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**EYE ON THE SKY**  
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EXPLAINED » **PAGE 7**



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# Alberta Farmer

Your provincial farm and ranch newspaper

VOLUME 10, NUMBER 13

JUNE 24, 2013

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**EXPRESS**

## AROUND A BARREL OF FUN



Twelve-year-old Karissa Enders, of Chestermere, Alta., guides her Shetland pony Flying Lollipop around a barrel in an all-breed competition held at the Spruce Meadows equestrian centre. Karissa was the youngest competitor in the event which pitted the Shetlands against nine other horse breeds. PHOTO: WENDY DUDLEY

## Interest in farmers' markets continues to grow

**There are now 130 approved farmers' markets in the province, but producers say there's plenty of room for growth**

**BY ALEXIS KIENLEN**  
AF STAFF / EDMONTON

Farmers' markets are growing in popularity and that's good news for producers like Jered Serben of Serben Free-Range Meats.

"It's pretty attractive for us to be there, instead of owning a storefront," said Serben, who generates most of his sales at Edmonton's City Centre Market and sits on its board.

"If I just had a storefront, I'd have to do all my own advertising and promotions to try to attract people. If I'm at the markets, I have many more chances of people looking for my products and seeing me."

The City Centre Market attracts an estimated 25,000 to 30,000 people on a typical Saturday. That was an important factor for Serben and wife Julia, who has a full-time, off-farm job. The Smokey Lake couple has young children; and raises pigs, turkeys, laying hens and chickens.

"We used to run around to a lot of different markets and do about three markets a week," said Serben. "What we realized is that our customer base would split up amongst those three markets. When we dropped the other two and started going to City, our customers followed us."








Some of their regulars live in Stony Plain, Spruce Grove or on the far side of Edmonton, but they value getting to know the farmers they buy from, he said.

"They have lots of questions," he said. "Some are naive, and some questions are quite good

**FARMERS' MARKETS** ▶ page 6

**XL RECALL:**

**PANEL FINDS 'RELAXED' ATTITUDE BY XL STAFF** ▶ **PAGE 3**

INSIDE »	LIVESTOCK	CROPS	COLUMNISTS
 <b>AFA CRITICIZES RESEARCH CUTBACKS</b> Lethbridge loses rangeland research to Swift Current <b>9</b>	 <b>SPEAK OUT, SAYS ALBERTA PORK</b> Draft code of practice would limit gestation stalls <b>23</b>	 <b>DON'T WORRY ABOUT THESE DRONES</b> They're spying on crops, not on you <b>11</b>	 <b>BRENDA SCHOEPP</b> WHEN THE FARM SAFETY MESSAGE HITS HOME <b>24</b>
 <b>ALFALFA REJUVENATION TIPS</b> Consider autotoxicity from older stands <b>14</b>			 <b>ROY LEWIS</b> RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEWORMING BISON <b>25</b>
			 <b>CAROL SHWETZ</b> EQUINE ROPE BURNS REQUIRE TREATMENT <b>27</b>

**NEWS**

**Facebook tip gets trader in hot water**

WASHINGTON / REUTERS / U.S. regulators have obtained a court order freezing the assets of a Thailand-based trader, saying he reaped \$3.2 million in illegal profits after getting a tip ahead of the announcement that a Chinese meat company was buying Smithfield Foods. The Securities and Exchange Commission said Badin Rungruangsavarat, 30, may have received the tip from a Facebook friend.

Shuanghui International Holdings recently said it was buying U.S. pork producer Smithfield for \$4.7 billion.

The agency said the friend is an associate director at a Thai investment bank which was also exploring a bid for Smithfield.

The SEC said Rungruangsavarat reaped \$3.2 million in profits by trading Smithfield "out of the money" call options and futures shortly before the announcement.

"Rungruangsavarat essentially cornered the market in Smithfield call options and futures contracts," the SEC said.

**CORRECTION**

**Rural/urban study**

A photo credit was missed for a picture that appeared with a June 10 issue story about the rural/urban reciprocity study being conducted by Carol Williams in the June 10 issue. Don Gill, an associate professor at the University of Lethbridge, should have received credit for the photo, which appeared on page 14.

# Caped cowcasaders welcome Superman

Jersey hosts a unique man of steel premiere at the local cinema



The island's namesake cattle joined in the celebrations to welcome a native son in a starring role. PHOTO: DANNY EVANS

**STAFF**

Even the namesake local cows were getting into the spirit of things June 13 as actor Henry Cavill took a premiere of his new film "Man of Steel" to his home island of Jersey.

A release from the island's tourism board said Cavill, who plays the leading role of Superman, made a specific request to the film company to give something back to the island where he was born and spent most of his childhood. His family still lives on the island and were joined by friends and supporters for a series of special screenings.

"Island life is gearing up for Henry's arrival; from the *Jersey Evening Post* turning into the *Daily Planet* for a day to local produce being prepared for the premiere's after party. Even our famous cows can't wait for Superman to fly in on Friday," said David de Carteret, director at Jersey Tourism.

As well as cows being dressed in red capes, a giant Superman crest was been drawn in the sand and a stamp featuring the man himself was issued.

Jersey is the largest of the "Channel Islands" between England and France, and like neighbouring Guernsey, is also known for a breed of dairy cattle of the same name.



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# XL Foods Inc. beef recall was avoidable: Report

Panel finds 'relaxed attitude' towards mandatory procedures amongst plant management, CFIA staff in Brooks

BY VICTORIA PATERSON  
AF STAFF / CALGARY

It was preventable. That was the conclusion of the independent expert panel's review of last fall's massive beef recall of beef from the former XL Foods meat-processing plant at Brooks. The panel also found a "weak food safety culture" and "relaxed attitude" at the plant, now operated by JBS.

On June 5 in the House of Commons, federal Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz tabled the report prepared by Dr. Ronald Lewis, Dr. Andrew Corriveau and Dr. Ronald Osborne, the independent panel formed to investigate the recall that saw about 4,000 tonnes of beef and beef products recalled from Canadian and international markets and 18 people become ill after contact with E. coli 157.

"It must be said that, over-

all, the incident revealed some of the strengths of Canada's food safety system... but it also revealed several weaknesses," the report said.

Operations at the plant were examined as part of the review, and the panel found both the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) staff and plant management shared a "relaxed attitude towards mandatory procedures."

The panel said, "We found that responsibilities towards food safety programs were not always met — by both plant staff and CFIA officials on site."

There was no evidence that XL Foods was analyzing root causes of "high-event periods" (HEP) or times when sample testing came back positive for the presence of E. coli 157 in data dating back to January 2012, the panel said.

A single source of contamination, such as a piece of equipment, is suggested by the fact that an identical E. coli 157 clone was found in products from various dates, the report said. "It is the panel's view that, had XL Foods Inc. analyzed its E. coli 157 sampling data and responded appropriately to HEPs in late August, the contaminated shipments would likely have been contained and not left the plant."

The CFIA should have been noticing shortcomings earlier, the panel said.



Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz said the government would act on all of the recommendations, announcing \$16 million over the next three years to create new inspection verification teams that will conduct unannounced spot checks at federally inspected plants.

## Recommendations

In addition to its in-depth review of how the recall happened and how it was handled, the panel issued 30 recommendations covering ways to strengthen prevention strategies and regulatory oversight, improve surveillance and trend analysis, strengthen incident management and recall response and improve food safety communication with the public and stakeholders.

Ritz said the government would act on all of the recommendations, announcing \$16

million over the next three years to create new inspection verification teams that will conduct unannounced spot checks at federally inspected plants across Canada. Many other recommendations are being addressed in the Safe Food for Canadians Action Plan announced May 17, Ritz said. "Canadian families must have confidence in the food safety system."

The recommendations all have value, said Jim Laws, executive director of the Canadian Meat Council, which represents federally inspected meat packers and processors. "Everybody takes this pretty seriously because this can mean the end of your business," he said.

Rich Smith, executive director of the Alberta Beef Producers, welcomed what he thought was a thorough review.

"We as an industry were asking for a complete review and it looks like that's what they did," Smith said, noting his organization and the Canadian Cattlemen's Association are supporting research aimed at improving food safety, including the CCA's renewed calls for beef irradiation approval.

While Aaron Brower, president of the Western Stock Grower's Association, thought the panel's report was well done, he hopes to see action. "Reports are reports and they have to be followed through and implemented to have any effect,"

Brower said.

The impact of the recall is still being felt by the industry in general and cattle feeders in particular, said Bryan Walton, CEO of the Alberta Cattle Feeders' Association. The association commissioned a report from the George Morris Centre that showed between \$16 million and \$27 million of marketing-related losses as a result of the recall. "We don't believe it should have ever got to a point where the plant was closed. The damage is done now. We've lost a Canadian owner, we've lost a bid," he said.

Walton questioned the need for more inspectors if people in the plants are doing their jobs, but supports more food safety oversight.

Ellen Goddard, a professor and co-operative chair of Agricultural Marketing and Business in the University of Alberta's faculty of agricultural, life and environmental sciences, complimented the report's focus on data analysis and the lack of co-ordination in communication. "I thought it was great they focused on that," Goddard said.

While supporting the recommendations, she noted many E. coli infections can often be prevented by cooking meat thoroughly and washing produce when preparing food.

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*"We as an industry were asking for a complete review and it looks like that's what they did."*

RICH SMITH

# EU, U.S. leaders launch free trade talks

Canadian talks could be sidelined by bigger deal to the south

REUTERS

ENNISKILLEN, NORTHERN IRELAND /  
REUTERS

The United States and the European Union launched negotiations for the world's most ambitious free trade deal June 17, promising thousands of new jobs and accelerated growth on both sides of the Atlantic.

Trade between Europe and the United States is worth almost \$3 billion a day and a pact could boost both the EU and U.S. economies by more than \$100 billion a year each — an attractive prospect after the devastating impact of Europe's debt crisis.

"This is a once-in-a-generation prize and we are determined to seize it," said British Prime Minister David Cameron, flanked by U.S. President Barack Obama and the presidents of the European Commission and the European Council.

The first round of negotiations will take place in Washington in July, Obama said, speaking at the Group of Eight summit near the Northern Irish town of Enniskillen.

First considered three decades ago but knocked down by France in the 1990s, the idea of an EU-U.S. free trade deal has gathered



Bringing down the final barriers to trade could unleash billions of dollars in transatlantic business. PHOTO: THINKSTOCK

momentum as Brussels and Washington look to generate growth and China's rise prompts deeper western integration.

The United States and the European Commission, the executive body of the 27-country European Union, hope for a free trade deal by the end of 2014 — a tight deadline in complex international

trade talks that usually take many years.

The European Union and the United States already account for about half the world's economic output and nearly a third of world trade, and bringing down the final barriers to trade could unleash billions of dollars in transatlantic business.

The new talks proceed as Canada and the European Union remain deadlocked over a long-delayed free trade agreement, Canadian officials said June 7, casting more doubt on the pact as the EU shifts focus to a bigger deal with the United States.

The Canada-EU deal was initially supposed to have been

finished by the end of 2011, but there is no end in sight, largely because the EU is resisting Canadian demands for much greater beef access.

Ottawa and Brussels started talks on opening up access to each other's economies in 2009 and say a deal could generate around \$28 billion in trade and new business a year.

Sources close to the talks said farmers in the west of Canada, the heartland of the Conservative Party, initially sought the right to export between 80,000 and 100,000 tonnes of beef a year to the EU.

This alarmed the cattle industry in Ireland and France and EU officials said they can offer a little more than 40,000 tonnes a year. Canada has moderated its initial demand, but the two sides are still apart.

EU-based officials say that unless a Canadian deal is settled soon, the 27-nation bloc will switch resources to the U.S. talks and the Canada agreement could be frozen.

"We are aware obviously of EU plans to negotiate with the U.S. but it's also equally in the other side's interest, you could argue, to conclude an agreement to show what kind of agreement is possible," said Andrew MacDougall, spokesman for Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

AlbertaFarmer

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OPINION



BY WILL VERBOVEN  
ALBERTA FARMER | EDITOR

The drones are coming to a sky near you

UAV use in crop production will soon expand as technology advances

Most folks have heard about the use of drones for military purposes, but there is a much better future for these unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), as they are officially called, in the world of agriculture. A number of universities and research agencies are already busily investigating their use mainly for crop surveillance of diseases and other production issues. The potential is certainly clear, the research is now trying to find what system and equipment will work best at the least cost. However, the real push is coming from private UAV developers and monitoring equipment manufacturers who see new marketing potential in agriculture applications. A whole swarm of companies in the U.S., Europe, Canada and Australia are already well along with UAV concepts and prototypes. An additional industry inventing unique plant sensors and cameras will probably be created to take advantage of advancing drone technology.

Aerial crop surveillance isn't new — satellites and aircraft have done it on a limited scale for years. But the results were not always detailed or timely, and cost was a limiting factor. However, the advancement in technology has changed all that. Military drones now seem to be able to read newspapers at 500 feet, do it for hours on end with precise GPS measurements and broadcast the results to a cellphone instantly. With that type of pinpoint accuracy one can envisage new camera technology that will identify what types of insects may be in field and how many are infesting a crop.

I expect all of that future surveillance will see further development in the use of attack drones that could spray crops against disease and pests in the exact location of the

outbreak. That could see considerable saving in herbicides and pesticides in blanket spraying as is now done by ground equipment and large spray aircraft. You would think green groups would be shouting hallelujah with this technological revolution, but I suspect chemical companies may not be as enthusiastic.

Another area that might see the use of drones is in locating and counting livestock on range operations or large feedlots. Helicopter drones could fly over an area at 100 feet and scanners would pick up the tagged cattle. No more riding the range looking for stray or sick cattle. Feedlots would know instantly cattle numbers in pens and fields on any day. It's not that far fetched — Walmart and other retailers are developing tiny electronic tags that can be inserted onto every item they sell. Those items can then be scanned all at once in a grocery cart and a bill made up instantly. I expect present animal ID tags will be replaced with even more advanced technology within the next five years if the retailers move forward with their technology. Ultra-high-frequency livestock ear tags are already well along with development.

There is a further precedent to this concept. Long-distance electronic monitoring of wildlife with radio collars has gone on for years using directional antennae. More advanced technology using drones could be used to locate the whereabouts of tagged predators like bears and wolf packs. What an advancement to peace-of-mind ranching that would bring to a lot of producers, if you could launch a personal drone to search and locate predators near your livestock.

Of course there is a further extrapolation of this type of technology. Are we that far away from having an ID chip inserted into humans that could be picked up by drone surveillance? That would sure make law

enforcement a much more interesting exercise. The number of missing persons would certainly be reduced. If you think that is unlikely, think again, how many parents would not want an ID chip inserted in their kids in case the child is lost or kidnapped? But that opens a whole new can of worms and it's already a big concern in the U.S.

The Federal Aviation Authority in the U.S. is in the midst of developing a policy on how to regulate the private use of advanced UAVs. At present only hobby-level model aircraft can be used by private citizens without a licence. The concern has to do with privacy. Authorities are worried that more advanced low-cost drones can be used by citizens to spy on other citizens for nefarious, nuisance or even titillating purposes. It gets worse, government agencies could expand their surveillance of the behaviour of citizens.

What if green or animal rights activist groups wanted to spy on a farming or feedlot operation to gather incriminating evidence? They could do this if they were allowed to use advanced drones.

In Canada federal regulations are keeping pace with UAV advancements, agencies are more concerned with safety and sharing airspace with other aircraft. But it's a whole new world, and advancements in UAV engineering is opening up all sorts of possibilities not just in agriculture but in areas like pipeline inspection, forest fire surveillance and yes, catching speeding cars on highways.

It would seem that the future of drones for use in agriculture would be a great leap forward and make crop production even more efficient and I expect that will come. The problem for authorities and society is to find a way to use UAVs for their positive potential and not allow it to be abused. I expect those concerns are being struggled with as we speak.

Defining the meaning of 'local'

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has announced that it will be initiating a study into the definition of "local" food. The present labelling regulation states that local food is defined as being sold within 50 miles of where it is grown or within a local jurisdiction. The CFIA feels that definition is out of date and needs to be redefined.

One wonders why an agency that is constantly under pressure to deal with food safety issues and budget cutbacks, suddenly has the time and money to deal with an issue that has nothing to do with food safety. It's also not exactly critical, being that labelling anything "local" is voluntary, is impossible to confirm in most cases, and the regulations are unenforceable. One ponders, then why does the CFIA need to get involved at all?

The word local, like organic, natural or sustainable, has become somewhat meaningless to most as they are all used without much concern that they may not describe what is being sold. And since there seems to be no consequences to falsely using those labels, vendors from

giant grocery chains to small market gardeners, by accident or design, use such labelling to further their marketing schemes. It gets absurd at farmers' markets where consumers assume that all produce being sold is organic and local. It doesn't seem to occur to many that a lot of fruit and vegetables sold at farmers' markets can't possibly be local because of our short growing season.

In Alberta many vendors overcome the seasonal production concern by claiming their fresh produce comes from B.C., which seems to presume they have a year-round growing season. It's all suspect of course — most consumers wouldn't know a B.C. strawberry from one from California or Mexico. A vendor's old sales trick is to pile empty fruit boxes with B.C. labels in full sight of passing consumers. Some vendors have resorted to certificates as proof of where their produce comes from. That's done with Taber corn for instance. But there is no way of knowing, there is no test that can confirm the origin of a peach or a rutabaga. It's all part of the trust that

naive consumers want to have in the process.

In the CFIA announcement it was stated that in the interim, local would also be defined as anything produced within the province. That blows the 50-mile rule out of the water. To be fair that rule has discriminated against large provinces with a spread-out ag industry. Are vegetables grown by a Hutterite Colony 100 miles away any less local than vegetables grown by a small grower a few miles out of town? Local in Alberta is not quite the same as local in compact growing areas in B.C. or Ontario. But it opens a can of worms — where do you draw the line? In a province that is 800 miles long that makes vegetables from the Peace River district local.

I suspect more growers and retailers wanted to get on the "local label" bandwagon and want the label redefined for their own marketing purposes. The problem is that will make the label less exclusive, and much more competitive. In the end that will put it in the same boat as an organic label — that is, fairly meaningless.

# OPINION

## Please, let's not 'win' any more beef trade battles

While we fight an unwinnable battle against COOL, the Americans are stealing our domestic meat market

BY JOHN MORRIS  
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Traceability is a fact of life for almost every other commodity that consumers buy; yet somehow we have not embraced traceability's potential in the world of food. I cannot buy an iPhone that does not have complete traceability back to its basic components; yet what we put into our bodies is rarely traceable to source. Why is that?"

That's a quote (see page 26) from Brian Sterling, president of SCS Consulting which advises food companies.

Anyone care to disagree?

Or how about this, which is a paraphrase from a statement by a U.S. senator a few years ago?

"The law in this country requires that my underwear has a label to say where it comes from. Are you going to tell me that I shouldn't have the same information about what I put in my mouth?"

Over the past few weeks we've been bombarded by indignant Canadian reaction to the new U.S. rules on country-of-origin labelling (COOL) for Canadian meat. Federal and provincial agriculture ministers and commodity organizations have issued statements. National newspapers have run columns from various pundits. Everyone agrees. It's unfriendly. It's unfair. It's unnecessary. It will cost Canadians more. It will cost U.S. consumers more. U.S. meat packers and retailers don't like it either.



Uh, huh. All true. But so what?

For several years, or at least since that senator's comparison with underwear labels, it was clear that this thing was a done deal. There is overwhelming support in the U.S. (as in Canada) from consumers who want to know where their food comes from, and knowing where meat comes from would be at the top of everyone's list. To think Canada could be an exception is simply unrealistic. Yes, we know all about the complications of animals raised in one country and slaughtered in another. Yes, we know there's a free trade agreement with the U.S. Yes, we know it's contrary to World Trade Organization (WTO) rules.

Yes, but we should also know that we're dealing with the U.S. This is the country which refuses to recognize the International Court of Justice, which kidnaps people to be interrogated by the CIA in other countries run

***The previous rules cost the Canadian producer approximately \$25 to \$40 per head. The new ones will increase that to \$90 to \$100.***

by dictators, which uses drones to execute suspected opponents without trial and monitors everyone's phone and Internet traffic.

In comparison, violating the rules by insisting that a package of bacon say "Canada" on it is presumably not something that President Obama and colleagues are losing much sleep over.

Though it is a violation of the WTO, as we were proudly informed by the usual blizzard

of government and industry press releases when Canada won its COOL challenge. Apparently they assumed the U.S. would roll over and comply.

Which it has, apparently with a set of rules that are even more complex than the ones already in place. According to the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, the previous rules cost the Canadian producer approximately \$25 to \$40 per head. The new ones will increase that to \$90 to \$100.

In other words, we were better off doing nothing. The headline should read: "WTO challenge more than doubles cost to Canadian producers."

That doesn't include the cost of all the legal work and fruitless lobbying by producer organizations.

Meanwhile, the U.S. is eating our lunch in the beef business, or perhaps that should be serving us lunch with beef from our own cattle. According to last

year's Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute's report on the Canadian beef industry, in 2002 Canada had a beef trade surplus of \$1.4 billion with the U.S. By 2011 it had dropped to \$42 million. They're taking our cattle and shipping us high-end beef cuts that we should be producing ourselves. CAPI says we are at risk of becoming a net importer of beef.

The U.S. is also using some of our beef to expand exports offshore. Since 2005 its exports are up 280 per cent by value. Since 2002 ours are down by 3.5 per cent. How is it that Canada, with a comprehensive cattle identification system, can be so outsnookered by the U.S., which has none?

Even more ironic is that we have a better identification system than the U.S., but Canadian industry representatives have spent all this time and effort on insisting that a label not be placed on Canadian product.

Could it be that all the fuss over COOL is just a smokescreen for failure to address bigger issues in the industry?

The latest WTO "victory" will mean the cost to export to the U.S. will more than double. The Canadian Cattlemen's Association and the Canadian government need to look up the definition of a "Pyrrhic victory" — "one with such a devastating cost that it carries the implication that another such victory will ultimately lead to defeat."

Please, let's not try to win another one.

## U.S. farmers must get ready for climate change

Excerpt from a speech by U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to the National Press Club in Washington, June 5, 2013.

I'm the secretary of sgriculture, and I am not here today to give a scientific lecture on climate change. I'm here to tell you what we're seeing on the ground.

We're seeing more severe storms. We're facing more invasive species. More intense forest fires threaten

communities each year. NOAA (U.S. weather service) reported that 2012 was the second most intense year in our history for extreme weather events — droughts, flooding, hurricanes, severe storms and devastating wildfire. NOAA also advised that last year was the warmest on record for the continental United States.

New technologies and advanced practices have managed to keep production steady even in the face of these new and more extreme weather patterns.

But the latest science tells us that the threat of a changing climate is new and different from anything we've ever tackled.

Earlier this year USDA released two comprehensive studies — one focused on crops and one on our forests — detailing the projected effects of climate change on our agriculture and forestry production.

These studies found that in the short term we have the means to manage threats, but over the next 50 years we will face new and different problems.

We'll face the need to adapt

crop production. As temperatures increase, crop production may need to shift based on water availability and other factors. Where you're growing water-intense fruits and vegetables today, you may be growing a drought-resistant row crop in a generation.

Rising temperatures will also add to our invasive species issues, bringing with them increased costs for producers. Right now, weed control alone costs us more than \$11 billion a year in the U.S. — and those costs are expected to rise with increasing temperatures. When winters aren't cold enough to kill off invasive insects, we'll face a new challenge to adapt to those threats. Landowners, dealing with bark beetles, are already starting to experience this phenomenon.

We will face more severe weather patterns. We'll see more events that could harm crops and livestock, which demand new strategies.

In our forests, the troubling pattern of intense and destructive wildfires threatens to become the norm. The fire season is now at least 60 days longer than it was just 30 years ago. The pine beetle

epidemic, which many scientists attribute to climate change, covers some 40 million acres of land across the interior West. Fires impact more acres. A recent Forest Service study forecasts a doubling of annual acreage subject to wild land fire by 2050.

In the Northeast, extreme precipitation events have increased faster than anywhere else in the nation, reducing yields.

Across the Midwest and Great Plains the growing season has lengthened by almost two weeks over my lifetime.

In the West and Southwest — home of more than half of our nation's high-value specialty crop production — increased drought poses a particular threat to irrigation-intensive nuts, fruits and vegetables.

So the fact is, across America, farmers and ranchers and forest landowners are seeing the beginning chapter of what will be a long-term challenge posed by a changing climate. This problem is not going to go away on its own.

That's why America must take steps now to adapt.



**FARMER'S MARKET ▶**  
 from page 1

and they've done a lot of research."

Consumer interest in local food is providing opportunities for farmers, he said.

"There seem to be more markets coming up lately," said Serben. "In Edmonton, it's just one after the other."

Size is one factor, said Eileen Kotowich, a farmers' market specialist with Alberta Agriculture at Vermilion.

"There are more individual markets in Edmonton than in Calgary," she said. "But in Calgary you've got those two big markets that operate four days a week year round."

Interest is also high in rural communities. In all, there are now 130 approved farmers' markets in the province, said Kotowich.

"We're seeing producers making a larger chunk of their income from farmers' markets," she said. "They go to more markets each week and they're seeing it as a viable opportunity for them to make money on the farm."

Even producers who earn most of their income from commercial sales are attending markets because it gives them immediate feedback from customers, she said.

Consumers are also often looking for more than just food, said Kotowich.

"Markets are also an outing for people. They get to go out on a Saturday and walk through some of those larger urban markets."

According to a 2012 provincial report, nearly 1.1 million Alberta households had visited a farmers' market in the previous year, spending an average of \$55 a visit. But there's been a change in what they buy.

"We've really seen a shift over the last few years from the produce to more protein products, more meat, more eggs (and) we've also seen a big increase in prepared foods," said Kotowich.

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Pastured pigs and pastured poultry are among the products sold by Jered and Julia Serben of Serben Free-Range Meats. PHOTOS: SUPPLIED



*"If I just had a storefront, I'd have to do all my own advertising and promotions to try to attract people. If I'm at the markets, I have many more chances of people looking for my products and seeing me."*

JERED SERBEN



# Lakeside beef plant in reputation-rebuilding mode

**JBS now running former XL plant at full capacity, chief says**

**BY LISA GUENTHER**  
MOOSE JAW / STAFF

Officials at JBS Canada are working to rebuild the food safety reputation at their Lakeside beef-packing plant after last fall's massive meat recall from the plant under the XL Foods banner.

The 2012 recall was the largest beef recall in Canadian history. A federally appointed review panel recently released a report blasting both XL Foods and Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) staff for a "relaxed attitude towards applying mandatory procedures."

The report found XL Foods was unprepared to handle the massive recall, and both XL Foods and CFIA shared "a weak food safety culture at the Brooks plant." The

panel made several recommendations to improve meat inspection and packing processes.

Following last fall's recall, the U.S. arm of Brazilian meat-packing firm JBS was contracted to manage — and, in January this year, purchased — the Brooks, Alta. plant.

Willie Van Solkema, now president of JBS Canada, told delegates at the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association (SSGA) convention here that the company is doing everything possible from a food safety standpoint.

"We have frequent audits from our own business. We also get audited by third-party auditors," he said, adding that customers have also audited Lakeside.

JBS reviewed all the food safety procedures and processes at Lakeside, and audited the plant while it was operating, to make

sure Lakeside's processes were consistent with processes in JBS's U.S. plants, he said.

When one plant finds a new process that works really well, the company communicates it immediately and implements it in other plants, he said.

Although the recall happened before JBS purchased the plant, he said, the company is still working to rebuild the plant's reputation.

"I think most customers are very comfortable with (the plant) because they've done audits of our facility. They're comfortable with our food safety. But, let's face it, it takes time to build that reputation back," he said.

The Lakeside plant is now operating at full capacity, processing 4,000 head of cattle per day.

Van Solkema said JBS is "absolutely committed" to food safety.

*"We have frequent audits from our own business. We also get audited by third-party auditors."*

WILLIE VAN  
SOLKEMA  
JBS CANADA

"We know how important it is to the beef industry. And let's be honest. We can't afford another wreck like the XL one. It hurt not just XL — obviously we all know what happened — but it hurt the total industry."



# Hail insurance available any time during the growing season

Alberta is Canada's hail capital, and last year it broke a record for hail claims to AFSC

## AGRI-NEWS

**A**s crops start to grow and another hail season begins, farmers across the province are hoping to be spared from the kind of record hail damage that battered crops in every part of Alberta last year.

"Last summer was the worst hail year we've ever seen. There were only 11 hail-free days all summer, from early June to mid-September," says Brian Tainsh, manager of on-farm inspections with Agriculture Financial Services Corporation (AFSC), the Crown corporation that administers crop and hail insurance in Alberta on behalf of the provincial government.

Hail pounded crops in every region of the province from Foremost to Fort Vermilion, triggering more than 11,000 claims and record payouts of almost \$450 million through AFSC's Straight Hail Insurance program, and the Hail Endorsement rider that many farmers add to their crop insurance each spring. "There wasn't one AFSC office across the province that didn't have hail claims reported," says Tainsh, noting the previous record hail year in Alberta was 2008 when hail claims totalled more than \$265 million.

What this year's hail season will bring is still anybody's guess, says Tainsh. He points out hailstorms in late May and



Hail pounded crops in every region of the province last year, triggering more than 11,000 claims. FILE PHOTO

early June have already triggered claims in the Vulcan and Lethbridge areas of southern Alberta — although crops at such early stages of growth have great potential to recover from hail damage.

Environment Canada meteorologist Dan Kulak says it's too early to tell what the summer holds.

"Alberta is a hail capital, so we know we'll get hail. The question is how much. A lot depends on what happens through the rest of June and how much mois-

ture we have going into July. The wetter it is, the greater likelihood of hail," he says, noting high humidity last summer was a key factor that contributed to so many hailstorms.

Kulak points out there are three ingredients for hail — heat, surface moisture or humidity, and a trigger.

"The sun is often the day-to-day trigger. It shines on the mountains, warming up the air, which then rises and often produces storms that move eastward from the foothills.

If that warm air collides with cooler air moving in from the mountains, the storms can be intense. Alberta is designed for hail production and the mountains play a key role," he explains.

Tainsh says an increasing number of farmers are choosing to 'Auto Elect' Straight Hail coverage at the same time they purchase crop insurance in April. "It gives them a two per cent premium discount and protects their crops against hailstorms early in the season."

That early protection is important, he says. "If farmers wait and their crops are struck by hail before they're insured, any fields with more than 25 per cent damage become ineligible for Straight Hail Insurance for the rest of the season."

Straight Hail Insurance is available any time during the growing season at AFSC offices, and takes effect at noon the day after it's purchased. "Farmers also have the option of purchasing it online — giving them 24-hour access and a two per cent discount," says Tainsh. "But first they need to contact AFSC for an activation code to enter the online site."

It's been 75 years since Alberta passed special legislation giving AFSC its mandate to provide hail insurance in every corner of the province — even the highest-risk areas, says Tainsh. "Many farmers couldn't get hail insurance back then because the risk was too high for private insurers to take on. That's why the Alberta Hail Insurance Board, which later became AFSC, was initially created — to ensure every Alberta farmer has access to hail insurance," he explains. "That's still an important part of our mandate today."

For more information about hail insurance, farmers can contact their nearest AFSC office or the Call Centre at 1-877-899-AFSC (2372).

## WHAT'S UP

**Send agriculture-related meeting and event announcements to:**  
will.verboven@fbcpublishing.com

**June 25:** Vegetable Field Day, Beck Farms 12:00 pm, Innisfail. Call: AFFPA 800-661-2642

**June 25/26:** 2013 Farming Smarter Field School 8:30 am, FS Field Site, Lethbridge. Call: FS 403-381-5118

**June 26:** CTF & Precision Ag Field Day, Durango Farms 1:00 pm, Lacombe. Call: ACPC 800-551-6652

**July 4:** All Crops Tour, Beaverlodge Research Station, Beaverlodge. Call: ACPC 800-551-6652

**July 4:** CTF Field Day Jackson Farm 1:00 pm, Dapp/Jarvie area. Call: ACPC 800-551-6652

**July 9:** All Crops Tour 2013, Lacombe Research Station, Lacombe. Call: ACPC 800-551-6659

**July 9/11:** Montana Research Bus Tour, Research Station, Lethbridge. Call: FS 403-381-5118

**July 10:** 2013 International Livestock Congress, Deerfoot Inn, Calgary. Call: Chantelle 403-686-8407

**July 11:** CTF Field Day, Steve Larocque Farm 1:00 pm, Morrin. Call: ACPC 800-551-6652

**July 16:** 2013 All Crops Tour, CAPA office, Oyen. Call: Rick 780-678-6167

**July 18:** Medicine Hat Field Tour, Field Site 8:30 am, Cypress County. Call: FS 403-381-5118

**July 19/20:** 2013 World Plowing Championship, Olds College, Olds. Call: Kerry 403-556-4762

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## IRAN RAMPS UP WHEAT PURCHASES

Iran has ramped up its campaign to import wheat, buying more than 800,000 tonnes in two weeks in what some traders said was a drive to ensure adequate supplies for a possibly tense period after its June 14 election. Traders believe Tehran paid a significant premium for at least 200,000 tonnes of wheat last week, adding to the previous week's purchases of 600,000 tonnes of bread-making wheat and 60,000 tonnes of feed wheat from Germany and the Baltic and Black Sea regions. "The pace of buying has been truly incredible," a European trader said. "Iran is still looking for more." — Reuters

## BULGARIAN FARMERS EYE BIG WHEAT CROP

Bulgarian farmers expect the Black Sea state to reap up to 4.8 million tonnes of wheat this year due to favourable weather, the Agriculture Ministry said last Wednesday. "Grain producers estimates are for a crop of between 4.7 million and 4.8 million tonnes and for a barley crop of between 700,000 and 800,000 tonnes," it said in a statement. Bulgaria, which exports about 2.0 million tonnes of wheat a year, harvested 4.4 million tonnes last year. Its barley harvest was 650,000 tonnes in 2012. — Reuters

# MARKETS



## Farmers unlock old-crop canola bins for delivery

CBOT soy slips on a bearish USDA supply/demand report

BY DWAYNE KLASSEN

The path of least resistance for canola futures on the ICE Futures Canada trading platform remained to the downside during the week ended June 14. Declines were influenced by the perception that canola seeding was now complete and that the crop was off to a generally good start, development-wise.

Downward price action was augmented by a generally weaker tone in outside oilseed markets during the week, including Malaysian palm oil, European rapeseed futures and Chicago Board of Trade (CBOT) soybean values.

Farmers, also now confident of harvesting a canola crop in the fall, have begun to unlock their bins of old-crop canola and to deliver to country elevators. Many farmers who have started to move their canola may have had that \$700-a-tonne price target in mind, based on conversations with some oilseed brokers — but with recent price weakness, those farmers have decided to take advantage of current values.

There remain opportunities to deliver against the nearby July future, but a lot of outlets are now accepting deliveries against the November contract.

The downside in canola was restricted by scale-down pricing by commercials. A lot of that price action was said to be covering export business as well as domestic crusher requirements. The export demand coming forward was believed to be covering both routine sales and fresh Chinese demand.

Adding to the support in the canola market were concerns about wet, cool weather which has dominated Alberta in particular. The worries were confined to select pockets of the canola-growing regions in that province. However, similar concerns were also now starting to surface in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

The crop concerns are not likely to send canola significantly higher, but can be viewed as one of those weather scares that have been talked about over the past couple of weeks.

There continues to be absolutely no interest in trading ICE milling wheat, durum or barley contracts.

### Bearish soy numbers

CBOT soybean futures were pushed lower during the week ended Friday with weakening demand and a bearishly construed supply/demand balance sheet from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.



PHOTO: THINKSTOCK

USDA left the U.S. soybean supply/demand table unchanged from its May report, with total 2013 U.S. production still estimated at 3.39 billion bushels. U.S. ending stocks were left unchanged, with old crop at 125 million bu. and new crop at 265 million bu.

Globally, USDA trimmed soybean ending stocks for 2012-13 by 1.3 million tonnes to 61.2 million. New-crop ending stocks were also lowered from May estimates by 1.27 million tonnes, largely due to lower beginning stocks.

Weather also played a role in the soybean declines, with the return of warm and dry conditions allowing U.S. farmers to finish off seeding. Improved weather was also seen aiding in the development of the recently planted crop.

The fact U.S. farmers were successful in getting the crop seeded was viewed as bearish for futures. However, there continue to be a few individuals who are adamant U.S. soybean output will be down, given how late the crop was put into the ground, and are certain yields will be well below normal.

CBOT corn values also suffered a price setback during the week with good weather for crop development and expectations of a record-large harvest in the fall.

A bearish aspect of USDA's report on corn came from its decision to not lower its new-crop supply forecast for 2013-14 by as much as the trade had been anticipating.

USDA now projects new-crop U.S. corn carry-out as of Aug. 31, 2014 at 1.949 billion bu. This would be down from its forecast last month of 2.004

billion, but well above the trade expectations averaging 1.758 billion bu.

USDA made numerous adjustments to the U.S. corn supply/demand balance sheet. It lowered yield by 1.5 bu./ac., citing delayed planting in the western Corn Belt that raised the likelihood that seasonally warmer temperatures and drier conditions in late July will adversely affect pollination and kernel set in a larger share of this year's crop. It reduced the average yield to 156.5 bu./ac. but made no revisions to planted acreage.

Even with a 135-million-bu. cut, USDA still sees 2013 U.S. corn production at 14.005 billion bu., an extremely large crop.

Meanwhile, USDA increased, rather than lowered, its old-crop U.S. corn ending stocks projection. The old-crop ending stocks projection was raised by 10 million bushels as USDA increased its U.S. corn import total to 25 million bushels.

The slightly larger old-crop carry over (769 million bu.), plus USDA's adjustments to 2013 new-crop production puts new-crop ending stocks at 1.949 billion bu., 55 million lower than USDA's May estimate, but well above trade expectations. The stocks-to-use ratio declined slightly to 15.2 per cent, more than double the old-crop ending stocks-to-use ratio of 6.9 per cent.

Globally, old-crop corn ending stocks declined to 124.3 million tonnes from 132.2 million. New-crop ending stocks were lowered by 2.8 million tonnes to 151.8 million on lower forecasted production and feed use.

Wheat futures on the CBOT, MGEX and KCBT generally lost ground during the reporting period, with most of

the bearish news associated with the adequate global wheat supply situation. Seasonal pressure also added to the KCBT wheat market given that the harvest of the U.S. winter wheat crop was now underway in select locations.

USDA projected U.S. all-wheat production at 2.08 billion bu., up from May estimates just shy of the highest trade estimate. Of that total, U.S. winter wheat production increased to 1.509 billion bu., higher than trade estimates.

U.S. hard red winter wheat production, at 781 million bu., is two per cent larger than last month's estimate. USDA also boosted its estimate of U.S. soft red winter wheat production two per cent higher, to 509 million bu. White wheat production increased slightly from May and came in higher than the average trade guess.

U.S. old-crop wheat ending stocks for 2012-13 increased by 15 million bu. due on slower export demand. New-crop 2013-14 ending stocks were lowered by 11 million bu. from May to 659 million bu., within the range of trade estimates, as increased production and export forecasts offset the decline in beginning stocks.

Globally, 2012-13 ending stocks for wheat declined slightly to 179.9 million tonnes; however, 2013-14 ending stocks came in lower than trade estimates at 181.3 million, a 5.1-million-tonne decline from USDA's May estimates, reflecting lower foreign production.

*Dwayne Klassen writes for Commodity News Service Canada, a Winnipeg company specializing in grain and commodity market reporting.*

## Richardson to spend \$40 million on expansion

**The Winnipeg-based company is adding grain storage and farm input facilities across the West**

WINNIPEG / REUTERS

**P**rivately held Richardson International Limited said it will spend \$40 million to add grain storage and farm input facilities in Western Canada, continuing an aggressive expansion in the wheat and canola region.

The new projects come after Richardson completed this year the \$900-million purchase of numerous Viterra grain-handling and -processing sites, linked to Glencore Xstrata PLC's takeover of Viterra in 2012.

Richardson, now one of the two biggest western Canadian grain handlers with Viterra, said June 10 it will add 14,000 tonnes of grain storage capacity to each of its country elevators at Carseland, Alta., Crooked River, Sask., and Shoal Lake, Man.

The Winnipeg-based company will build more fertilizer storage space plus blenders and storage warehouses for chemicals and seed at four country elevators previously owned by Viterra. The facilities are at Stony Mountain and Letellier, Man., Kindersley, Sask., and Lacombe, Alta.

Richardson will also build a 35,000-tonne fertilizer distribution centre at Saskatoon, Sask., and add fertilizer blenders to its locations in Oyen and Magrath, Alta.; Kamsack, Saskatoon and Shellbrook, Sask.; and Shoal Lake, Man.

Richardson chief executive Curt Vossen told Reuters recently that the company is too large to grow much more in Western Canada through acquisitions and would look for opportunities in the United States.

The company has already announced it will spend \$120 million to expand its Vancouver, British Columbia, grain terminal and is boosting its canola-processing capacity at its two plants.



**The latest expansion follows earlier improvements to JRI's terminal and canola-crushing facilities.**

# Alberta Federation of Agriculture criticizes ag research cutbacks

**Lethbridge Research Centre loses rangeland research to Swift Current**

BY VICTORIA PATERSON  
AF STAFF / CALGARY

**A**lberta farm groups are disappointed by Ottawa's decision to cut back on research in the province, says the head of the Alberta Federation of Agriculture.

"Our group sort of views it as (government) saying one thing and doing something else," said Lynn Jacobson.

Universities can only do so much, and the research focus of private companies is on boosting their profits, he said.

"Some of the primary research that Ag Canada has done will more than likely suffer," said Jacobson, adding public research is an investment that pays rich dividends.

"It is a concern all the way across the board for us."



**The office at Onefour, which will close along with Stavely and former PFRA offices in Westlock, Peace River, and Red Deer.**

Rangeland research conducted in Lethbridge is being moved to Swift Current (although the Lacombe Research Centre will take on beef grazing work from Brandon, Man.) and the Onefour Ranch and Stavely substations will close. As well, former Prai-

rie Farm Rehabilitation Administration offices will be closed in Westlock, Peace River, and Red Deer.

The cuts are part of an effort to find the "most effective and least-costly ways to deliver service to Canadians so that as much

of Agriculture Canada's overall budget as possible goes directly to producers and the agricultural industry," Agriculture and Agri-Food spokesman Patrick Girard stated in an email.

Girard couldn't say how many jobs in Alberta would be lost, but a union official said 19 members of the Agriculture Union, a branch of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, would be affected.

"We had no idea those cuts were coming," said Fabian Murphy, adding 700 positions were being eliminated across the country.

Usually there is more consultation and discussion with the union, but that didn't happen this time, he said.

"We're not happy with that," he said.

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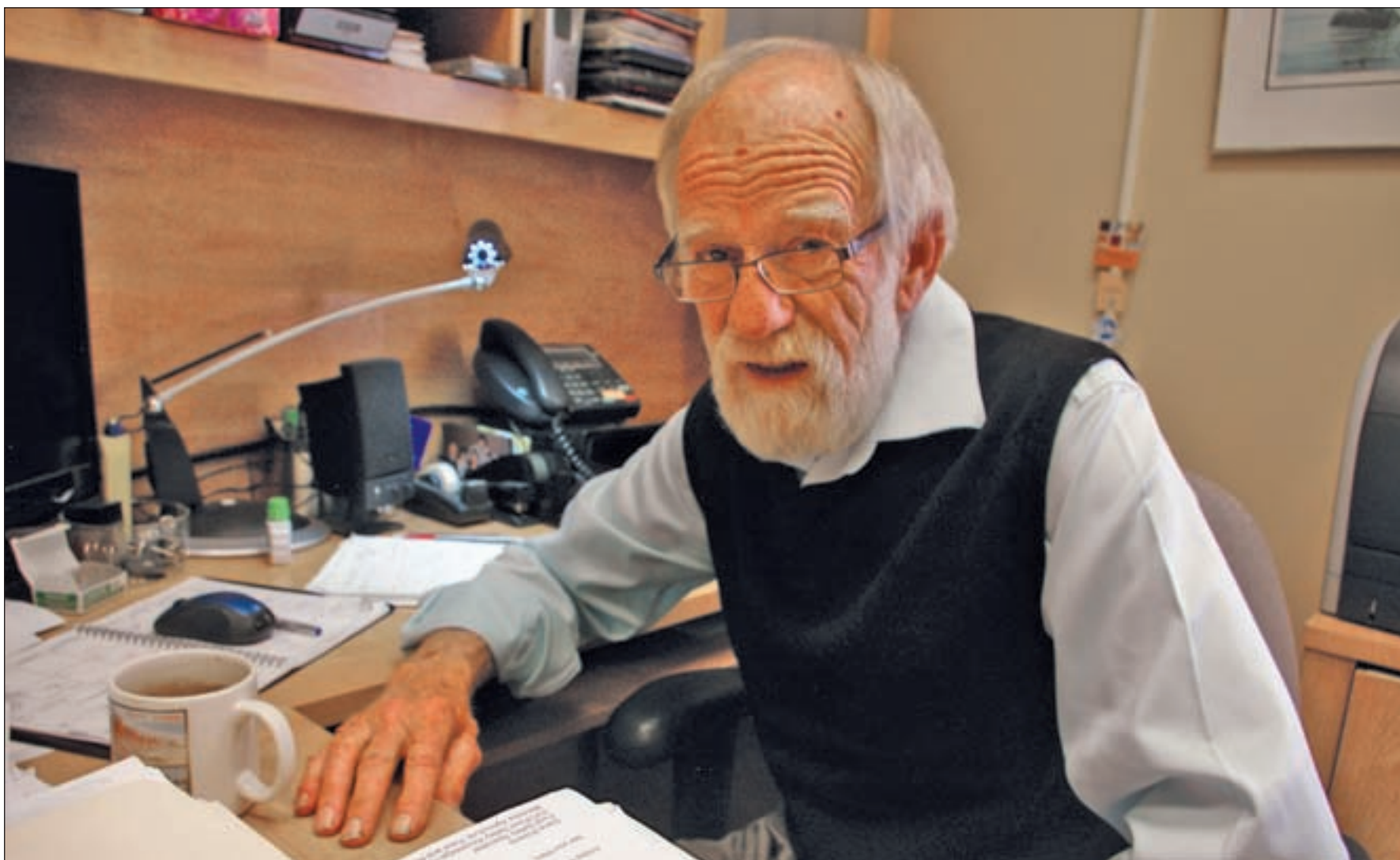
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# CCA hopeful resubmitted irradiation petition will succeed

The debate over whether to permit irradiation of beef products begins again



University of Manitoba food scientist Rick Holley was the principal investigator in a recently completed study on the effectiveness of low-dose electron-beam treatment to eliminating harmful bacteria in beef trim used to make ground beef. Holley also oversaw a panel of taste testers to see if the treatment changed the colour, aroma, texture, juiciness or flavour of the meat. PHOTO: LORRAINE STEVENSON

BY LORRAINE STEVENSON  
STAFF

The waiting has begun all over again for the Canadian Cattle-men's Association (CCA) as it renews efforts to persuade Health Canada to approve irradiation for beef.

The CCA submitted paperwork in early May asking the federal agency to restart the approval process for beef irradiation in Canada, repeating a similar request in a 1998 petition.

Then, the association sought irradiation as an option for fresh or frozen ground beef in its final packaging for the control of E. coli 0157:H7. However, this time, the petition is for all types of beef products so that its use can be expanded to other beef products, said Mark Klassen, director of technical services with the CCA.

"This isn't a short process," said Klassen, adding it will take at least a year for Health Canada to process the application.

The U.S. Food and Drug Agency (FDA) has evaluated the safety of irradiated food for more than 30 years and seemed the process was safe. Beef, pork and poultry are among nearly a dozen food products permitted to be irradiated in the U.S.

The CCA's request has been on hold for 15 years, with the federal government stating last fall there were no plans to revisit the issue.

A scientific review of CCA's initial submission was completed by Health Canada in 2000, and at that time a recommended Canadian code of practice for food irradiation was also developed.

But the matter was shelved after public consultations in 2003 revealed considerable consumer unease with food irradiation.

He's hopeful there may be less opposition this time.

Klassen also said time lapse may be to their advantage. It was consumer concern that halted final approval of the previous application, not questions about the safety or efficacy of irradiation technology.

"Sometimes there's no substitute for time," he said. "It's my impression that society is becoming more comfortable with technology of all sorts."

But opposition will be expressed again. Groups and individuals who continue to mistrust the technology have already begun urging Canadians via online posts and letter-writing campaigns to tell federal authorities to block approval.

However, there are also signs some Canadians would choose irradiated food products. A 2012 Angus Reid poll conducted by the Consumers Association of Canada logged 45 per cent of respondents saying they were 'very concerned' about the presence of food-borne illness-causing bacteria in both chicken, hamburger and deli meat. Eleven per cent said they were 'very likely' and 43 per cent 'somewhat likely' to consider irradiated meat as a choice for their household if it was less like to be contaminated with pathogens.

## New research

The CCA's 2013 petition is also supported with updated research, including findings from a study completed this spring at the University of Manitoba

showing a very low dose of electronic beam irradiation is effective at killing pathogens of concern.

University of Manitoba food scientist and principal investigator Rick Holley said a treatment of one kGy, which is the unit used to measure absorbed dose, was shown to effectively control both E. coli 0157:H7 and non-0157 VTEC E. coli as well as salmonella in fresh beef trim (which is used in ground beef production).

"Our intent here was to determine what effect would the lowest practical dose have upon elimination of threat or risk with this group of pathogenic organisms," he said.

The study also used a sensory panel to determine whether the same low-dose e-beam treatment would affect sensory qualities. The findings show there are no detectable changes to aroma, texture, juiciness and flavour and only very minor changes in colour that are eliminated when meat is cooked, Holley said.

A panel of taste testers could not tell which patties were treated, even when made with 100 per cent irradiated beef, he said, adding there was also improved shelf life of fresh meat.

"Within this single study, with the equipment that we were using, and at that level (of treatment) we found essentially suitable elimination of the pathogenic bacteria and we weren't able to see that there were detectable effects on the cooked meat," Holley said.

Irradiation is approved in the U.S. for use in meat at absorbed doses up to seven kGy. Irradiation has been scientifically deemed safe for food use at levels much higher — up to 60 kGy.

Irradiation is approved by Health

Canada for potatoes, onions, wheat, flour, whole wheat flour, whole and ground spices, and dehydrated seasoning preparations but the technology is not widely used. According to Health Canada's website, the main use of irradiation in this country has been on spices.

## Critics

Klassen said while the technology will continue to have its critics, the industry believes clear labelling of irradiated beef and consumer education as key to these products eventually gaining consumer acceptance.

The CAC's survey notably also found the majority of Canadians (57 per cent) don't understand what food irradiation is.

"We'll do what we can through labelling of these products so consumers can make an informed choice," he said, adding that pasteurization was suspected for many years after the milk industry began using it too.

"Where we can get support from the medical community and the scientific community helping explain this will potentially shorten that time for acceptance," he said.

"I think the concerns that are understandably present for some consumers relate to the fact that irradiation seems like something new, even though it has been around for more than 100 years," he added.

It was in 1905 that patents were first issued to U.S. and British scientists who were then proposing the use of ionizing radiation to kill bacteria in food.

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## AGRIUM SUSPENDS NITROGEN PROJECTS



gas contract for the project. The news came as many rivals said they planned to add nitrogen capacity in the United States, where a greater supply of natural gas makes production more profitable.

Agrium stepped back from two projects that would have expanded its capacity to make nitrogen-based fertilizer, partly because numerous competitors are pursuing similar plans. Agrium, the world's third-largest nitrogen producer, said June 3 that it would suspend engineering work on a proposed \$3-billion plant in the U.S. Midwest. Instead, it will focus on finding a partner to share the capital cost and securing a long-term natural



PIONEER

## CROPS

## These drones are strictly for peaceful purposes

Bird's-eye crop scouting can provide earlier warning of crop problems

BY HELEN MCMENAMIN  
AF CONTRIBUTOR / LETHBRIDGE

How much to rent that quarter? Felix Weber says a view from above can help decide.

Weber is an Ontario consulting agronomist who uses a Swiss-made Swinglet CAM unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) for a variety of uses from locating old drainage tiles to assessing crop-damage claims, as well as for in-season crop scouting.

"The UAV quantifies things we already know," he says. "I find the UAV helps me give my clients better advice."

Weber says the infrared images show how much of the crop is affected and where the stress is worst. We still need to ground-truth, go there and check the problem, but we have target areas for our scouting," he says. "I walked a client's field where construction traffic had caused soil compaction and thought it didn't look too bad. When we flew the field, we could see the real extent of the damage and the pattern. In another field we were able to see the area that wasn't fertilized because a nozzle was blocked on the floater."

Another flight showed an apple grower had three trees with blight. The client was able to treat those and save the rest of his orchard from the disease.

Some involved with UAV mapping believe it's too complicated for non-specialists, but Weber disagrees. "With some training, you can fly this plane if you can manage a mouse," he says. You program the complete flight on your home computer — setting the area to cover, the altitude, overlap and size of each photo — then upload it to the plane. You launch the plane

by hand and you can modify the pattern during the flight. To bring the plane down before the flight plan is done, you just hit one button and it lands at the launch site.

"Everything comes with the plane," he says. "You do need GIS software, but the processing is relatively simple. And, if a farmer doesn't want to do it, most consultants can do it quite easily."

Weber has become the Canadian distributor for the Swinglet and its successor, the eBee. Both have a delta wing less than a metre across with a short fuselage carrying a push propeller instead of a tail. Both are made of compressed Styrofoam, so they're light. That minimizes risk to a manned aircraft in the event of a collision and helps them land very slowly and safely. "The biggest hazard for these planes is tall structures or trees. But, even when somebody does smash one up, it usually comes apart at the glue lines so they can just glue it back together themselves," says Weber.

## More complex

Steve Myshak and Owen Brown, partners in Isis Geomatics in Lethbridge, see unmanned aerial systems (UAS) as technology farmers can best access through consultants. Their company flies the area, processes the data and delivers it to clients as map layers within hours. They use an eBee and an Aeryon Scout, a quad-copter widely used in law enforcement that costs around \$35,000. "Our investment in aircraft and sensors is around \$150,000," says Myshak.

A fixed wing is generally better for mapping a larger area and a multi-rotor or 'copter allows you to look at an object from several angles.



Felix Weber says that if you can manage a compute mouse, you can fly the UAV.

They use true-colour, infrared, thermal and video imaging as well as gas sensors in their surveys. "The data processing isn't simple. Both Owen and I specialized in remote sensing in our postgraduate work and it took us awhile to learn to interpret all the information we collect from the UAS."

Isis Geomatics works with individual farmers and with McCains to assess field qualities that affect potato yield and quality. The company hopes to monitor crop N status as a rapid alternative to petiole testing.

## Low-cost quad-copter

Rory Paul, of Volt Aerial Robotics in St. Louis, Missouri, has developed a quad-copter for crop scouting, with easy operation and low cost as key

features. The UAV price includes software and carries a camera along with a GPS locator. It allows you to get a good look at any part of a field. "With our 12MP camera you can see the individual leaves on plants," says Paul.

He says you can monitor the video camera and choose some areas more closely. You can map the whole field or just weed patches. Once it's set up for takeoff, you launch it from your computer.

If the 'copter loses contact with the computer, or detects an issue with any of its systems, it returns to home. In the event it does fall to the ground, it has a radio tracker that links it to your computer so you can find it even if it falls into a crop with a totally closed canopy.

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# Aerial surveying now in reach of many farmers

Hobby craft are being reconfigured for serious aerial survey work

**BY HELEN MCMENAMIN**  
AF CONTRIBUTOR / LETHBRIDGE

Drones — technically called unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) — have matured from their days as just gee whiz military equipment to time- and money-saving tools in a wide range of industries, including agriculture.

In fewer than 10 years the Canadian civilian UAV industry has grown to around \$750 million from almost nothing. MicroPilot, of Stony Mountain, Man. became a pioneer in low-cost UAVs almost by accident. Its goal was to show other companies it was possible to build a functional UAV for under \$7,000 to create a market for its autopilot business.

*“There’s no new technology in these units — just radio links, GPS and an autopilot.”*

**RORY PAUL**  
VOLT AERIAL ROBOTICS



“In the early 2000s, a UAV was expected to cost about the same as a manned plane,” says Pierre Pepin, of MicroPilot. “We based our UAV on a motorized model glider from the Czech Republic.”

The UAV, dubbed “CropCam,” has a six-foot wingspan and the camera is mounted in a pod suspended below the wing. It’s launched by throwing it into the wind. The wings and fuselage can be disassembled and packed in

a rifle case for secure transport. It can glide to land on cropland or stubble safely. The CropCam has become a leading UAV especially in Southeast Asia and South America, where infrastructure is limited and costly.

Wine Hawk, which recently changed its name to Precision Hawk, was another early leader in low-cost crop surveillance. It has expanded from an automated plane protecting vineyards and other high-value crops from birds to focusing on data collection for precision agriculture, environmental monitoring, mining, forestry, engineering and geology. The new focus is in part less focus on the aircraft and more emphasis on collecting and processing data into information each industry wants.

You can even build your own UAV. Despite the high-tech image, you can safely run a purchased or home-built helicopter-type UAV with just a day or two of practice, according to Rory Paul, owner of Volt Aerial Robotics in St. Louis, Missouri. A hobby autopilot can cost as little as \$200 and a kit to assemble a quad-rotor UAV starts at \$600.

“People tend to discount what you can do with limited technology,” says Paul. “There’s no new technology in these units — just radio links, GPS and an autopilot. If you had the time and inclination you could build a unit like this for maybe \$2,000. Once farmers see the benefits of this technology, we’ll see all sorts of innovation.”

Canada is a leader in the development and use of UAVs because regulation has developed along with the industry. The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration will produce its UAV regulation by the end of 2015. Until then, UAV



The CropCam has a six-foot wingspan and the camera is mounted in a pod suspended below the wing. PHOTOS: SUPPLIED

flights are legal only if they’re for “research and development,” and a company is not allowed to offer commercial UAV services. Many states have legislation against UAVs to prevent surveillance.

In Canada, UAVs are being used to measure the volume of quarries, environmental monitoring — checking the health of fish habitat or the impact of an industrial site. First responders use UAVs in searching for people who are lost or hiding. A UAV can be safer in a hazardous environment and it can gather the information faster than people on the ground.

**Regulations and training**  
Flying a UAV any bigger than a toy requires a special flight oper-

ations certificate (SFOC), from Transport Canada. An SFOC is basically an operations plan. Before issuing an SFOC, Transport Canada needs to know who you are and what training you have to enable you to operate the UAV safely, when, where and at what maximum altitude you plan to fly.

Transport Canada also wants details on your UAV, its weight and material to assess its potential hazard to other aircraft, and how you mitigate risks.

Stirling Cripps of the Canadian Centre for Unmanned Vehicle Systems in Medicine Hat runs a two-day ground school for UAV pilots. It covers the theory needed for UAV flying — aerodynamics, weather, radio commu-



**The view from above shows the problem spots.**

nications for pilots and provides students with a radio licence — a requirement for aeronautical radio operation. Cripps has also produced a book that provides the basics you need to operate a UAV safely.

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## Break in Russian ractopamine meat ban possible

Ractopamine concern prompts Russian officials to visit Canadian meat plants

**BY ALEX BINKLEY**  
AF CONTRIBUTOR / OTTAWA

Russian veterinarians and meat inspectors are coming to Canada to examine measures Canadian companies have taken in order to become eligible to ship more meat free from the feed additive ractopamine, says Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz.

“We will try to show them how our companies can keep beef and pork treated with ractopamine separate from other meat,” Ritz told reporters in a conference call from Kazakhstan. Earlier he visited Russia and held discussions with the country’s new agriculture minister and other officials.

In April, VPSS, Russia’s veterinary and phytosanitary service, halted beef and pork shipments from about half of the Canadian companies registered to export meat to Russia. As he has all along, Ritz pressed his Russian counterpart to accept ractopamine (which aids digestion and improves feed efficiency) because studies have found it safe and WTO membership requires members to use sound science

when making health decisions on imports.

Russia has also blocked shipments from the U.S., Mexico, and Brazil because of concerns that ractopamine residue could impact humans.

Canada has been the largest pork supplier to Russia — selling \$500 million worth last year. But VPSS is now only accepting product from 12 Canadian pork packers and a handful of beef operations. Most of the operations are small.

The Canadian Cattlemen’s Association says the levels of ractopamine being fed to Canadian cattle are well below the internationally set limit. Russia bought about \$15 million of beef from Canada last year.

In addition to Russia, South Korea and Taiwan have banned it over concerns that residues could remain in the meat and cause health problems.

In December, Russia required all imported meat to have never been treated with ractopamine, which severely reduced beef shipments. In April, it tightened the restriction to take product only from plants that don’t handle animals fed the stimulant.

# Canadian canola meal boosts Chinese milk cows' production

The results will boost demand for Canadian canola, says the Canola Council of Canada

BY ALLAN DAWSON  
STAFF

The Chinese have 7.2 million reasons to switch their dairy cows to canola meal from other protein rations.

That's how many more litres of milk their 12 million cows would produce every day based on a year-long joint Sino-Canadian study conducted by Chinese academics, in co-operation with China's five largest dairy companies.

"Canola meal has now proven its value as a feed product in Chinese dairies, opening the door for China's milk industry to enhance quality and increase production without significantly increasing cost," Canola Council of Canada president Patti Miller said in a news release from Beijing June 14.

The results are timely given the growing demand for dairy products in the world's most populated country and concerns about milk quality.

The study, which compared Canadian canola meal against the dairies' usual protein rations of either soy meal or cottonseed meal, showed the cows fed canola meal produced, on average, 0.6 more litres of milk per cow, per day, Bruce Jowett, the canola council's vice-president of market development said in an interview.

"We want to show them if you're

going to import the seed not only are you getting great benefit in the oil that you're extracting... but you've also got this meal that has got a lot of value for your dairy industry," Jowett said.

The fact that the study was done by Chinese dairymen and a Chinese university with their own animals, in their own country adds credibility to the study, which is consistent with ones done elsewhere, he said.

"Now that they see it my hope is that they'll say 'how do we ensure that we can get more Canadian canola meal into our rations?'"

China is still restricting Canadian canola imports over concerns the seed could spread blackleg, a fungal disease, to its rapeseed crops. However, gradually more Chinese crushing plants are being allowed to import Canadian canola.

"We continue to work through the science," Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz told reporters during a teleconference from China where he was on a trade mission. "They've had a number of delegations to Canada and we have also worked with them here. They are opening up more for us. The new crush facility that is available to Canadian canola is in the rapeseed-growing area at the Delta of the Yangtze, which is extremely important to us. It gets it closer into the area we're looking to serve. So that's a big step for the Chinese government."



A canola council study says canola meal rations improve milk output over soy meal or cottonseed meal.

There's no word for "canola" in Mandarin so the Chinese refer to it as rapeseed, which is high in erucic acid and glucosinolates and are undesirable in the oil and meal, respectively. The council is pushing the distinction between the two.

The council is also promoting canola oil in China by doing taste tests.

"They really like the clean, light taste of it (canola)," Jowett said.

China has 1.3 billion people, the most of any country. And its middle class continues to grow, which means more disposable income for an improved diet.

Despite concerns over blackleg, in 2012 China imported a record \$3.1 billion of Canadian canola seed, meal and oil.

Most of the sales were for seed — 1.3 million tonnes versus 586,000 tonnes of meal.

However, canola exports to China swing wildly year to year. For example, in 2011 China imported \$1.5 billion worth of Canadian canola products — half as much as 2012.

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# Dairy producers urged to keep an eye on global trends

British food-marketing expert says improving diets in the developing world and aging population in the West will have major impacts on dairy production

BY ALEXIS KIENLEN  
AF STAFF / RED DEER

It's a changing world and dairy producers will need to keep a close watch on markets at home and abroad to keep up, says an expert in food marketing.

"The exciting part of the world, as far as most exporters are concerned, is the Asian end," David Hughes, a professor at Imperial College of London, told attendees at the recent Western Canadian Dairy Conference.

"You've got lots of people and they do appear to be racing forward. That's India, China and most of southeast Asia, and you can see it in the trade figures. They're demanding more meat and more dairy."

For example, demand for baby formula is soaring in China and other parts of Asia as well as in the Middle East and Latin America — which offers opportunities to offset declining demand in North America, he noted.

But there's a risk that comes with improved diets and rising demand for meat and dairy in developing nations, he added, because people in those countries spend a high proportion of their incomes on food.

"If you see a doubling in rice, wheat, maize or potatoes, then you'll see emerging country consumers focusing on affording staple foods and cutting back on discretionary products," he said.

Farmers of all commodities are already hugely dependent on China, he added.

"Whatever they decide to eat more of will have a huge impact on that commodity area going forward," he said. "If China stumbles or falls, all of us will feel it in commodity markets around the world."

The aging demographics of Europe and North America will also have a big impact, he said.

"There's a lot of opportunity in the dairy market but our traditional market of block, boring cheeses or fluid milks are under real, real pressure," he said.

However, a growing number of older consumers are willing to buy premium-priced products, said Hughes.

"Artisan cheeses are increasingly in demand," he said. "You might think them niche, but that niche is growing."

The dairy category is going to become more fragmented, predicted Hughes, noting non-dairy milks such as almond, soy, rice and hemp are grabbing market share.

Concerns about obesity and other health issues will see government acting — both through regulation and taxation — to reduce consumption of fats, sugars and salt.

"This doesn't mean poor news for dairy, because there are some great dairy products," said Hughes, citing the success of products such as Activia and Greek yogurt.

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# Consider autotoxicity when rejuvenating alfalfa stands

Stands that are two or more years old will contain more toxins than stands that are one year old or less

## AGRI-NEWS

When looking to breathe new life into an old alfalfa stand, alfalfa autotoxicity is one factor to be carefully considered before developing rejuvenation plans.

"Plants produce many different chemicals that they use to defend themselves from things like insects and diseases," says Stephanie Kosinski, forage specialist, Alberta Ag-Info Centre. "Certain plant species give off chemicals that affect the growth and development of other plants. This is called allelopathy. Alfalfa has an allelopathic chemical that inhibits the growth of other alfalfa plants. It is said to be autotoxic, or toxic to itself."

The autotoxic chemicals produced by alfalfa are water soluble and can leach into the soil from decomposing plant material and growing plants. The chemical causing autotoxicity in alfalfa has not been positively identified, but is thought to be ethylene and/or possibly medicarpin. The autotoxic chemical is found in higher concentrations in the leaves and flowers than the stems and roots of alfalfa plants.

"As soon as a stand is killed, the autotoxic chemicals are released into the environment from the decomposing alfalfa plant material," says Kosinski. "Once they enter the soil, they will remain there until they break down or are moved by water. The length of time these toxic chemicals remain in the

soil depends on soil type, temperature and rainfall.

"On sandy soils, you will see more acute effects of the toxic chemicals, but they will last for less time than on heavier-textured soils. This is because they will be quickly leached out by rain. On soils with more clay, the toxic chemicals are more strongly attached to soil particles, resulting in a lower level of damage over a longer period of time."

The age of the alfalfa stand affects autotoxicity. Stands that are two or more years old will contain more toxins than stands that are one year old or less. In addition, alfalfa plants have a higher level of toxins when flowering compared to alfalfa that is vegetative.



Alfalfa has an allelopathic chemical that inhibits the growth of other alfalfa plants.

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# India demand for yellow peas remains strong

Trade volume limited until new crop hits market

BY BRANDON LOGAN  
COMMODITY NEWS SERVICE CANADA

**D**emand for Canadian yellow peas continues to be strong after a disappointing Rabi crop (spring) harvest in India, said industry participants.

According to the Saskatchewan Pulse Market report for May 2013, yellow pea imports for India are expected to be in the 1.5-million- to 1.7-million-tonne range for 2012-13.

"I think a good chunk of yellow pea demand is coming from India and that is what has been giving it a lift for the last couple months," said Chuck Penner, president of LeftField Commodity Research. "It is certainly a

case of its (India's) crops being a little bit disappointing."

Shifting gears to last year's crop of green peas, Penner said he expects limited activity to continue until the new crops reach the market.

"I don't think there's much trade happening," he said. "There are very small volumes and little left to sell, so I really don't see much movement until the new crop hits the market — then prices will drop back down again."

In terms of this year's crops, seeding is over 70 per cent completed in Saskatchewan, which is on par with previous years, according to a Saskatoon broker.

Statistics Canada estimates that the 2013 Canadian pea area will cover 3.43 million acres, up from 3.34 million acres in 2012. How-

ever, StatsCan does not differentiate how many acres of green versus yellow peas are being planted.

"It's a little bit of guesswork, but I think there will be more green peas, so that will put a little pressure on that side of the market," said Penner. "Yellow peas' side of the market can handle bigger supplies, because the demand can expand."

"I think it'll be bigger than last year's crop, but we'll be starting with almost no carry-in stock of either greens or yellows. Total supplies aren't going to rise that much," he added.

Spot bids for old-crop green peas are \$7.50, with yellow peas trading as high as \$8.65. New-crop green peas are priced at \$12.50, with yellow peas at \$8.26, according to Prairie Ag Hotwire.



PHOTO: THINKSTOCK

## Crop and livestock biodiversity concern

The UN says 22 per cent of the world's livestock breeds are at risk of extinction

BY ALISTER DOYLE  
OSLO / REUTERS

A decline in the diversity of farmed plants and livestock breeds is gathering pace, threatening future food supplies for the world's growing population, the head of a new United Nations panel on biodiversity said May 27.

Preserving neglected animal breeds and plants was necessary as they could have genes resistant to future diseases or to shifts in the climate, Zakri Abdul Hamid said.

"The loss of biodiversity is happening faster and everywhere, even among farm animals," Zakri told a conference of 450 experts in Trondheim, Norway, in his first speech as founding chair of the UN biodiversity panel.

Many traditional breeds of cattle, sheep or goats have fallen out of favour, often because they yield less meat or milk than new breeds. Globalization also means that people's food preferences narrow down to fewer plants.

Zakri said there were 30,000 edible plants but that just 30 crops accounted for 95 per cent of the energy in human food that is dominated by rice, wheat, maize, millet and sorghum.

He said it was "more important than ever to have a large genetic pool to enable organisms to withstand and adapt to new conditions." That would help to ensure food for a global population set to reach nine billion by 2050.

Zakri noted that the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization estimated last year that 22 per cent of the world's livestock breeds were at risk of extinction. That means there are fewer than 1,000 animals in each breed.



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# Wild grass could help end wheat yield stagnation

Crossbreeding back to goatgrass could add up to 30 per cent to yields

LONDON / REUTERS

Plant scientists in Britain said May 13 that crossbreeding wheat with a type of wild goatgrass could end years of stagnation in yields with early results showing growth of up to 30 per cent.

The National Institute of Agricultural Botany said in a statement that the additional genetic diversity which the program introduced would offer new sources of yield improvement, drought tolerance and disease resistance.

“Over the years, domestication of the wheat plant has increased yields, but recently those increases have slowed, leading to concerns for future food security,” NIAB chief executive Tina Barsby said.

“This is partly because domestication has eroded wheat diversity and the pos-

sibilities for improvement from within the current wheat germplasm pool are reaching their limit.”

The national average wheat yield in Britain has stalled at around eight tonnes per hectare for the past 12 years.

Modern wheat varieties can be traced back to an original crossbreeding between an ancient wheat and wild grass species that happened in the Middle East about 10,000 years ago.

“Yield increases of up to 30 per cent have been produced in early field trials, despite the past few years being cold, wet seasons where lack of sunlight depressed yield,” plant breeder Phil Howell said.

He said new varieties would be developed adapted to future challenges such as restrictions on pesticides and fertilizers coupled with projected climate change and would be on farm by 2019 at the earliest.



PHOTO: LAURA RANCE

## BRIEFS

### Ammonium nitrate was cause of Texas explosion

SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS / REUTERS / Investigators have determined that ammonium nitrate was the cause of the explosion at a West, Texas, fertilizer plant that left 14 people dead and some 200 injured, a spokeswoman for the Texas state fire marshal’s office said May 7.

“The investigators have been able to narrow down the origin to the fertilizer and seed building on site, and we also know that what caused the explosion was the ammonium nitrate,” said Rachel Moreno, a spokeswoman for the Texas State Fire Marshal’s Office. “What we don’t know is exactly why.”

The fire marshal’s office has been leading the investigation of the April 17 blast, along with the federal Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives agency (ATF).

Ammonium nitrate is a dry fertilizer mixed with other fertilizers such as phosphate and applied to crops to promote growth. It can be combustible under certain conditions, and was used as an ingredient in the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 that left 168 people dead.

### Argentine farmers protest export tax

BUENOS AIRES / REUTERS The number of grain trucks entering Argentina’s main shipping hub of Rosario dropped sharply last Monday as farmers protested government policies by refusing to sell recently harvested corn and soybeans.

The Argentine government puts a 35 per cent tax on soybean exports and curbs overseas shipments of corn and wheat to ensure ample domestic food supplies. Growers say the curbs reduce profits by cutting competition among the exporters who bid for the crops.

The protest threatened to slow the loading of cargo ships waiting along the Parana and La Plata rivers for corn needed to replenish global reserves left thin by last year’s poor U.S. harvest.

The Rosario grains exchange said 553 trucks entered port by mid-morning on Monday, compared with 3,561 during the same time frame a week earlier.

The strike was to continue until Wednesday at midnight. But growers said more and longer protests might be needed to pressure the government into negotiating policy changes. Farm sector leaders are set to meet June 25 to decide what is next.

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## INDIA MONSOON FLOODS KILL SCORES

Early monsoon rains swelled the Ganges, India’s longest river, swept away houses, killed at least 60 people and left tens of thousands stranded, officials said last Tuesday. The rains were at least twice as heavy as usual in northwest and central India as the June-September monsoon spreads north, covering the whole country a month faster than normal. So far, the rains have not hit the summer sowing season in India, as planting of rice, sugar, cotton and other agricultural produce is not yet in full swing. About 55 per cent of India’s farmland relies on the monsoon for water. — Reuters

## WET WEATHER HITS U.K. WHEAT

Britain is on course to harvest its smallest wheat crop in more than a decade this summer, guaranteeing a second successive season as a net importer. The planting of wheat crops last autumn was wrecked by wet weather which also ruined the quality of last year’s harvest. The U.K. had its second-wettest year on record in 2012. “Almost every farm has got wet corners and thin crops in different places. We know it is going to take a long time to put this right,” Peter Kendall, president of the National Farmers Union said at the Cereals 2013 event. — Reuters

# WEATHER



## Severe summer weather – the ingredients of a tornado

Early signs point to an active thunderstorm season this summer

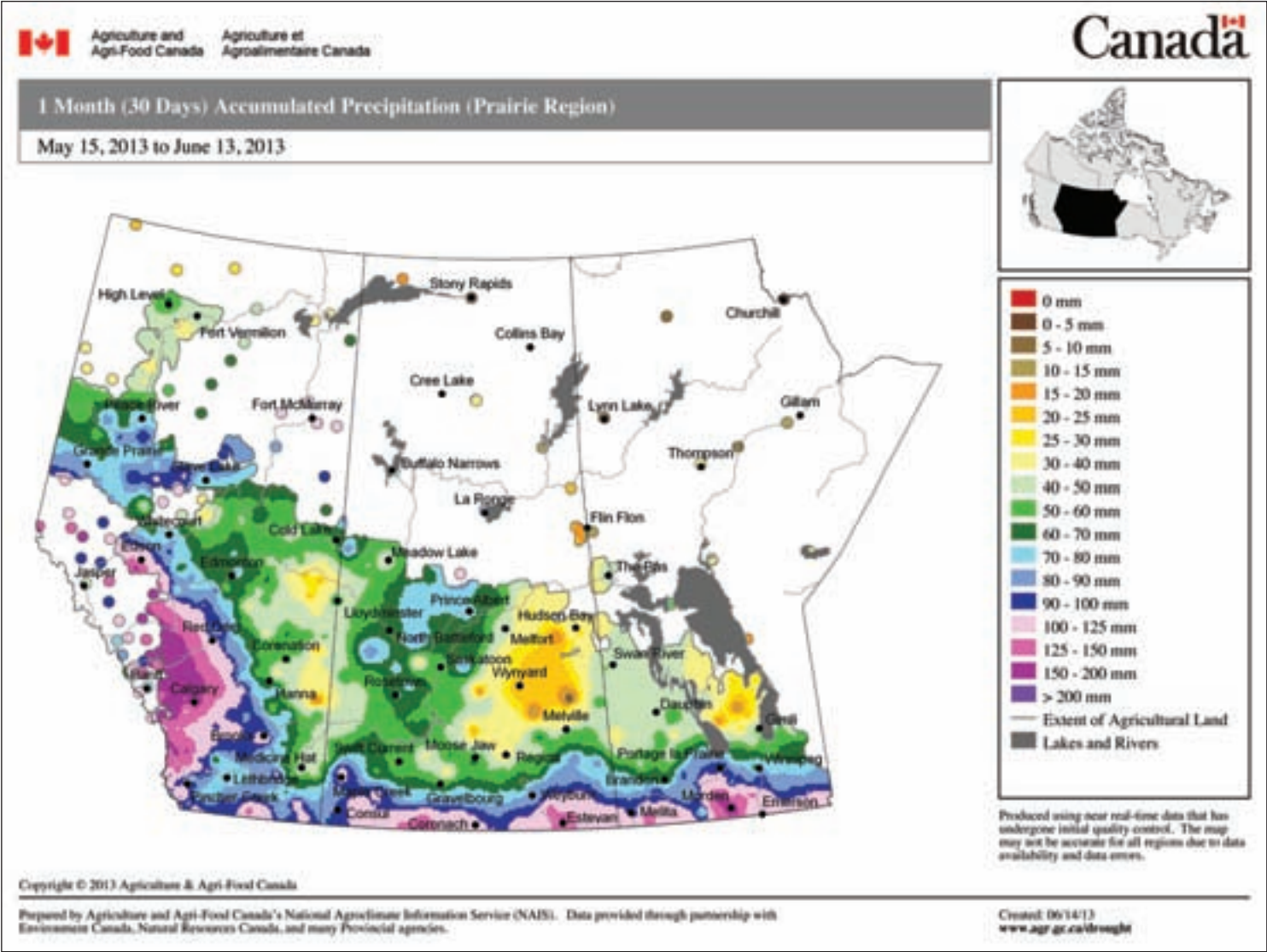
BY DANIEL BEZTE

After a fairly cool spring with few if any thunderstorms, summer has started to make headway into the Prairies over the last few weeks. In some years summers come and go with only the odd thundershower and maybe one big thunderstorm, but in other years every storm that comes along seems to bring severe weather. If the early part of thunderstorm season is any indication, it looks like this could be one of the more active years.

Every year I revisit the topic of severe summer weather, and in particular, thunderstorms and tornadoes. The reason I do this probably has to do with my teaching background. Typically it takes three to five attempts for people to “learn” a topic and since we are dealing with such a potentially deadly topic I think the extra lessons to remind us are well worth it.

The biggest question about thunderstorms and tornadoes is probably why some thunderstorms produce tornadoes and others don’t. The answer to this, and likely why I am always hesitant to write about how tornadoes form, is that we just don’t really know. We have a pretty good idea of the conditions necessary for the formation of tornadoes, and from this we can make some good, educated guesses, but until we can get detailed measurements of the atmosphere before and during a tornado-producing thunderstorm, the best we can offer is just that — an educated guess.

We know that for tornadoes to form you need severe thunderstorms, and not the garden-variety afternoon thundershower. The reason some thunderstorms are not severe while others do become severe comes down to a few factors. The first is just how much energy is available for the development of the storm. For thunderstorms, energy comes in the form of heat, and heat can be found in warm air temperatures or it can be liberated when water condenses. For most thunderstorms it is a combination of the two, but heat being released during condensation is the biggest



The 30-day period ending June 13 was fairly wet across the extreme southern part of the Prairies along with the western half of Alberta. Over these regions 100 to 200 mm of rainfall was recorded, which is two to four times the long-term average. Drier conditions prevailed over northeastern regions.

source of energy — that’s why most storms occur on warm, muggy days.

The next factor that helps to determine whether a storm will become severe or not is wind. Now remember, the atmosphere is three dimensional, so when we talk about wind we are not just talking about wind at the surface, but also at different heights. In a garden-variety thunderstorm the wind doesn’t change much as you go up in height. This means that over time, the storm’s downdrafts wipe out or kill off the updrafts.

**Separation**  
When this happens the storm no longer has an energy source and it begins to weaken and die. When wind speed or

direction change with height, the updrafts and downdrafts can become separated, and in some cases the downdrafts will actually help the updrafts and strengthen them. When this happens there is a continuous supply of energy for the storm and the storm can remain strong and last for several hours.

Weather experts believe that it is this change in wind speed or direction with height, also known as wind shear, that is responsible for the development of tornadoes. Here is where it starts to get a little fuzzy, but this is how experts believe tornadoes form. If the change in wind speed and direction is just right within the storm, large parcels of air will begin to rotate. This is the same

idea as when you take a pencil and spin it between your hands. If one of these rotating parcels of air gets caught up in the storm’s updraft, and the winds remain “just right,” it will begin to spin faster and faster, much like a spinning top. If the winds are not just right, then the air will not spin fast enough, and just like a spinning top, it will fall over and break apart.

Now, picture the spinning air becoming vertical within the updraft. The rapidly rising air within the updraft now begins to stretch out the spinning air and this will enhance the rotation, much like a figure skater pulling their arms in during a spin. As the spin rate increases it continues to stretch out, eventually breaking through the bottom of

the storm. At this point we would see a funnel cloud. If it continues to stretch and increases its spin rate, the funnel cloud will reach the ground and become a tornado. How big the tornado will get then depends on either how big the area of rotation that started the tornado was, or how long the “just right” set of wind speed and direction remain within the storm.

While tornadoes can produce the most powerful winds on Earth and they can be truly awe inspiring to see, I really hope that no one has to feel the effects of one first hand. Let’s hope the rest of the summer brings us a good combination of sunshine, heat, rainfall, and yes, a few thunderstorms to add a bit of excitement.

# Scientists say new study shows pig health hurt by GM feed

Study looked at 168 pigs over six months and found those fed genetically modified varieties of soy and corn had higher rates of severe stomach inflammation

BY CAREY GILLAM / REUTERS  
WITH FILES FROM CONTRIBUTOR  
ALEX BINKLEY

Pigs fed a diet of only genetically modified grain showed markedly higher stomach inflammation than ones which dined on conventional feed, according to a controversial new study.

The study was trumpeted by critics of GM crops, but proponents of biotechnology were equally quick to label the study as flawed.

The study by epidemiologist and biochemist Judy Carman was published in the June issue of the peer-reviewed *Journal of Organic Systems*. Carman, director of the Institute of Health and Environmental Research in Adelaide, and other Australian researchers worked with two veterinarians and a farmer in Iowa to study a group of pigs raised in the U.S. The study was conducted over 22.7 weeks on 168 newly weaned pigs in a commercial American hog facility.

Half ate a diet that incorporated genetically modified (GM) soy and corn, while the other 84 pigs ate an equivalent non-GM diet. The corn and soy feed was obtained from commercial suppliers, the study said, and the pigs reared under identical housing and feeding con-

ditions. The pigs were then slaughtered roughly five months later and autopsied by veterinarians who were not informed which pigs were fed on the GM diet and which were from the control group.

Researchers said there were no differences seen between pigs fed the GM and non-GM diets for feed intake, weight gain, mortality, and routine blood biochemistry measurements. However, those pigs on the GM diet had a higher rate of severe stomach inflammation — 32 per cent of GM-fed pigs compared to 12 per cent of non-GM-fed pigs. The inflammation was four times more likely in GM-fed males compared to non-GM-fed males, and more than twice as likely in GM-fed females versus non-GM-fed females. As well, GM-fed pigs had uteri that were 25 per cent heavier than non-GM fed pigs, the study said.

While the researchers said more long-term animal feeding studies need to be done, the Canadian Biotechnology Action Network said the research has lent “scientific credibility to anecdotal evidence from farmers and veterinarians, who have for some years reported reproductive and digestive problems in pigs fed on a diet containing GM soy and corn.”



A Monsanto spokeswoman discounted the study, noting that GM corn has been fed to pigs for the past 15 years. PHOTO: THINKSTOCK

Not so, charged a spokesperson for Monsanto Canada.

“The vast weight of scientific evidence gathered over hundreds of independent food and feed safety studies found no difference between animals fed GMO or non-GMO diets,” said Trish Jordan.

“For example, this study lasted about six months. Animals have been consuming GM crops and grains for more than 15 years.”

More than 150 scientific studies have been done on animals fed biotech crops and to date, there is no scientific evidence of any detrimental impact, said CropLife Inter-

national, a global federation representing the plant science industry.

That’s likely to be ignored and the new study treated as “if it was sound science,” said Steven Yarrow, vice-president of CropLife Canada.

“It will be quoted over and over,” said Yarrow.

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## CHILE REOPENS TO CANADIAN BEEF

Export certificates are now in place to resume immediate exports of all types of Canadian beef to Chile, one among many countries to shut its ports to all Canadian beef in 2003 after the discovery of Canada's first domestic case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in an Alberta cow. Immediate unrestricted access to Chile's beef market is estimated to be worth up to \$5 million a year for exporters, with "potential growth" of up to \$10 million in three years, the federal government said. Chile's total imports of beef products from all sources in 2012 were valued at an estimated \$827.7 million, the government added.

## U.S. HUNTS FOR HOG DIARRHEA VIRUS

The sudden and widespread appearance of a swine virus deadly to young pigs — one never before seen in North America — is raising questions about the biosecurity shield designed to protect the U.S. food supply. The swine-only virus, the porcine epidemic diarrhea virus (PEDV), poses no danger to humans or other animals, and the meat from infected pigs is safe for people to eat. Though previously seen in parts of Asia and Europe, the virus now has spread into five leading hog-raising U.S. states.

# LIVESTOCK

## Alberta Pork urges hog producers to speak out on new animal care code

**The draft Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Pigs would severely limit the use of gestation stalls and require producers to use group housing**

BY VICTORIA PATERSON  
AF STAFF / RED DEER

Alberta Pork is calling on producers to speak out against a proposed animal care code that would severely limit the use of gestation stalls.

"Clearly everyone has figured out already that this thing is full of landmines — that is why we're telling you that you need to respond in this public comment period," Alberta Pork chair Frank Novak told producers at a recent meeting in Red Deer.

"We need to have very clear statements about what this means to your operation."

The draft Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Pigs says gestation stalls

are not a best management practice, and can cause an increase in sow behaviours signalling stress, such as bar biting, sham chewing and excessive drinking. The yet-to-be finalized code stops short of an outright ban, but recommends use of gestation stalls be limited to no more than 35 days per cycle. It also states current stalls are not large enough to properly house a sow and would need modification. The new guidelines would come into effect in 2024.

"We were told years ago that sows were better off in stalls, we all know that," said Audrey Cameron, Alberta Pork's animal care and quality assurance co-ordinator.

"Now we're getting a different message."

While some attendees at the meeting have already adopted group housing, others expressed concerns about how they were going to pay for the switch.

"We're basically saying we can't do this, and somebody's going to have to pay the freight and we all know we have nothing left," Novak said.

The Manitoba Pork Council, which is also urging its producers to voice their concerns, estimates the cost of converting to open housing would be \$500 to \$1,000 per sow. Although no law forces farmers to abide by the code, it is effectively mandatory for producers under the industry's quality assurance program.

Other areas of concern in

the draft code are the practices of castration, tail docking, and teeth clipping as they relate to pain management in animals, as well as euthanasia and enrichment requirements.

Now is the time for producers to make their concerns known, said Novak.

"This thing is not a done deal," said Novak. "If all the producers rise up and say they will not sign this... this whole thing can die. This is your chance and you need to make sure that you're loud and clear about this."

The draft code is available at [www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/pigs](http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/pigs) and is open for public comment until Aug. 3.

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## Farm-to-farm traceability next step for pork sector

**Every pig will need 'a passport' to leave a farm as officials begin to track all pig movements within the province**

BY VICTORIA PATERSON  
AF STAFF / RED DEER

Farm-to-farm traceability requirements are coming for Alberta pork producers.

"This whole program was predicated on what we can do in Alberta from a traceability perspective that might help the industry deal with future animal disease outbreaks and food safety-related issues," said Ron Axelson, a traceability consultant working with Alberta Pork, which is contracted by the province to run the program.

Traceability information started being tracked in Alberta voluntarily in 2010 and has been mandatory since 2011, Axelson and Christina Carley, Alberta Pork's education program co-ordinator, said at a recent Alberta Pork meeting in Red Deer.

Over the next two years, the program, which already tracks hogs as they move from farm to fork, will start transitioning towards keeping data on all pig movement, starting with farm to farm.

One of the four official manifests will have to be filled out before the pigs leave a location, said Carley.

"Think about it in a sense as that shipment of pigs has to have that passport, or manifest, with it before it leaves the farm," she said.

The processor will be responsible for sending the final manifest in for the traceability records.

"We've also started the groundwork for starting electronic traceability," Carley said.

It's hoped electronic manifests will be available in the next few years. Axelson said 10 or 12 producers might be selected to help pilot the move to electronic manifests to help work out any hiccups.

"We could introduce it as part of the system as early as next year," Axelson said.

All pork producers will have to comply with the traceability rules, the focus will initially be on education, he said.

"We will know if you're not using a manifest going farm to farm, and you might get a visit from someone coming out to chat with you about it," said Axelson. "And if that doesn't work, quite frankly, the Alberta government takes over from there."

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The yet-to-be finalized code stops short of an outright ban, but recommends use of gestation stalls be limited to no more than 35 days per cycle.



# When the farm safety message really hits home

The government of Alberta has failed to acknowledge that farmers and farm workers need protection

BY BRENDA SCHOEPP

A few weeks ago I watched in horror as my husband was attacked and rolled by a cow. It was unexpected in our herd, but a new cow in a new place can result in some fear. It is in those moments when time stands still and you fail to believe your eyes. The same week in our community, a neighbour was injured by a bull and another fell with serious injuries. It is time again to talk about farm safety.

When my mother was posted at her first permanent job as a registered nurse in Edmonton, she was caring for a young boy who was kicked in the head by a stallion. Being a city girl, this had a great impact on her and she has been terrified of horses her entire life. As a child and still to this day, I have no fear of livestock and most certainly not of horses. I think now of her dread each morning as I tore out of the house and jumped on any old steed to spend the day galloping recklessly in the fields. I most certainly had my share of spills and hurts, and some minor damage to hips, but nothing that stopped me from a normal life, unlike the little boy in the hospital.

Like all accidents, farm accidents are quick and unexpected. I have friends and acquaintances who are missing fingers, arms, legs or

other body parts from farm accidents. Some hurt deeply inside, are paralyzed or burdened by poverty because they no longer can work.

Farm accidents are the second-biggest killer next to mining in Canada, and unfortunately largely ignored. As our physicians plead for laws to forbid minors on quads and for use of helmets when riding horses, the government bends to the wishes of big industry at the cost of lives and family fiscal security. Some farm equipment is still designed without extensive safeguards. In addition, the government of Alberta has failed to acknowledge that farmers and farm workers need protection.

We cannot live the life of a farmer or farming family without risk. It is inherent in our industry and so all we can do is mitigate it. I often say that risk management is not about futures and options; it is about insurance, guards on PTOs, helmets and zones such as grain storage, where children are not allowed.

I recall a letter from a farmer who watched his boy get bucked off in a pen of cattle. The little fellow hit the ground so hard his helmet cracked, but his head did not. That dad is forever appreciative of the untraditional suggestion that farm kids wear head protection.

I asked Lyndon Carlson, director Canadian Centre for

*How do widows manage 500 cows with a house full of children? How does a husband suddenly learn to cook when his wife has suddenly passed in a tractor rollover?*



Health and Safety in Agriculture, to give me one take-home message on farm safety. His answer surprised me. He used the analogy of the city yard. City yards are fenced to keep children in and trouble out. Why then, he pondered, are country yards an expanse of land without barrier and without signal to the child that there are limits for exploration?

His reasons were well founded. Farm children are sometimes accidentally run over by parents or grandparents. The grief and emotional toll for these families is almost unimaginable. My heart goes out to them and there is no

fault here, just the unknown action of a child who was a second ago secure behind the front door. The discussion allowed me to look at our yard through a different set of eyes and imagine the chaos of five grandchildren going in and out the door (a hundred times a day as they tend to do) without the visual barrier between them and the parking area. This year we are changing our yard.

## Post-accident support

I was speaking about farm safety with David Sprague, CEO Ag for Life. In the discussion I wanted to make the point that if we take the situation where a family member has been lost or injured, after the initial medical attention, there is little in the way of support networks. How do widows manage 500 cows with a house full of children? How does a husband suddenly learn to cook when his wife has suddenly passed in a tractor rollover?

And more importantly — what financial, personal and emotional support is available to them? Remember, the accident often occurs at home and that means living with some sort of reminder every day. Prevention and information about prevention is a must but until we are willing to shift the focus to a complete model that includes post-traumatic sup-

port, we have failed in helping farm families find balance.

The Farm Safety Advisory Council keeps the information in front of the agriculture minister but we have seen little commitment. In consultation with Alberta farmers we could prevent the loss of another life and have programs in place to ensure emotional support and financial security. Today, it is up to farmers to cover themselves and their workers, including family members and to get the message out.

Focusing on children, the Alberta Farm Safety Centre speaks to tens of thousands of children in Alberta every year helping them to identify and reduce the risk on the farm. We need more. More open discussion on the really tough subject of farm safety, more support for families to handle their changes or loss, more protection for farmers and farm workers at a reasonable cost and more funding from this government. It is time for all groups to be at the kitchen table.

*Brenda Schoepp is a Nuffield Scholar who travels extensively exploring agriculture and meeting the people who feed, clothe and educate our world. A motivating speaker and mentor she works with young entrepreneurs across Canada and is the founder of Women in Search of Excellence. [www.brendaschoepp.com](http://www.brendaschoepp.com)*

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## Canadian Bison Association creating national registry

The registry will allow producers to improve herd management and avoid inbreeding

BY VICTORIA PATERSON  
AF STAFF / CALGARY

A national bison registry is being created — although there may not be a stampede of owners registering their herds.

Efforts to create a registry go back to the 1980s, but the Canadian Bison Association decided to move forward after more than 100 producers said they would register their herd, said executive director Terry Kremenik.

"The registry is there to get a good handle on the genetics of the wood and plains bison," said Kremenik. "It allows producers to better manage their herds, and also to potentially provide conservationists with a source of either wood or plains bison."

Having purebred registration isn't important for many producers, but is key for others, such as those who sell breeding stock. Registration "is not inexpensive" and not everyone who indicated they would register may follow through, Kremenik said.

There is little or no difference in the DNA of wood bison and plains bison, but there are phenotypic differences (observable characteristics or traits) between the two. There are also crosses of the two subspecies.

"From a registry perspective, it's

important to maintain that differentiation even though it may just be phenotypic," Kremenik said.

Producers could use the information to minimize inbreeding in their herds, and also to preserve the bloodlines of the two subspecies, particularly the plains bison.

"Public" herds of plains bison roaming parks aren't growing as hoped, and conservationists want to be able to access pure plains bison.

"Future generations should be able to determine if they want to keep the subspecies or not," said Thomas Ackermann, who sits on the national board and is chair of Alberta Bison Producers.

While they could breed bison strictly as commodities, he said there's a desire to keep the subspecies separate and close to their natural state.

"We want to keep the bison and its habitat and its morphology and its genetics as pure as we can," he said.

They're working on conservation guidelines for producers on how to raise the animals and keep their habitats and behaviours intact, he said.

In the U.S., there's some debate about whether the woods and plains bison are separate subspecies, but in Canada, the subspecies division is generally accepted, he said.

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# Some new recommendations for deworming bison

**There is no doubt internal worms are one of the main diseases which can severely affect bison**

BY ROY LEWIS, DVM

It's well known that buffalo, especially young or stressed individuals, are susceptible to internal parasites. This is exacerbated by the fact we now intensively graze large concentrations in smaller areas. Bison grazing in the wild or on huge tracts of land are constantly on the move, and so seldom re-expose themselves to parasitic larvae. But in small enclosures, the parasitic burdens can become huge very quickly. Controlling internal parasites must be an integral part of your herd-health program.

Have your veterinarian do various fecal samples throughout the year to determine how great the parasitic burden is in your herd. These are easy to do and almost always are done in house so results are quickly obtained. Keep in mind parasitic numbers are often falsely lower in the winter. Parasites are survivors so will reproduce more eggs in the warmer months and fecal counts at this time are a truer reading.

*Have your veterinarian do various fecal samples throughout the year to determine how great the parasitic burden is in your herd.*



Also, some species of worms produce fewer eggs than others. If using a quantitative test, any egg counts of 10 eggs per three grams or greater are considered significant. If you can observe individuals passing manure and can gather random samples of fresh manure from 10 per cent of the herd, it will give a good average of where the herd is. A few different species can be identified by their eggs and some are more significant than others. Your veterinarian can best advise how serious your problem is. If lungworms are suspected, a different type of fecal flotation is done (again usually in house) but the results take several hours to quantify. There are no dewormers officially approved for use in bison in Canada (only Ivomec in the U.S.) so all applications would require a veterinary prescription.

Worms can cause mortality if severe enough, but poorer weight gains in young calves and poor fertility in mature stock are often the first signs. Dull hair coats, slower shedding in the spring or increased susceptibility to other diseases, such as pneumonia, may be your first clue worms are present. The two best times to deworm are in the fall at processing and at pasture where overwintered larvae and eggs are picked up. Wet, cool weather in the spring favour survival of parasitic larvae and increased worm burdens.

## Treatment

The endectocides and benzimidazoles are all fairly effective in treating the internal parasites common to bison. Most producers I work with prefer the injectable since dosage can be finer tuned especially if weighing them at the same time. The pour-ons must not be applied when bison are shedding their winter coat, as any product applied on these dead hair follicles will not be absorbed. Push the application gun down through the hair to ensure proper absorption. These products are commonly applied in the late fall at the yearly processing along with any other procedures commonly done to bison such as pregnancy diagnosis and vaccinations. When comparing

injectables to the pour-ons, the efficacy seemed the same as long as they were applied properly.

The dilemma I run into as a veterinary consultant comes after doing fecals in the late spring. If worm counts are up how do we effectively deworm at this time of year? Running bison cows with calves through at this time of year is out of the question. But several fairly good options are available to us. A product called Safeguard (active ingredient fenbendazole) is very effective when administered in the feed, and many producers give their bison grain as a treat once in a while. Provided trough space was adequate, and all or most of the herd were consuming the grain at once, mixing Safeguard in could have desir-

able results. There are always a few timid animals that hold back, however. The other way is mixing the product in the minerals to be consumed over several days. All these applications will need a veterinary prescription, so talk to your herd veterinarian to help facilitate this.

There is no doubt internal worms are one of the main diseases which can severely affect bison and levels can build up over a few years where death can result, even for adults. Deworm your herd at least once a year by the methods indicated and this will go a long ways towards keeping your bison healthy.

These same principles can apply to cattle at pasture. Although they don't generally have fatalities from worm burdens, production

losses in the form of weight gains do occur. One day we can possibly look forward to a water-soluble dewormer that might be the easiest at treating bison at pasture. Resistance by worms to some of the dewormers is already happening in the cattle industry, so if in doubt check some manure samples to make sure the products you are using are working well. By keeping your bison as worm free as possible, weight gains will be higher, reproductive rates better and disease incidence will be lower as parasites tax the immune system.

*Roy Lewis is a Westlock, Alberta-based veterinarian specializing in large-animal practice. He is also a part-time technical services vet for Merck Animal Health.*

# WHAT'S NEXT?



Cattle photo courtesy of Canada Beef Inc.

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# Wet cornfields dampen U.S. hog farmers' hopes for cheap feed

**There is no end in sight for a nine-month losing streak in which producers lost more than \$30 per hog**

**BY THEOPOLIS WATERS**  
DES MOINES / REUTERS

**U**.S. hog producers are losing hope for an early harvest of this year's expected bumper corn crop, which could lower feed costs sooner rather than later, as wet fields continue to impede planting in parts of the Midwest, said producers and analysts at a pork industry meeting here June 7.

"It's been a long haul," said Iowa hog producer Conley Nelson, who was counting on a timely Midwest harvest after last year's drought to boost corn supplies and ease prices in the red-hot corn market. "You go into a survivability mode and try to be as efficient as you can."

Iowa leads the nation in corn and hog production, harvesting 1.88 billion bushels in 2012, down 20 per cent from 2.36 billion in 2011. It currently has 20.3 million hogs, up three per cent from 19.7 million a year earlier.

Demand for corn from last year's drought-ravaged crop has been intense. Purchases by ethanol plants, livestock producers, corn processors and exporters have made corn remaining from last year's harvest scarce. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has forecast supplies will reach a 16-year low by the end of the marketing year on Aug. 31, just before harvest starts.

The cash market price of corn in the Midwest ranged from \$7.16 to \$7.56 per bushel this week, or 50 to 90 cents above

the Chicago Board of Trade July futures contract. CBOT July corn futures closed Friday at \$6.66-1/4 per bushel, about 70 cents more than a year earlier.

The cash corn market has been on fire all year, with ethanol producers, who use up to 40 per cent of the annual harvest, paying top dollar. Cash prices are expected to go higher this summer as corn supplies get tighter.

*"It's been a long haul... You go into a survivability mode and try to be as efficient as you can."*

CONLEY NELSON  
IOWA HOG PRODUCER

These historically high prices for corn — the primary feed grain for livestock — are squeezing hog, beef, dairy and poultry farmers the hardest despite very high wholesale and retail meat prices. Iowa State University researchers calculate hog farmers in April, on average, lost \$31.66 for each hog sold, extending their streak of losses to nine months.

To stem the flow of red ink, some producers are feeding hogs less, marketing them at lighter weights and using distillers

grains (DDGS), a feed byproduct of ethanol production, Nelson said.

Before harvest this autumn there are places in the Midwest where corn will be hard to buy at any price "and it could get ugly," Paragon Economics president Steve Meyer told reporters at this week's World Pork Expo.

Rain-delayed U.S. corn planting, which is the slowest in 17 years, means early harvested supplies are unlikely to be in marketing channels before September, crop specialists say.

The situation for soybeans, which are crushed into soyoil and the feed additive soybean meal, is not any better.

Several Midwest soy-crushing plants have shut early to conduct summer maintenance, citing scarce soybean supplies. Other crushers are scheduled to shut down for maintenance in July and plan a longer-than-usual break, Meyer said.

Another Iowa hog producer, Leon Sheets, said farmers were accustomed to minor variations each year in acquiring feed either because crops were planted too late or too early. But the extreme weather and markets in the last year had made planning for worst-case scenarios even more challenging.

"Perhaps the summer will change and we'll harvest on schedule and everything will be fine," Sheets said. "But in the event that it's not, you really don't want to wait until there is nothing in the bin to feed hogs and wonder where you're going to go find it."

## Effort to cut red tape on meat labelling divides food industry

**The pre-market label is quick and inexpensive, food processors say**

**BY ALEX BINKLEY**  
CONTRIBUTOR / OTTAWA

A move to end "pre-market approval" of labels for meat products is receiving a thumbs-up from meat processors while others in the food industry condemn it as a backward step.

Having to submit labels to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) before they could be used on products was "unnecessary, bureaucratic and discriminatory regulation," said Ray Price, president of the Canadian Meat Council.

"The termination of pre-market label registration will permit the redirection of resources toward activities that really do enhance food safety," said Price.

The review typically added one to two months to the process of introducing a new product, such as sodium-reduced prepared meat, added council executive director Jim Laws.

But the head of the Food Processors of Canada said the pre-market label process is a quick and inexpensive way to ensure labels meet government rules and regulations.

In other food sectors, the CFIA often frequently finds high levels of exaggerated health claims or other labelling violations, said Chris Kyte.

But the discovery usually comes long after the product is on the market, and with 40,000 grocery stores and 73,000 retail outlets, finding violators is "clearly an expensive, hit-and-miss proposition," he said.

"It is also one of the front-line programs for identifying products originating in countries that are not permitted to export into Canada for animal health reasons," said Kyte, adding the CFIA has sped up its review process and it now only takes a couple of weeks.

Other food sectors frequently see imports with misleading labels gaining market share, he said.

"Also, 50 per cent of recalls are caused by imported non-meat products, but meat-containing products are rarely on that list," he said.

## CFIA lays out details of food safety regulatory overhaul

**BY ALEX BINKLEY**  
AF CONTRIBUTOR / OTTAWA

**T**raceability will gain a more prominent place on the menu, and food companies will be required to develop preventive control plans under a new regulatory plan proposed by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

The proposals, which follow the passage of the Safe Food for Canadians Act last fall, still have to be put into the form of regulations. Draft regulations will be issued for comment next spring, with implementation in January 2015.

The regulations will require food companies selling products in other provinces or internationally to detail preventive control plans, including how they will deal with "deviations and respond to unforeseen food safety situations."

Farms that ship to other provinces or internationally would also be required to have preventive control plans in place. The draft plan notes "a food safety outbreak originating from a single farm could have dev-

astating economic consequences to the entire sector and diminish consumer confidence in fresh fruits and vegetables."

The traceability will require food companies to maintain records on inputs and distribution one step up and down the food chain. For example, a processor would have to know who supplied ingredients and what retailer or distributor bought the plant's product.

That's the bare minimum in traceability, and is already happening in many livestock sectors and food companies, said Brian Sterling, president of SCS Consulting which advises food companies.

"Traceability is a fact of life for almost every other commodity that consumers buy, yet somehow we have not embraced traceability's potential in the world of food," he said. "I cannot buy an iPhone that does not have complete traceability back to its basic components. Yet what we put into our bodies is rarely traceable to source. Why is that?"

Implementing full traceability is far cheaper than one major food recall, he added.

"Most of the information we need is already being collected, we just have to use it," he said.

The new rules would also require a company to provide information on their production output on request within 24 hours. During last year's XL Foods contaminated beef incident, the meat packer took a long time to produce records — which were boxes of paper documents CFIA staff had to dig through. That delayed efforts to contain and round up contaminated products.

Food companies will also be required to immediately inform the CFIA if they suspect they may have a food safety problem.

The agency said it will try to design rules that won't bury small and medium enterprises in requirements that are overkill for the size of their operation or range of products.

The new regulations would enable the minister of agriculture, to suspend the operating licence of any company or importer that doesn't comply with food safety rules, and cancel it if the company provides "false or misleading information."

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# Rope burns can be serious and difficult to treat

While rope burns seldom bleed, they can still be painful and require regular treatment

BY CAROL SHWETZ, DVM

Ropes in their various guises are common in the horse world. Although they may differ in length, size and makeup, they all serve to connect people to horses or horses to stationary objects. As a result of this and due to their unforgiving nature, a good working knowledge of ropes is imperative to the safety of both horses and people.

Whenever horses, people or at times both become entangled with a rope(s), burns are a likely mishap. The friction created by the rope as it runs across the skin heats the tissue, causing a burn injury that can be very serious, painful and difficult to treat.

Rope burns frequently occur in locations where the body flexes such as pasterns, knees, flanks, hocks and under the tail head. The pastern is commonly afflicted and can be problematic to heal because of its tenderness and flexibility.

*Whenever horses, people or at times both become entangled with a rope(s), burns are a likely mishap.*

Unlike an open, bleeding wound which demands immediate attention, rope burns tend to be more subtle showing very little apparent damage to the tissues initially. As such their seriousness is often overlooked. Rope burns seldom bleed. Bleeding would be an indication to summon a veterinarian. These injuries cannot be sutured. Consequently they are managed as open wounds. Rope burns seep and weep fluid. Weeping is an indication of tissue injury, as well as a means of healing for often fibres from the rope become embedded in the tissue and must 'fester' out like splinters for complete healing.

Pain and lameness will be readily apparent. Even mild rope burns tend to be quite painful for the horse. Any person who has experienced a rope burn can readily attest to its stinging discomfort. Individual assessment of the injury will be necessary to evaluate involvement of deeper tissues such as muscles, bones, tendons, tendon sheaths and joints.

Keeping a rope burn clean is important. It is the most important element in healing any wound, and rope burns in particular. They are often incredibly painful and cleaning them can intensify the pain, so restraint or sedation may be necessary to attend these wounds. Gentle rinsing with cold water brings welcome relief, cleaning and soothing the wound.

While healing, the wound benefits from daily hydrotherapy. Aloe vera or Derma-gel are good

choices as initial healing salves. It may be necessary to cover the wound to keep it from crusting over and painfully breaking open as the horse walks. The benefits to bandaging the wound are cleanliness, fly control, improved healing and reduced scar formation.

Many burns stubbornly form a scaly crust as they heal, leaving a raised, hairless scar. Keeping the skin moisturized for months with soothing ointments containing lanolin, vitamins A and D or aloe vera serves to minimize scarring.

At times infection may complicate a rope burn. Horses with an infection become very lame with marked swelling and foul discharge at the injury site. They may also develop a fever, become lethargic and lack appetite.

Scarring from deep rope burns can impede blood circulation distal to the injury site, temporarily causing the limb to swell until collateral circulation becomes established.

Keeping the skin pliable and soft at the injury site while encouraging movement can minimize the effects of superficial and deep wound scarring. These wounds can take up to two years to strengthen, remodel and mature, so patience is valued.

Rope burns are best given immediate first aid treatment. Proper treatment greatly reduces the chances of their complications, ensuring a favourable cosmetic outcome and return to function.

*Carol Shwetz is a veterinarian specializing in equine practice at Westlock, Alberta.*



Rope burns frequently occur in locations where the body flexes such as pasterns, knees, flanks, hocks and under the tail head.

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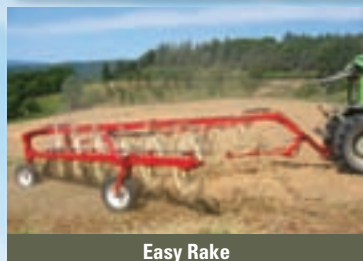
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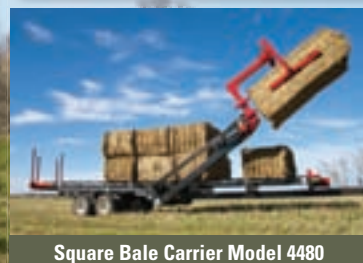
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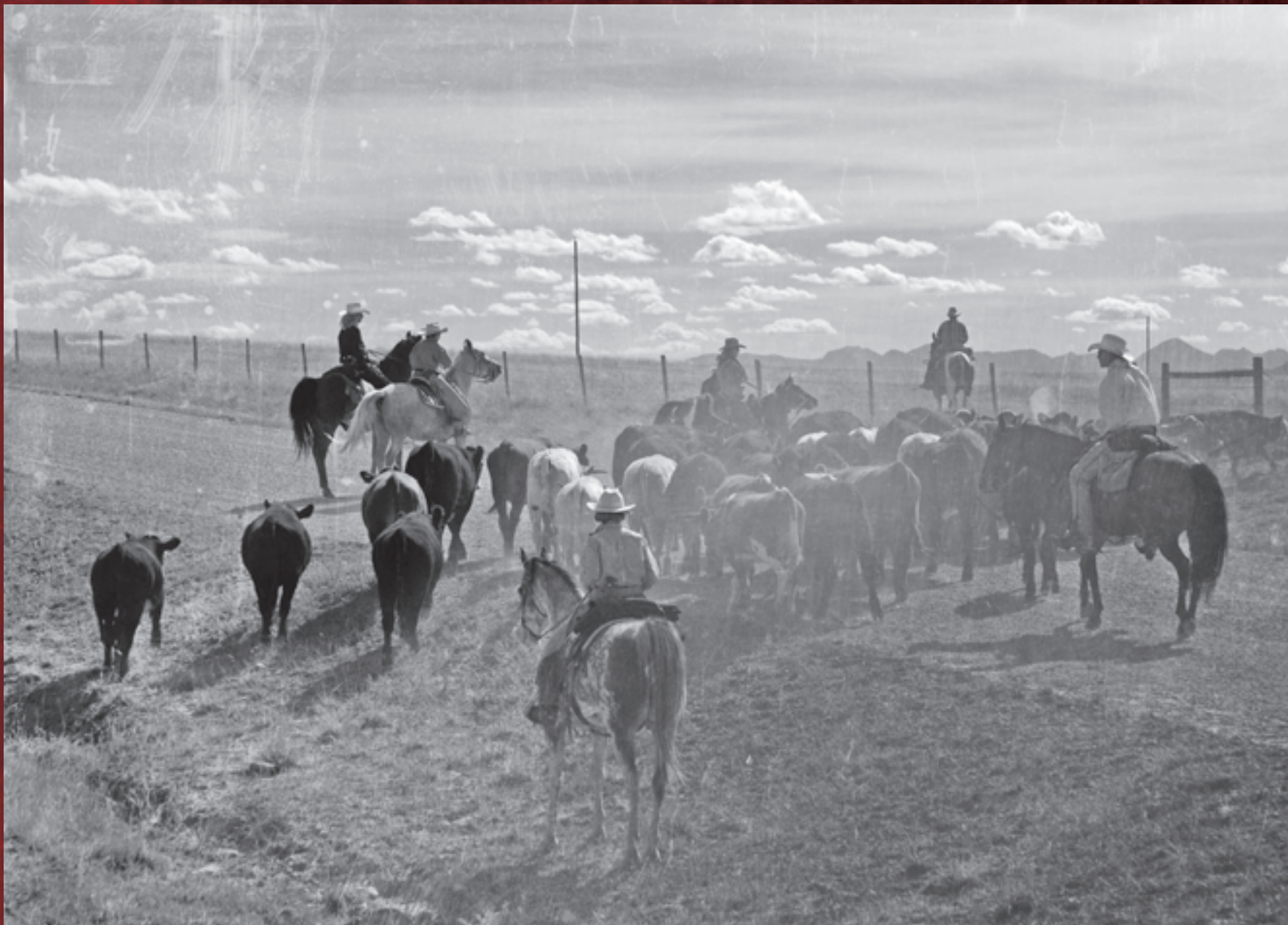
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