even for a farmer in Australia. Almost all the submissions used advanced 'machine learning' methods to solve the problem, which is why

the competition is called a machine learning or data science competition."

More than 2,270 teams competed from around the world. The top three winning teams are from Japan, the United States, and Vietnam. The winners are listed at <https://www.kaggle.com/c/global-wheat-detection/overview>

The competition was run on Kaggle.com, which is the most prominent web-

site for data science competitions. The new model will be publicly available through open science: <https://www.kaggle.com/c/global-wheat-detection/overview>

"At GIFS, we appreciate how vital innovation is to enhancing plant breeding and the entire production agriculture process," said Steve Webb, GIFS chief executive officer. "This is why we were very pleased to support this im-

portant competition that will help advance wheat head counting, and we are thrilled about the exciting ideas that have come forward to innovate this manual process."

The competition is associated with the Computer Vision Problems in Plant Phenotyping workshop of the European Conference on Computer Vision to be held on Aug. 28: <https://www.plant-phenotyping.org/CVPPP2020>



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Thanks to the 4-H Steer Buyers



Cohen Neville
I would like to thank Food to Fit Nutrition for purchasing my first 4-H Steer, Sam. I hope you enjoy the beef. I am going to save the money towards a project for next year!



Pee Wee Member: Luke Greenbank



Pee Wee Member: Hayden Jamieson



Callie Reid
A big thank you to Dale at Nixon Electric for purchasing my steer "Bambi". I hope he tastes better than he behaved because he was kind of a bone head! I sure appreciate it and will use some of the money to put towards feed for my next year's steer, who will hopefully be a lot nicer! Thanks again Nixon Electric for your continued support of 4-H!



Drew Leeds
Thank you to Sandra Garrett from Witch's Brew for purchasing my 4-H Steer, Carl. I sure hope you enjoy the meat! I had lots of fun this year and can't wait to pick out another steer for next year.



Levi Jamieson
I would like to say a huge thank you to JACK Technologies Inc. - Danny McCarthy for purchasing my 4-H Steer "Buckshot". I hope you enjoy the beef and I really appreciate your support of the 4-H Program. I will be donating \$50 of my steer money to STARS



Rory Greenbank
With the difficulties facing us this year I would like to thank Corie and Aaron Wudrick-Mohrbuter for purchasing my steer. I plan on using my steer money to pay for the feed that was used, skating lessons and saving some for my education fund.



Nate Greenbank
Thank you to Parrish & Heimbecker for purchasing my steer this year. I plan on using the money to purchase a heifer to show in 4-H next year and expand my herd.



Cheyenne Jamieson
Thank you to Pharnasave - Darcy Rambold for purchasing my steer "Zeke"! Your faithful and continued support of the 4-H Program and 4-H Youth is extremely appreciated. I will be donating \$50 of my steer sale proceeds to a charity of the buyer's choice and using the remainder towards my future education plans!



Cutter Reid
A huge thank you going out to Curtis & Karleen Redman (Wapella), Margaret West (Roblin, MB), Mike Brasseur (Estevan) and Ron Gibson (Bienfait, SK) for purchasing my 4-H steer "JR". I want to say thank you for supporting the 4-H Program. Some of the profit will go towards expanding my herd and paying off the feed bill. I really hope you all enjoy the beef. Thanks again!

Thank you very much!

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Balance sheet of agriculture: Debt increased faster than equity in 2019

By ISABELLE NKA PNANG DJOSI
AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIST WITH FCC

The 2019 balance sheet of Canadian agriculture reveals the industry's financial health heading into the COVID-19 pandemic. The ability to cover short-term liabilities with cash or liquid assets declined in 2019, which suggests a weaker first line of defence for farms facing financial challenges.

The balance sheet's overall strength is also measured by the degree of financial leverage in the industry. The debt-to-equity or leverage ratio measures the total amount of debt in Canadian agriculture relative to total equity. This equation is important because it measures how much of the operation is financed by creditors compared to the farm. It also assesses an operation's ability to access capital and address operating environment challenges.

Debt-to-equity in Canadian agriculture weaker

In 2019, farm debt increased by 8.4% to \$109.2 billion, while farm equity increased \$18.7 billion or 3.6% to \$546 billion. As a result, the debt-to-equity position increased to 0.2, implying that 16.7% of assets in Ca-



nadian agriculture is debt-financed.

Operations expanding or making investments often find themselves with a ratio larger than this on their balance sheet. The nature of the investments also results in differences across sectors. Portfolio data

from FCC reveals that the median grain and oilseed farm operation had a leverage ratio of around 0.8 in 2019. The median debt-to-equity ratio was about 1.1 for poultry operations.

This is the fifth year in the row that the

debt-to-equity ratio is trending higher, and it's the weakest the ratio has been since 2010. Despite the higher leverage, Canadian agriculture remains in a strong position to weather potential challenges in 2020 as farm equity is five times larger than the debt.

What we expect moving forward

The debt-to-equity of Canadian agriculture is expected to soften further in 2020. Lower livestock prices, labour challenges and demand disruptions are expected to result in weaker farm revenues and higher operating costs. As a result, the demand for operating debt will remain strong.

Conversely, lower farm revenues are expected to slow the appreciation in farmland values and overall farm equity. FCC will release its mid-year farmland value assessment in mid-September—so stay tuned.

Overall, Canadian farm operations have access to the financing they require to weather current industry disruptions. Work with your lender and accountant to determine the suggested ratios for your specific industry and be sure to understand them according to the strategy and risks facing your operation.

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Why developing an HR strategy is worth the investment

One of the biggest challenges with human resources on the farm is investing in the resources.

Dr. Sara Mann, interim dean and the associate dean academic at the LANG School of Business and Economics at the University of Guelph, says there is no question that developing a human resources strategy on a farm is a good investment.

WORTH THE INVESTMENT

"One of the biggest challenges when it comes to human resources is convincing farmers and farm owners that investing in HR practices is worthwhile," Mann says. "When you're trying to measure the success or return on investment of an HR practice, it's very difficult to do that because there are so many other confounding variables. We find it very difficult to show there is a direct relationship between HR and the bottom line."

Still, Mann says research shows that spending money and devoting resources to HR will result in more motivated, committed workers, who perform better on the job and are more apt to stay with their employer.

USE TALENT MANAGEMENT

She also encourages farm operators to use talent management with employees.

"In all industries, we want our employees to be motivated to perform highly on the job, to be engaged. Will talent manage-

ment do that? Of course, it will," Mann says. "There's no question that investing in hiring, attracting, selecting and retaining the best employees will result in an improvement in profitability."

Mann says that not making that investment means a farmer will never "really be able to understand, predict or influence how employees will behave, and will not be able to attract, select and retain the best people."

THINK ABOUT HR STRATEGICALLY

Depending on the job on the farm, some operators may focus on minimizing costs of human resources. However, others may need and want the farm to be known in the community as one with a strong human resource plan.

Mann explains that if the positions to be filled are unskilled and don't require much training, it may not make sense to put a lot of farm money and resources into HR. More complex jobs, however, may need a more detailed strategy.

"If you are the type of company where attracting and selecting the best employee really would make the difference - if you have a very specific skillset you're looking for, a very skilled job you're looking to fill - then you need to brand yourself as an employer that devotes money and resources to HR to try and attract and retain the best people."

MOTIVATION GOES BEYOND MONETARY

Mann also adds that employee retention, satisfaction and performance



doesn't always come down to dollars and cents.

"There are a lot of other things you can do, aside from offering a high wage, that will motivate and encourage your employee to perform more highly on the job," Mann explains.

She says research shows that supervisors, managers and owners often underestimate the importance of

intrinsic motivation, such as feedback, telling people they're doing a good job and instilling feelings of accomplishment.

"That doesn't cost money, but it does take some training for people to realize that's an important thing that they need to look at as a supervisor or manager," Mann says. "Providing continuous feedback is

key to this approach."

She says it's also crucial to recognize that different employees are motivated differently. Some employees are motivated by money, others by much more intrinsic feelings.

"Understanding what each employee is motivated by and then altering your management approach to each employee based on this will make a big difference."

Bottom line

Developing a human resource strategy is a good investment on the farm. It can help attract and retain employees who are the best fit for an operation. As well, research shows that spending money and devoting resources to HR will result in workers who are motivated, more committed and will perform better with fewer turnovers.



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USask research reveals hidden features of plant genomes

An international team led by the Plant Phenotyping and Imaging Research Centre (P2IRC) at the University of Saskatchewan (USask) and researchers at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) has decoded the full genome for the black mustard plant—research that will advance breeding of oilseed mustard crops and provide a foundation for improved breeding of wheat, canola and lentils. The team, co-led by P2IRC researchers Andrew Sharpe and Isobel Parkin, used a new genome sequencing technology (Nanopore) that results in very long “reads” of DNA and RNA sequences, providing information for crop breeding that was previously not available. The results are published today in *Nature Plants*.

“This work provides a new model for building other genome assemblies for crops such as wheat, canola and lentils. Essentially, it’s a recipe for generating a genome sequence that works for any crop,” said Sharpe, director of P2IRC.

“We now know that we can get the same quality of genomic data and level of information about genetic variation for these important national and international crops. This means we can make breeding more efficient because we can more easily select genes for specific desired traits.”

Sharpe said his team is already using this software platform in the Omics and Precision Agriculture Lab (OPAL) at the USask Global Institute for Food Security (GIFS) to sequence larger and more complex crop genomes.

Black mustard (*Brassica nigra*), commonly used in seed form as a cooking spice, is grown on the Indian sub-continent and is closely related to mustard and canola crops grown in Canada. The research provides a clearer, “higher resolution” view of the plant’s genes and gives researchers and breeders a more defined view of which genes are responsible for which traits.

The resulting gene assembly for black mustard also helps explain how the black mustard genome differs from those of its close

crop relatives—such as cabbage, turnip and canola.

The team also uncovered the first direct evidence of functional centromeres, structures on chromosomes essential for plant fertility, and detected other previously hard to identify regions of the genome. This knowledge provides a foundation for improving crop production.

Parkin, a USask adjunct professor and P2IRC member, said the use of long-read sequence data has enabled unprecedented access to previously hidden features of plant genomes.

“This provides not only insights into how crops evolve but enables the identification of novel structural variation—now known to play an important role in the control of many key agronomic traits,” said Parkin, also the lead research scientist with AAFC Saskatoon Research Centre.

They also found in the sequence multiple copies of certain genes that express specific traits. This could mean that certain traits, such as fungal resistance, could be expressed more strongly through several genes.

Other USask members of the team include GIFS researcher Zahra-Katy Navabi and bioinformatics specialist Chu Shin Koh. Other team members include Sampath Perumal, a



P2IRC researcher Andrew Sharpe with the PromethION high throughput DNA and RNA sequencing device at GIFS. Dave Stobbe photo

post-doctoral fellow with Parkin, as well as others from the University of Ottawa, Thompson River University, the National Research Council, and researchers from the United Kingdom and China.

“The genome assembly for black mustard that we have developed is a great example of how new Nanopore sequencing technology quickly reveals important genome biology,” Sharpe said, noting that

this advanced sequencing technology and capability is available to public and private plant breeding organizations through the OPAL at GIFS.

The research is funded by the AAFC Canadian Crops Genomics Initiative and P2IRC, as well as a Mitacs Elevate post-doctoral fellowship.

The P2IRC program is a multidisciplinary digital agricultural research centre funded by the Canada First

Research Excellence Fund and managed by GIFS. The goal of the centre is to discover, develop and deliver new tools and integrate them into software platforms to accelerate digital

breeding. The result will be new crop varieties that are more resilient to biological and physical stresses such as disease, insects and drought, ensuring sustainable food production.

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Help young people plan well now to afford the farm later



According to farm financial experts, addressing questions around farm purchase involves creativity in saving, investment and loan management strategies.

FROM AN AGRISUCCESS ARTICLE BY MATT MCINTOSH

Focus on segments, not the whole

Purchasing the farm is less daunting when done in increments, says BDO Canada's Coralee Foster. An accountant and partner based in south western Ontario, she believes smaller transactions—with or without a loan—let the in-

coming generation slowly invest in farm assets while letting the outgoing generation feel more comfortable.

"Maybe they're in a position to buy the next piece of equipment ... it might not be the whole parcel," Foster says. An estate freeze (where the value and tax liability of appreciating assets is frozen, usually to

transfer future growth to someone else) is one option, she adds. It's designed to retire equity over time.

Colin Sabourin, financial planner and investment advisor with Winnipeg's Harbourfront Wealth Management, agrees. "Any future growth goes to you. Otherwise it's just a matter of paying as slowly or as fast as you want."

Debt strategies

Sabourin says debt is almost always a reality for those buying a farm. He says the most significant asset many farmers possess for repaying debt is their time, which itself can be leveraged.

"You can borrow from Mom and Dad... and work that loan off by putting in hours on the farm," he says.

Foster says it's common for the outgoing generation to provide some financing, which can bring tax advantages if repayment is

The most significant asset many farmers possess for repaying debt is their time.

spread out.

You may need to do more than just service debt, Foster adds. "Leave room for a poor crop year, or a piece of equipment that needs to be replaced unexpectedly. Find the balance."

TFSA is never a bad idea

If you do have money to invest, Sabourin says a tax-free savings account (TFSA) is "a no-brainer." Assets in a TFSA can include other forms of investment than a savings account—like stocks and mutual funds—for more aggressive saving strate-

gies.

"If you're saving ... you should be doing it through a TFSA," Sabourin says. He generally recommends people saving for land make additional investments elsewhere. "Keep your investments inside your TFSA conservative if you're planning on purchasing something in less than five years, it's okay to be a little more aggressive," he says.

According to Foster, producers with off-farm investments are in a more

flexible position when it comes to transition.

Know the numbers—and expectations

Both Foster and Sabourin reiterate it's crucial to know the financial situation of the farm. The outgoing generation needs to be transparent, while the incoming generation needs to make efforts to review the information.

"Being clear on everybody's expectations up front, I think, is the most important thing," Foster says.



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Kevin Weedmark photo

Harvest is well under way across southeast Saskatchewan and southwest Manitoba Valley. This was the scene just west of Moosomin last week. Kevin Weedmark took this aerial photo with the help of local pilot Rob Austin last Wednesday.

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Published from the World-Spectator office
714 Main Street Moosomin, SK

306.435.2445

world_spectator@sasktel.net
www.world-spectator.com/ag-news

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A sunflower and sunset. Taken at Langenburg, Sask. Submitted by Nicole Rathgeber.



Rhlayn Gallarde in a canola field near Fort Qu'Appelle and field of sunflowers near Neepawa.



Eric Thompson driving the combine at Gravelbourg, Sask. Submitted by Kelsey Thompson



Left: Jenny Scharff from Cromer, Manitoba took this photo of Katie Little in a barley field at Cromer.



Above: Harvest submitted by Ross Legaarden at Kenlis, Sask



Above: Nixon and Oaklan Hockley with their papa Keith Jones harvesting in the Silverwood area, between Wapella and Whitewood. Submitted by Alyssa Jones.

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