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EXPRESS

Richardson International to share top spot in Canada's grain industry

STAYING POWER ▶ The patient 155-year-old firm outlasted the Pools, UGG and the wheat board**BY ALLAN DAWSON**
STAFF

The pending multibillion-dollar sale of Viterra demonstrates the value of patient capital and private ownership, says Richardson International president Curt Vossen.

Last month, publicly traded Viterra, Canada's largest grain company, announced it was selling to the world's No. 1 diversified commodities trader, Swiss-based Glencore, for \$16.1 billion. But in a move believed aimed at getting government approval, Glencore will sell some of Viterra's assets to Winnipeg-based Richardson and fertilizer giant Agrium, headquartered in Calgary.

Richardson's market share will jump to 34 per cent from around 24 currently.

Richardson will buy 19 Viterra elevators, 13 attached retail farm input outlets, Viterra's smaller 231,000-tonne capacity "C" terminal at Thunder Bay, one-quarter of Viterra's 282,830-tonne Cascadia terminal at Vancouver and Can-Oat milling, which includes a wheat mill in Texas and an oat plant in Nebraska.

Calgary-based Agrium will buy 90 per cent of Viterra's 258 input

**RICHARDSON'S** ▶ page 6

The Pioneer elevator at Olds. Family-owned James Richardson International is now tied for No. 1 in grain handling on the Prairies. SUPPLIED PHOTO

INSIDE:**Q & A - PARTY LEADERS ADDRESS FARM AND RURAL ISSUES ▶ PAGE 46****SPRING
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INSIDE »	LIVESTOCK	CROPS	COLUMNISTS
 GRAIN COMMISSION TURNS 100 A special feature on a century of service 13	 TWO-LEGGED RANCHING Poultry can also be raised "on the range" 27	 PRECISION AG IS FINE... But there's no substitute for soil sampling 33	 DAVID DROZD JAPANESE "CANDLESTICKS" ALERT OF CHANGE IN HOG PRICES 11
 CUTE BUT DEADLY Deer mice carry potentially fatal hantavirus 50			 BERNIE PEET TIME TO START THINKING ABOUT GROUP SOW HOUSING 28
			 ROY LEWIS TIPS ON PRACTICAL HEAT DETECTION 30

NEWS

Anti-waste groups "buy the farm"

Five U.S. organizations that lobby for government spending restraint say they've come up with a new fundraising scheme — buying farmland.

"This will give a whole new meaning to 'buying the farm,'" said Citizens Against Government Waste president Tom Schatz.

The Heartland Institute, Citizens Against Government Waste, National Taxpayers Union, Americans for Tax Reform and Taxpayers for Common Sense will jointly own and operate "Greenback Acres," a farm in Illinois.

"Instead of aiming to produce any food or fibre, the farm will turn profits entirely by taking advantage of federal agricultural subsidies," the groups said in a release.

"Unlike the overwhelming majority of family farmers, who actually hew to the outdated notion that they should make money by growing things, caring for their land, and selling their products at market prices, we plan to take advantage of every loophole, subsidy, absurdity, and program in existence," said Greenback Acres general manager Lirpa Sloof.

Sloof says the farm provides a variety of surefire money-making strategies such as enrolling land in the Conservation Reserve, planting highly speculative crops in erosion-prone areas to take advantage of crop insurance and collecting direct payments based on crops it no longer produces.

"I can't wait to be guaranteed an annual salary that's twice that of the average American family thanks to price controls and subsidies," said Kelly William Cobb, government affairs manager at Americans for Tax Reform. "Plus, taxpayers are going to pay us not to farm on half of our land!"

"When we looked at the astonishing range of guaranteed-money programs available to farms, we realized it was such a good deal we couldn't afford not to take advantage," said Eli Lehrer, vice-president of The Heartland Institute.



A parasitic wasp heading for its next meal.

Trials start of GM wheat that terrifies aphids

AROMA ▶ The gene comes from peppermint, but the smell is like Granny Smith apples

LONDON/REUTERS

Field trials are underway in England of a genetically modified (GM) wheat that strikes fear into aphids and attracts a deadly predator to devour them, providing an alternative to the insecticides now used to control the crop pest.

The wheat emits a pheromone which aphids release when they are under attack to create panic and prompt the insects to flee, John Pickett, scientific leader of chemical ecology at Rothamsted Research in eastern England, said.

It also attracts tiny parasitoid wasps to provide a second line of defence for crops by laying eggs in the aphids.

"(It) eats the aphids from the

inside out so it takes out the population on the crop," Pickett said.

"We are providing a totally new way of controlling the pests that doesn't rely on toxic modes of action," he told a media briefing.

The wheat has been modified using a gene found in peppermint plants, he added, although the smell was more like Granny Smith apples and too faint to be detected by humans.

Pickett said the field trials, at Rothamsted's research facility in Hertfordshire, used a spring-planted variety of the wheat cultivar Cadenza.

He said the approach could eventually be used to protect other crops and flowers from aphids.

There are no other GM wheat trials currently being conducted

in Britain although there are two involving GM potatoes.

Pete Riley, campaign director for campaign group GM Freeze, which opposes use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), said he had several concerns and believed there were better alternatives for controlling aphids.

"There are natural alternatives with which, if you design your farm right with plenty of cover and food for predators and parasitic wasps, you can control aphids pretty effectively and that has been demonstrated in the U.K.," he said.

"We don't see any need for this technology other than it is potentially more profitable to do GM than to tell farmers how to create the right habitats on their farms," he added.

Riley said that if the new

The wheat emits a pheromone which aphids release when they are under attack to create panic and prompt the insects to flee.

wheat was produced commercially it could contaminate non-GMO varieties. He also questioned its effectiveness.

"We feel it is likely, if it is used very widely, that aphids would eventually get habituated to the chemical and not take any notice of it," he said.

Super-size surveys show consumer landscape is changing

REALITY BITES ▶ Consumers today want their Big Mac, but they want hormone- and antibiotic-free meat too

BY SHERI MONK
AF STAFF | EDMONTON

McDonald's is an iconic brand which has transcended its all-American heritage to become the world's most renowned fast-food brand leader. Yet to stay at the top, McDonald's must change some of the same practices that got it there, says a senior company official.

"As the face of Canada truly changes, so does its eating habits," Jeff Kroll, senior vice-president, supply chain management for McDonald's Canada told a Cattle-men's Young Leaders (CYL) seminar hosted by the Alberta Live-stock and Meat Agency (ALMA) last month.

Kroll, an ALMA board member, said McDonald's, like other successful enterprises, must change with its customers.

"The Canadian consumer landscape is changing. Canada's demographic environment is changing, driven by two things. One is an aging population, and population growth fuelled by immigration."

Members of those groups are less interested in what propelled McDonald's to the top — burgers and french fries. Kroll said an aging population is increasingly concerned about health and wants more fruits and vegetables.

While most people still associate beef with burgers, that trend is slowly changing, in part due to immigration. Kroll says two-thirds of Canada's visible minorities are of Asian descent, and cultural preferences are shaping buying decisions.

"When selecting meats, Asians are more likely to choose pork, poultry and fish and the overall decline in beef consumption suggests that Canada's changing demographic profile is an influence on the proteins that Canadians are eating," said Kroll. Also, Canadian tastes are becoming more eclectic, and in the last 10 years, more are experimenting with new spice sensations, especially ginger, garlic, basil and curry.

Taste – and information

With 33,000 restaurants in 119 countries, McDonald's has a lot at stake, and part of protecting and even growing its market share depends on market intelligence. To that end, McDonald's conducts regular market research to stay ahead of the curve.

"Canadians are very consistent



Asians like McDonald's too, but Canada's growing Asian population prefers fish and chicken. ©THINKSTOCK

in what they want," said Kroll. And what they want, he says, is taste. "But in addition to taste, they want to be educated about the food they are eating. They want to learn about the food, they want to know where it comes from and that the company they are buying from is concerned about societal issues."

Kroll said three of five consumers say it is very important that the meat used to make their burger is sourced from animals that were raised without the use of steroids. More than half say it's important that their burger patty is made from meat that is hormone and antibiotic free. Kroll said these concerns have risen considerably in the past two years, especially over antibiotic use. It's a trend any large retailer is going to be watching closely — if consumers become serious about hormone and antibiotic use, there would be serious ramifications for the livestock industry.

"Managing desires for natural and fresh products needs to be balanced with the ability to offer those options at affordable prices," said Kroll. Large-volume suppliers like Wal-Mart and McDon-

The new face of McDonald's. The McBistro grilled chicken sandwich has 460 calories versus 540 in a Big Mac, and 780 for an Angus bacon with cheese burger, and you can order it without the sauce.



ald's would have difficulty even sourcing enough hormone- and antibiotic-free product to meet demand.

Defining "local"

Another new trend is consumer desire for local product.

"Local is an interesting and complex one, because I like to say everything is local to someone, so it's how you define that local," Kroll said.

In an effort to satisfy the public's growing hunger for foods seen as wholesome, gourmet burgers are

increasingly adorning drive-thru menu boards across the country. Consumers equate certain brands like Angus, and certain cuts like sirloin as pivotal to a higher-quality sandwich, and specialty cheeses, buns and season ingredients are also prized. This demand for slower, guilt-free, gourmet food is paradoxically at odds with the traditional consumer demand for inexpensive, uniform, high-speed food.

Asked about the fast-food industry's social responsibility in a time of increasing obesity,

"Managing desires for natural and fresh products needs to be balanced with the ability to offer those options at affordable prices."

JEFF KROLL
MCDONALD'S CANADA

the noticeably fit and trim Kroll ultimately passed the buck to the consumer.

"I think it's all about balance and choice. I have been eating McDonald's for 31 years — almost every day when I worked in the restaurant," he said. "For example, just two days ago I had our new McBistro grilled chicken, no sauce because I tailor it to the way that I want it," he said. "If you want balance and choice, we have everything available to make that happen."

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OPINION



The party leaders speak on farm and rural issues

CLOSE RACE ▶ The results in rural ridings can't be taken for granted in this critical election

BY WILL VERBOVEN
ALBERTA FARMER | EDITOR

Until this time most elections in Alberta were foregone conclusions before they were even called. In the same light agricultural issues usually barely saw a mention. And rural and small-town voters usually did their duty and voted the ruling PC party back in for another term.

But it's different this time around. There is a sense that an epic election battle is underway — this seems to happen every 40 years in Alberta.

To try and raise the agricultural issues interest in this election, I planned to engage directly the party leaders by posing them all the same questions. This rarely happens in Alberta as leaders either assign other candidates to deal with the ag media, or when asked about agriculture, recite the usual platitudes and bromides of the party ag policy (if they even have one). It's the safe approach for political parties, when on the whole their leaders are usually urban folk who have little understanding or interest in agriculture, the province's second-largest industry. Yet those same leaders are well versed on energy, health, education and a host of other issues.

At press time a survey showed the Wildrose Party ahead in rural Alberta. I figured with almost half the ridings in the province deemed to be rural, that survey should spark some interest in rural and ag issues. It did — but not with all parties.

The journey to get party leader involvement has been quite challenging, being you have to deal with suspicious campaign managers. Time was a problem because of our early publishing deadline. We publish twice a month and because of the election

date and Canada Post deliveries this is the only edition that we knew for sure would arrive before the election date.

Alberta Farmer contacted the five political parties for an interview with their leaders. The parties all responded with interest, and time and dates were discussed. But as I learned many years ago, the ag industry and ag publications don't rate much of a priority in the eyes of urban-focused campaign managers.

The ag industry and ag publications don't rate much of a priority in the eyes of urban-focused campaign managers.



The NDP did indicate some initial interest, but did not pursue the offer. That's no surprise, I expect they understand the hopelessness of spending time and effort on rural ridings where only divine intervention could see an NDP candidate win. It would also have meant a crash course for their leader learning about ag issues and they probably figured his time is better spent elsewhere.

The Wildrose Party on the other hand knows their election destiny is based on capturing rural ridings, so ag issue awareness is a high priority. Being in striking distance of winning the election, their enthusiasm for immediate, knowledge-

able co-operation is understandable. Their leader Danielle Smith was well versed on ag issues, thanks in part to her extensive touring and consultation in rural areas during last year's Wildrose leadership campaign.

The Liberals were enthusiastic about an interview, but admitted their leader wasn't up to steam about ag issues. But they are happy political warriors and were willing to make an effort to have their leader be part of the discussion. It turned out to be a delightful interview, and it turned out that their leader, Raj Sherman, came from a dairy and sugar cane farm in India. It turns out he had the closest connection to agriculture of all the leaders.

Alberta Party Leader Glenn Taylor showed real interest and made a genuine effort to research ag issues and he provided a robust interview. In preparation for the interview he consulted extensively with his candidates that had ag backgrounds. He admitted that it was quite a worthwhile exercise, being he is now much more aware of issues facing the ag industry.

The ruling PC party initially showed a positive interest in having their leader Premier Alison Redford participate in the discussion on ag issues. I was even given a time for the interview, albeit for only 15 minutes. But at literally the last minute PC party staff decided even that was not possible and they cancelled the interview. I should say that the premier herself may not have been even aware of what has occurred, being leaders are sometimes kept out of the loop by party strategists who figure they know best.

In the end three out of five leaders are part of the ag issue discussion — that's not too bad for what I believe may be a first time for the farm media in Alberta.

Moving beyond supply management

TRADE DEALS ▶ Doha may be dead, but bilateral negotiations may require change

BY SYLVAIN CHARLEBOIS AND
TATIANA ASTRAY

Now that we have some clarity on the economic future of the Canadian Wheat Board, attention is slowly turning toward the issue of supply management, which has arguably served our agricultural economy well for decades.

Economically speaking, these sectors have been unwavering, and consumers have long benefited from stable retail prices for these products. However, the global agricultural landscape is shifting, and international talks currently underway suggest the possibility of externally imposed agricultural reforms.

For example, WTO's Doha Round, focused on addressing agricultural trade distortions, has made Canada look like a lone wolf on supply management issues since negotiations began in 2001. However, by

many accounts Doha is all but dead.

The real menace now stems from other potent multilateral agreements with the U.S. and the Asia-Pacific region regarding the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and even from the European Union regarding CETA (the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement).

Our trade-friendly federal government is keen in pursuing an aggressive global commerce agenda, and is more than willing to put supply management on the table. Many agree that supply management in Canada will ultimately end; indeed, many farmers working under supply management believe this as well.

Should supply management cease, threats to our domestic market would come primarily from the U.S., particularly to the dairy industry. The U.S. has dairy production capabilities that are 14.5 times larger and exports that are 16.2 times larger than Canada's. The U.S. currently produces

twice the amount of dairy that is needed for its domestic consumers. These production capabilities would allow the U.S. to flood the Canadian market with cheap dairy products, instantly jeopardizing the Canadian dairy industry.

In addition, Canada would have competition from emerging markets and more efficient countries such as Australia. While analysts predict that the Canadian dairy market would not be significantly affected in a liberalized scenario, such forecasts are questionable, considering Canada's inability to be competitive in domestic and international markets.

The Canadian dairy industry has strengths that can be leveraged in a liberalized market, such as the availability of abundant land, low-cost good-quality feed and genetics, which give farmers the ability to scale their productions with cost efficiencies.

In order to position the Canadian dairy industry in a competi-

tive place in the global market, policy reform is needed at the international and domestic levels.

In the end, the potential for Canada's domestic industry to leverage its strengths and become competitive will only manifest itself if interest groups put the long-term success of the dairy industry ahead of their desire for short-term inflated profit, if consumers become advocates for themselves, and if government starts pushing for reform.

Supply-managed industries should consider committing to their own reform agenda before Canada is asked to comply with externally generated standards.

Sylvain Charlebois is acting dean and professor, and Tatiana Astray is a lecturer in the College of Management and Economics at the University of Guelph. They are authors of The Future of the Canadian Dairy Sector in a Post Supply Management Era published by the Frontier Centre (fcpp.org)

OPINION

Livestock industry needs to build trust with consumers

SHARED VALUES ▶ Simply claiming that science is on their side won't help producers build trust with consumers

AFAC RELEASE

A new culture of care is emerging around farm animal welfare that demands fresh thinking, partnerships, expectations and strategies for the livestock industry to define a successful future. And it's coming fast, said speakers at the Livestock Care Conference hosted by Alberta Farm Animal Care (AFAC) last month in Red Deer.

"We're in a completely different environment today," says Charlie Arnot, CEO of the Center for Food Integrity, a major U.S.-based initiative spanning the broad food industry. "The world is changing and our 'social licence' to control how we operate is at stake. We need to build public trust to consistently earn and maintain that licence, to define a future we can compete and succeed in."

Science and standards alone are not the answer, says Arnot.

"In agriculture, we're good at science and we think if the science is on our side people will come around to our side of the argument. But our stakeholders need more than that — they need to know we share their values and are committed to doing what is right. We've had the communi-

cations equation exactly backward."

Research by the centre and its partners shows perceptions of shared values and confidence are three to five times more important than demonstrating competence. "It keeps coming back to values," Arnot says. "That's where we need to connect with people. It's not just about polishing our image. It's an issue of trust that requires fundamentally different strategies. We need to be integrated in our thinking not only as a supply chain but with the values and expectations of our customers."

Where is it from?

Customers increasingly want to know more about how their food is produced and desire products that make them feel good about their purchases, says agricultural economist Glynn Tonsor of Kansas State University. If that relationship is thrown off by questions of trust or confidence the economic implications can be dramatic. "Animal welfare is increasingly a focus and it's now in the conversation on trade. We're seeing more and more examples where a welfare issue is creating challenges for industry, from state ballot initiatives in the U.S. targeting specific practices to iconic global

brands such as McDonald's and Wal-Mart facing pressure and driving changes."

Often the most damaging developments are high-profile media issues that damage food brands and industry sectors, he says. Research by Tonsor and others shows increasing consumer awareness and scrutiny of welfare practices often have significant impact on meat demand.

"One of the emerging areas being considered now is labelling of animal welfare attributes on retail products, including potential mandatory approaches," says Tonsor. Much work is needed before mandatory labelling discussions go further, he says. "It's an area we need to follow closely. Clearly it has the potential to strongly influence the economic implications of various animal welfare approaches."

HSUS partnership

This new world demands new approaches, says Gene Gregory, president of United Egg Producers, an organization that has taken the bold step of directly negotiating and partnering with the Humane Society of the United States. "It's about having a measure of control in your future, rather than having it dictated

for you," he says. "Through this approach we were able to define terms we could live with that would allow our industry to continue to operate. We faced a lot of criticism but in the end we got a better deal than we would have otherwise, including consistency of requirements across states that was critical to avoiding costly or unworkable models."

Having some control over the pace of change is essential for industry to manage new expectations, echoed scientist Herman Vermeer of the Netherlands, who shared his experience and insight from the EU swine gestation stall phase-out.

"With science we can solve problems. But often as in the case here the debate is an emotional one. We have made adjustments but it has not been easy for the pig farmers."

While public perception is increasingly the major factor driving change, industry can help navigate by keeping on top of the consumer mindset and strengthening that relationship, says consumer research consultant Theresa Dietrich. "People increasingly want to have a closer connection to their food. They want to know where it's coming from and to feel good about what they're eating."

"One of the emerging areas being considered now is labelling of animal welfare attributes on retail products, including potential mandatory approaches."

GLYNN TONSOR
KANSAS STATE



What does that mean? One thing clear is the relationship between animal agriculture and the consumer needs to be an authentic relationship — that 'authenticity' word is really trending in what matters to consumers today."

Keep in mind activists are one end of the spectrum and don't reflect the general consumer, advises Dietrich. "By focusing on the consumer relationship, there is an opportunity to build confidence and have a positive discussion of welfare as it continues to get more interest and profile."

Pink slime a learning opportunity for Canada

TRUST ISSUES ▶ The furor over the beef additive comes at a time when consumers are leery of industry and government

BY SHERI MONK
AF STAFF | PINCHER CREEK

The pink slime controversy is poised to become an infamous part of our cultural food lexicon — it's gone viral and unfortunately, it's given the beef industry another black eye.

Pink slime refers to lean finely textured beef, or LFTB, an additive used as filler in ground beef. In fact, it really is still beef. LFTB harvests the bits of meat left on trimmings and fat by separating the two using heat in a centrifuge. Afterward, the product is treated with food-grade citrus acid, compressed into bricks, and frozen for shipment to processors who mix it with ground beef.

Until a former USDA microbiologist blew the whistle on the practice, the public was largely unaware that this filler could comprise as much as 15 per cent of their ground beef. The USDA still considered the product meat, with no need for any special labelling.

The reaction in the U.S. has been swift and visceral. McDonald's won't touch the stuff.

Most in the industry would agree that while it may be pink, and it may appear

slimy, LFTB is still meat — technically. But if most of us were honest, we would admit that given the choice, we'd pass on the pink slime and take the 100 per cent fresh ground beef option.

The American public was never given that choice and that's why they are angry. Astoundingly, the U.S. beef industry seems incapable of recognizing this. Instead of offering an apology, they're trying to pummel the public with scientific facts showing the LFTB is safe. Meanwhile, hundreds of workers have been laid off at Beef Products Incorporated plants where LFTB was made.

Detached from consumers

In Canada, we need to watch this very closely, even though we don't use LFTB. Perhaps more importantly, we are bearing witness to how incredibly detached the American beef business is from its end-users. If we're smart, we'll learn from their mistakes. If we're complacent, we'll repeat them.

Food industry analysts have taken notice of the fiasco because it signifies a paradigm shift. The consumer force has finally been roused from its discount slumber, and it is not in a good mood.

In 2008 and 2009, two national U.S.

newspapers served the LFTB story to readers and nothing happened. So what's changed? Nothing — at least not overnight. What we're seeing now is the inevitable explosion when widespread mistrust and consumer disconnection reach critical mass.

We've come to expect jittery consumers in Asia, in part because of China's poor record with food safety. But North Americans have been nothing less than stoic when it comes to food — as long as it was provided cheaply and easily.

Two factors have helped create this perfect storm of consumer cynicism — climate change and the financial meltdown of 2008. Global warming really began hitting the public radar in the mid-'90s. Conservative think-

tanks, funded by a private sector afraid of expensive climate regulations, went into overdrive to discount the evidence, and the issue became intensely political. It culminated into a war on science, which to this day calls into question the processes and even motivations of the world's smartest minds.

In 2008, the U.S. economic system ruptured after years of systematic financial deregulation that spawned the subprime housing crisis. Adding insult to injury, taxpayers had to bail out the very corporations that the government had failed to protect them from.

Americans have learned the hard way not to trust their government to protect them from a predatory corporate world, so when pink slime hit the news again in 2012, the public noticed. So what if the USDA and industry researchers say LFTB is safe?

Psychologically, Canadian consumers aren't in the same bad place right now as our American counterparts, but we easily could be. It's imperative we carve out a different, higher road before we run out of eyes we can afford to have blackened.

sherimonk@gmail.com

The truth is, no one wants to eat on a technicality. And given the choice, we'd all take the 100 per cent fresh ground beef option.

RICHARDSON'S ▶ from page 1

stores in Canada and all 17 in Australia, along with 34 per cent of Canadian Fertilizers Ltd. for \$1.15 billion.

Viterra traces its roots back to the defunct farmer-owned Prairie Pools and United Grain Growers, which once dominated Western Canada's grain industry. Glencore, which is the dominant global commodities trader, will have roughly 34 per cent of the western Canadian market after the sale — the same as Richardson.

"The beauty of this situation is I don't have Glencore coming in at twice the size that I already am," Vossen said in an interview. "They're going to be the same size. It's a fair fight."

Fair, but also challenging, Vossen conceded.

Farmers win because of increased competition, he added.

Suddenly Richardson International will go from No. 2 spot in Canada's grain sector to tied for No. 1. Not so long ago it was third, behind Agricore United and Saskatchewan Wheat Pool.

Agricore United was created in 2001 when United Grain Growers acquired Agricore. Agricore was founded in 1999 when Alberta Wheat Pool and Manitoba Pool Elevators, created in the 1920s, merged.

SaskPool and Richardson both pursued Agricore United in 2007. Although SaskPool was the victor, Richardson picked up some assets thanks to the Competition Bureau.

Family businesses remain

Richardson existed long before farmers formed their own companies starting with the Grain Growers Company in 1906, the Prairie Pools in the roaring '20s or the Canadian Wheat Board.

In fact, the company formed in 1857 is older than Canada itself.

Vossen agrees Richardson's longevity stems from being a family-owned, private company. The structure allows for a longer-term view.

"With many of these global grain companies, one thing that's synonymous with them is patient capital, private ownership and quite often family ownership and willingness to ride out the cycles," he said.

"Maybe once or twice or three times a generation we're going to hit a down cycle. If you're a modern, publicly traded company you're under the magnifying glass every quarter," he said, noting private companies don't face that kind of pressure.

"Inevitably this business has its ups and downs. You have to live with the downs and ride the ups and stay relatively even keeled through it all."

Multinational grain merchandising giants Louis Dreyfus and



Richardson International president Curt Vossen says his company can compete with Glencore and the competition will serve farmers well.

PHOTO: ALLAN DAWSON

Cargill have been in business more than 100 years and are private, family-owned firms.

Canadian grain companies N.M. Paterson and Parrish and Heimbecker formed in 1908 and 1909, respectively, are as well.

"They won't get pushed out of business unless they want to be pushed out of business because they've got great positioning in Western Canada," Vossen said.

The Pools dominated Western Canada's grain sector both in business and farm policy for most of the 20th century. While many factors contributed to their downfall, their perceived inability to raise capital is often cited as one. That's why United Grains Growers and SaskPool went public in the 1990s. But publicly traded companies are vulnerable to takeovers.

Being able to originate grain in Canada is why Glencore is buying Viterra, Vossen said.

"They said to themselves, 'If we

don't integrate back into origination we could get cut off at the knees...'"

Richardson International has no immediate plans to expand into the United States or beyond, Vossen said. The focus is on integrating its new assets.

"We definitely plan to grow our base in Canada," he said. "If it makes sense growing business outside of Canada we're also open to that."

While Glencore is a huge company, Richardson is confident it can compete with it in Canada, Vossen said.

"The advantage isn't sheer size globally, what's important is how strong are you in your particular marketplace," he said. "The key for us... to compete in this market is... a demand-pull for products that we're originating. We've got the infrastructure to bring that stuff right from the farm gate... to a consumption-end customer."

Bakers run short of eggs after battery cage ban

BRUSSELS / REUTERS / Biscuit and cake makers across Europe are cutting back on baking because of an egg shortage being blamed on a ban on cross-border trade in eggs from small battery cages.

Since the ban took effect in January, some suppliers have failed to meet their contracts because of the shortage, forcing bakers to buy eggs from supermarkets. Pasta makers are also being affected by the scarcity.

The new EU rules only banned the retail sale of eggs from battery hens and still allow producers to sell non-compliant eggs to domestic food manufacturers, though they cannot be exported to other EU member countries.



Eggs on sale at a vendor in Budapest. The Hungarian Central Statistical Office says egg prices had risen by 23.1 per cent year on year in February 2012. REUTERS/LASZLO BALOGH

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Spring sprung early signals global warming

EXTREMES ▶ Heavy rainfall, heat waves and increased pollen-induced allergies are to be expected as climate change unfolds

REUTERS / Extreme weather events over the past decade have increased and were “very likely” caused by man-made global warming, a study in the journal *Nature Climate Change* said March 25.

Scientists at Germany’s Potsdam Institute for Climate Research used physics, statistical analysis and computer simulations to link extreme rainfall and heat waves to global warming. The link between warming and storms was less clear.

“It is very likely that several of the unprecedented extremes of the past decade would not have occurred without anthropogenic global warming,” said the study.

The past decade was probably the warmest globally for at least a millennium. Last year was the 11th hottest on record, the World Meteorological Organization said.

Extreme weather events were devastating in their impacts and affected nearly all regions of the globe.

They included severe floods and record hot summers in Europe; a record number of tropical storms and hurricanes in the Atlantic in 2005; the hottest Russian summer since 1500 in 2010 and the worst flooding in Pakistan’s history.

Last year alone, the United States suffered 14 weather events which caused losses of over \$1 billion each.

Abnormal

The high amount of extremes is not normal, the study said.

Even between March 13 and 19 this year, historical heat records were exceeded in more than 7,000 places in North America.

For some types of extreme weather, there are physical reasons why they would increase in a warming climate. For example, if average temperature rises, then so will the number of heat records if all else remains equal, the study said.

Natural weather patterns like El Niño or La Niña can also cause highs in global temperature or increased precipitation which leads to floods.

“Single weather extremes are often related to regional processes, like a blocking high pressure system or natural phenomena like El Niño,” said Stefan Rahmstorf, co-author of the study and chair of the institute’s earth system analysis department.

“These are complex processes that we are investigating further. But now these processes unfold against the background of climatic warming. That can turn an extreme event into a record-breaking event.”

Recent years have seen an exceptionally large number of record-breaking and destructive heat waves in many parts of the world and research suggests that many or even most of these would not have happened without global warming.

Currently, nearly twice as many record hot days as record cold days are being observed both in the United States and Australia, the length of summer heat waves in western Europe has almost doubled and the frequency of hot days has almost tripled over the period from 1880 to 2005.



Spring is now arriving three days earlier than in the period 1951 to 1980. PHOTO: THINKSTOCK.COM

Extremely hot summers are now observed in about 10 per cent of the global land area, compared with only about 0.1-0.2 per cent for the period 1951 to 1980, the study said.

The link between storms and hurricanes and global warming is less conclusive but at least some of recent rainfall extremes can be attributed to human influences on the climate, it added.

A report March 23 said the unprecedented heat wave across much of the U.S. set or tied more than 7,000 high temperature records.

“This heat wave is essentially unprecedented,” said Heidi Cullen of the non-profit science and communication organization Climate Central. “It’s hard to grasp how massive and significant this is.”

These records include daytime high temperatures and record-high low temperatures overnight, which in some cases are higher than previous record highs for the day, Cullen said.

“When low temperatures are breaking previous record highs, that’s when you see this is incredibly special,” she said.

Spring arriving earlier

Cullen noted that this warmth is part of a trend that is pushing the spring season earlier by an average of three days in the contiguous 48 U.S. states.

The date of first leafing — the day when buds burst open — has moved forward from March 20, where it was during the 30-year period from 1951 to 1980, to March 17, where it has been for the period from 1981 to 2010.

This early wake-up call for plants and animals can have disastrous health consequences, especially for children, said Dr. Aaron Bernstein of the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School.

Pollen counts are breaking records around the United States, Bernstein said, noting that allergies cost the U.S. economy between \$6 billion and \$12 billion annually.

The early heat stimulates growth in plants and the pollen season has become longer by one to two weeks over the last half-century, while the higher levels of carbon dioxide in the air stimulate pollen production in highly allergenic plants like ragweed, Bernstein said.

“As we juice these plants with carbon dioxide, we’re going to make people have greater allergy symptoms,” Bernstein said.

“As we juice these plants with carbon dioxide, we’re going to make people have greater allergy symptoms.”

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Hedging strategies if you're selling grain in U.S. dollars

OPTIONS ▶ An example of protecting against currency moves with a combination of calls and puts

BY DAVID DERWIN
UNION SECURITIES

If you sell product to the U.S., as many Canadian businesses do and want to protect yourself, you are probably asking what to do if the loonie is worth more than a U.S. greenback, which it has been again recently. With many risk-management tools available today, what is the best strategy for you in your situation?

Forward contracts are simple, but are they the most effective tool? It depends on whether now is a good time to lock in prices. With forwards, since you lock in at a fixed price without the potential for gain, there can be a lot of opportunity cost and you can leave a lot of money on the table.

There are other potentially more profitable risk-adjusted option strategies to consider instead of, or in addition to, just forwards. Provided is an example of a risk-management profile we implemented for a client showing why options can often offer a better risk-reward ratio than using only forwards.

Example

Last year at this time, we helped a client who needed to manage his Canadian dollar risk. To better understand their situation, we have included some of the criteria used to determine our best strategy for their needs:

- The client had sold grain in U.S. dollars with payment expected late summer/early fall.
- Given the C\$ had moved higher from 1.00 par to 1.045 from

March 2011 to April 2011, we wanted to leave some room in the event the C\$ pulled back from its recent strong run but still have protection against a move higher.

- At the same time, the client was less concerned about the C\$ going much above 1.10 U.S.
- Also, the client would be happy locking in C\$ at a much lower level of 1.02.
- We wanted to structure the hedge so there would be little net cost to the client.

Option strategies

Option strategies work best considering all these conditions combined. In early April, with the C\$/U.S. exchange rate at 1.0450, we recommended the following to hedge a US\$800,000 payment expected in the summer/fall of 2011:

- Buy eight September 1.0500 calls for \$16,400 for premium paid including commission and fees as protection against a stronger C\$.
- Sell eight September 1.1000 calls for \$3,200 for premium received including commission and fees to offset some of the cost of buying the 1.05 calls since the client was not too concerned about C\$ moving above 1.10.
- Sell eight September 1.0200 puts for \$11,400 for premium received including commission and fees to offset some of the cost of buying the 1.05 calls since the client would be happy to convert his US\$ into C\$ at 1.02.
- Therefore, it cost \$1,800 to

CANADIAN DOLLAR U.S. DOLLAR EXCHANGE



implement this \$800,000 hedge until September.

In summary, this strategy provided protection from 1.05 all the way up to 1.10, with the opportunity to convert at a better rate if C\$ dropped back to 1.02, all at little cost to the client.

Results

So, how did this strategy unfold? As you can see from the chart, the C\$ moved sideways to lower in favour of the client. Based on US\$800,000, the net benefit of the strategy was \$17,320. The main gains came from having the flexibility of an option strategy to convert US\$ into a weaker C\$ at 1.02 rather than locking in the US\$/C\$ up at 1.045.

Here's how the approximate numbers worked:

- The cash currency gain from converting cash US\$ to C\$ was of \$32,720 since the C\$/US\$ spot rate fell from 1.0450 at the beginning of hedge to 1.0041 at end of hedge.
- The option hedge offset was \$15,400, representing the difference between the put sold at 1.02 and the spot rate of 1.0041 as well as all option costs, commission and fees.
- The net gain from hedging with options versus just locking in a forward was therefore \$17,320, assuming the client exchanged the cash the same day the hedge was lifted.

This is just one example and it won't necessarily work this cleanly every time. For instance, if the C\$ had moved dramatically lower, significant funds could be required during the course of the hedge to cover the short put until the US\$800,000 account receivable was received and the hedge was lifted.

Regardless of the exact strategy you implement for your situation, we advocate a continuous, disciplined, proactive approach to put the odds in your favour over time. Remember, it's too late to buy fire insurance when

your house is already on fire; or, if you can, it will be extremely expensive and difficult to implement. Bottom line, as we like to say: "Manage your risks before they manage you!"

Courtesy of David Derwin, an investment adviser for Union Securities Ltd. For a complimentary copy of our Risk Management Systems Guide or if you have any questions, please contact us directly at 1-800-661-0298 ext. 7 or dderwin@union-securities.com.

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AFC is a membership-driven leader in Alberta's agriculture and food sector with a vision to be an innovation and breakthrough catalyst for the sector. AFC operates targeted programs and initiatives supporting the development of the sector, and is also respected by industry partners as a convenor of policy discussions and outcomes on important issues affecting the sector.

Though membership applications are accepted throughout the year, organizations that have paid the annual \$200 membership fee and individuals who have paid the \$50 fee by April 25 may cast one vote each for three available director positions at our June 26 AGM. The 2012 AGM Keynote Speaker is Robert Orr, co-founder of the world's largest ingredient supplier of Omega 3s from fish oil and a new health and wellness company.

www.agfoodcouncil.com/director-nominations-2012

Agriculture & Food Council
of Alberta

Food companies poised to profit as production rebounds

RELUCTANT ▶ Companies absorbed some of the high prices so may not pass along full savings

BY ROD NICKEL
REUTERS

The world’s farmers are poised for a year of plenty in 2012 after last year’s weather-related disasters, and prospects of lower grain prices from bumper harvests could offer relief to the battered bottom lines of grain and food companies.

Food and beverage companies like Sara Lee, PepsiCo and General Mills have struggled to absorb high costs of meat and grains in the past year, while economic uncertainty has hammered agribusiness giants.

While weather worries persist in some areas — notably droughts affecting crops in South America and the southern U.S. Plains — expanded global farm production looks to take the sting out of farm prices for food makers by late 2012.

“Let’s make the assumption (prices) stay down year over year; that would be a pretty welcome event,” said Matt Arnold, a consumer analyst at Edward Jones in St. Louis.

Mixed blessing

Makers of breakfast cereal and other packaged foods, such as Kellogg and Kraft Foods Inc., absorbed some of the recent spike in grain prices and are unlikely to pass along all of their expected cost savings to consumers, Arnold said.

Instead, food makers will probably offer shoppers short-term

relief through promotions and coupons, while pocketing some savings to offset the hit they shouldered when grain prices ran up, he said.

The implications of lower grain prices are more of a mixed blessing for meat processors, Arnold said.

Hormel Foods, seller of SPAM and Jennie-O turkeys, would save on feed costs for its turkey-raising operation, but farmers might use those savings to expand their flocks over time, pressuring overall turkey prices.

U.S. beef packers have posted big losses since late last year as the prices they paid for cattle outstripped what they earned on beef, according to private data.

The high cost of cattle has pinched JBS, the world’s largest beef processor as well as owner of the largest U.S. cattle-feeding operation.

On the restaurant side, regional, semi-national chains such as Sonic Corp. and Jack in the Box might have the most to gain from food cost relief, since they are not protected by the greater bargaining power enjoyed by names like McDonald’s and KFC parent YUM Brands, said RJ Hottovy, an analyst at Morningstar.

“Corn costs, which play a big part in (influencing) just about all the commodities out there, especially for restaurants, have certainly been a headwind for the past two years,” he said. “I think restaurants are looking for any kind of relief as soon as they can.”



Lower feed prices may not be translated into lower prices for a can of Spam.

WHAT’S UP

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

April 11: Working Well Workshop, location tba, Rockyview County. Call: Brenda 403-520-8159

April 12: AB Canola Industry Research Update, Mayfield Inn, Edmonton. Call: Rick 780-678-6167

April 18: Women in the North Conference, location TBA, Peace River. Call: Agnes 780-624-1161
- April 20/21:** AB Human Ecology & Home Economics Conf. Hilton Inn, Stony Plain. Call: Margurite 780-968-3513

April 24: Cows, Creeks, & Communities, Kurt Browning Complex 12:00 pm, Caroline. Call: Albert 403-844-2645

May 2: Grey Wooded Forage Association AGM, Hall 4:00 pm, Leslieville. Call: Muriel 403-844-2645

May 2/3: 2012 Swine Breeding MGT. Workshop, Alberta AG building, Edmonton. Call: Tracy 780-248-1159

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N Stabilizer is Good for Yield, Spring Schedule

By Earl Greenhough



Earl Greenhough

The hustle and bustle of planting season is quickly approaching. One way to save time is to avoid the hassle and expense of putting all your nitrogen down at seeding, by substituting a broadcast application before seeding, right after seeding or even after emergence with urea protected by AGROTAIN® nitrogen stabilizer. You can still get the nutrients the plant needs to get a good start, but avoid the crush of having to place all your nitrogen at once and all the time it takes away from seeding to stop and fill the fertilizer tank.

Cool spring conditions can make your urea fertilizer vulnerable to nitrogen loss. As much as 30 percent or more of surface-applied nitrogen can be lost in the first critical weeks after application even with melting snow and cold temperatures. That’s why AGROTAIN® nitrogen stabilizer needs to be part of your program. It is the only product proven to reduce nitrogen loss through ammonia volatilization.

Wheat is a nitrogen-intensive crop. It requires 2.2 pounds of nitrogen for each bushel produced, agronomists say. What’s more, wheat requires nitrogen in all plant development phases. So what happens if the crop doesn’t get the nitrogen it needs? The results can include reduced tillering, smaller head sizes, poor grain fill, diminished yields and low protein content. A carefully timed nitrogen application can prevent most of those problems. Seeding fields immediately after surface applying your fertilizer isn’t enough to protect against N loss. Adding AGROTAIN® nitrogen stabilizer to urea or UAN, at a cost of just pennies per pound of N, controls nitrogen volatilization loss. Growers gain cost efficiencies and time efficiencies because their fertilizer investment is protected which leads to higher yields. Growers gain peace of mind knowing that their nitrogen will be protected and used efficiently by the crop resulting in a better bottom line.

If you have a question for the Nitrogen Miser or need more information on Stabilized Nitrogen Technology, don’t hesitate to contact me at earl.greenhough@kochind.com or 780-850-1679.

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USDA PREDICTS RECORD ACREAGE TO CORN



Farmers in the United States are expected to plant more acres to corn in 2012 than any year since 1937, according to USDA's Prospective Plantings report released Apr. 1. It pegged U.S. corn acres in 2012 at 95.9 million, up four per cent from 2011. "If realized, this will be the largest corn acreage in the United States since 1937, when producers planted 97.2 million acres of corn," USDA said. Soybean is forecast at 73.9 million acres, down one per cent from 2011, with wheat expected to touch 55.9 million acres, up three per cent from 2011.

ARGENTINE SOY CUT AGAIN

Argentina's biggest grains exchange slashed its forecast for 2011-12 soy production to 43.1 million tonnes on Apr. 2 as the extent of drought damage became clearer, especially in northern provinces. "The reductions as a result of dryness are very significant in those areas," the Rosario grain exchange said in a report. Recent rains have not been sufficient to offset damage from dry weather during sensitive crop development stages in December and January. — Reuters

MARKETS



BY PHIL FRANZ-WARKENTIN

Fewer U.S. soybean acres bode well for canola

EVER LARGER ▶ Some analysts are talking up 23 million acres of yellow flowers this year

ICE Futures Canada canola contracts climbed sharply higher during the week ended March 30, hitting their strongest levels in over six months and settling just below contract highs at the end of the week. Canola first rose on the back of the tightening supply situation in Western Canada and solid export demand, but saw another leg up when a much-anticipated U.S. Department of Agriculture report provided a bullish spark for soybeans south of the border.

The USDA forecast soybean plantings in 2012 at 73.9 million acres, which was well-below average trade guesses for a 75.5-million-acre crop and about a million acres smaller than the year-ago level. The trade was quick to point out that actual acres will likely be larger, as the rally in soybeans over the past month will swing some area its way, but the initial bullish reaction in the futures was swift.

With South American soybean production failing to live up to expectations this year, the world is banking on a larger U.S. crop to cover some of the slack. However, with the corn market also working to draw in acres, any limitations on U.S. soybean area bodes well for canola prices.

In Western Canada, all signs point to the largest sea of yellow in history this summer. The largest official industry guesses have topped out at 22 million acres, well above the 18.9 million seeded

in 2011 — and already an unprecedented number. However, anecdotal reports now point to canola plantings at 23 million acres or more. The excessively wet land in Saskatchewan and Manitoba that was unseeded last year could be up to 75 per cent canola if some reports are to be believed. Seed dealers are said to see dozens of farmers come in daily for canola. There is also plenty of talk in the market of more farmers than normal looking to seed canola on the same ground they seeded to the crop last year.

Rolling the dice

That canola-on-canola crop rotation poses disease and yield risks. However, when the price is right, that seems to be a risk many will be willing to take this spring. From a monetary perspective, growing canola this year could conceivably boost profits by \$100 per acre compared to wheat or barley.

Those large acres are overhanging the market, but canola supply/demand in itself won't dictate the price, as the crop is a small player in the global oilseed market. That means even if the canola crop does end up as huge as is being forecast, prices could still stay firm if soybeans hold up. Some luck will be needed, but there is always an element of rolling the dice each spring.

The rally in canola does raise some concerns that the market is becoming overbought. That may be true on the old-crop contracts, but when you look at new-crop



PHOTO: ISTOCK.COM

prices, canola still looks attractive from an end-user's perspective. Crush margins against the nearby futures are at their lowest levels in a few years. However, when calculating the margins — which basically work out to the difference between the seed cost and the product values — the new-crop prices still look very profitable for the crushers.

While the oilseeds were rallying, corn futures in the U.S. actually moved down slightly on the week. The USDA forecast U.S. corn plantings at 95.9 million acres, which easily surpassed trade guesses and would be the largest crop since 1937. Tight nearby supplies mean that increase will be needed, but profit-taking was enough to keep some pressure on values during the week.

What could prove interesting from a Canadian perspective in the USDA plant-

ings report was the smaller-than-anticipated spring wheat estimate, at only 12 million acres. After poor conditions limited some plantings in the northern states last spring, the general consensus had been for a million-acre increase from the 12.4 million acres of spring wheat grown in 2011.

Minneapolis wheat futures led to the upside in the U.S. during the week, and the ICE Futures Canada milling wheat contracts actually saw some light commercial trade as well.

U.S. durum acres are expected to increase to 2.2 million, from 1.4 million in 2011, with crop insurance programs offering good returns for the crop.

Phil Franz-Warkentin writes for Commodity News Service Canada, a Winnipeg company specializing in grain and commodity market reporting.

For three-times-daily market reports from Resource News International, visit "ICE Futures Canada updates" at www.albertafarmexpress.ca.



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Harami alerts hog producers to a downward correction

CANDLESTICKS ▶ Japanese charting technique signals changes in market direction

BY DAVID DROZD

After rallying up, but failing to fill a gap between \$91.475 and \$91.650, lean hog prices on the weekly nearby candlestick chart turned back down on February 24, 2012. The ensuing reversal pattern (sell signal) that developed is referred to as a harami on a candlestick chart.

Lean hog prices have since lost more than six cents per pound in the past five weeks.

Candlestick charting provides an insight into market activity that is not readily apparent with the conventional bar-type charts. When you see a black bar, the sentiment is bearish and when the bar is white it is bullish.

Harami suggests a waning in momentum and a change in trend. At a market top, the harami is identified by a long white body followed by a short black body which is contained within the parameters of the preceding long white body.

Harami in Japanese means pregnant. The Japanese are regarded as the true pioneers of market technical analysis. They began trading forward rice contracts (futures) in 1654 and by the

year 1750 developed a relatively sophisticated way to analyze the markets.

These same techniques have evolved over nearly 2-1/2 centuries into an amazingly powerful modern-day charting method referred to as candlestick. Now anyone can learn how the masterminds of the Orient have attained wealth in their markets and in ours.

Virtually all modern-day technical analysis used in conjunction with bar charting such as trend-line analysis and pattern recognition can be applied in the exact same way using candlesticks with additional advantages.

Strength and weakness

Candlestick charts allow the viewer at a casual glance to spot technical strength and/or weakness by highlighting the relationship between the opening and closing price for each line.

The Japanese method of charting is called candlestick because the individual lines resemble candles. The exact same data is used in traditional bar charting — open, high, low and close is all that is required. The daily line shows the open, high, low and close.

The thick part or candle is

called the “real body.” It highlights the range between the open and close. If the close is above the open, then the body will be white. When the real body is black this simply means the close was below the open. The lines above and below the real body represent the high and low ranges for the period and are called “shadows.”

The long black body illustrates a bearish period in the market with an opening near the day’s high and close near the day’s low.

The long white body is the opposite of a long black body and shows technical strength with an opening near the low and a close near the high in a wide range period. The small body represents a tight range between the open and close. However, when combined with other patterns they can be very significant, such as in the formation of a harami.

The candlestick method gives you deeper insight into market analysis by utilizing numerous interpretations for intra-line activity. Hence, the user has a timely advantage in spotting key market turning points for all time frames.

Candlesticks are a useful stand-alone tool or can be used

LEAN HOGS PRICES



in conjunction with other technical tools such as stochastics, RSI, etc. creating a vast array of techniques and possibilities.

It is important for farmers to be aware of the reversal patterns that routinely occur in the grain and livestock charts. By recognizing buy and sell signals, producers can be better informed on price direction and take advantage of pricing opportunities.

Lean hog prices have been trading in a sideways \$8 range for the past five months. Support comes in at \$83 and resistance is up at \$91. Rectangular patterns like this tend to be consolida-

tion areas, which often form prior to prices having their next big move.

Send your questions or comments about this article and chart to info@ag-chieve.ca.

David Drozd is president and senior market analyst for Winnipeg-based Ag-Chieve Corporation. The opinions expressed are those of the writer and are solely intended to assist readers with a better understanding of technical analysis. Visit Ag-Chieve online at www.ag-chieve.ca for information about grain-marketing advisory services, or call us toll free at 1-888-274-3138 for a free consultation.

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1912-2012 CANADIAN GRAIN COMMISSION 100 YEARS

MARKING A CENTURY OF SERVICE

On April 1, 2012, the Canadian Grain Commission celebrates its 100th anniversary. The employees of the Canadian Grain Commission join with me in thanking the hardworking staff at Grainews for producing this publication to commemorate a century of service.

To survive a century is quite an achievement. But our longevity is not what is noteworthy, as you will see as you read about our past. No, our true achievement is our role in the growth of the Canadian grain industry. For 100 years, we have collaborated with Canadian grain producers and other members of an industry that has shaped Canada's society, economy and landscape.

The Canada Grain Act, which guides us in delivering our mandate, was passed by the Canadian government to meet the needs of grain producers. Through the Act, we work to establish and maintain standards of quality for Canada's grain, regulate grain handling in Canada, and to ensure that Canada's grain is a dependable commodity for domestic and export markets.

Grain producers still have rights that were initially granted to them under the Act in 1912. Producers can dispute the grade and dockage received at a licensed primary elevator and ask our inspectors to provide a binding decision. Producers are also guaranteed the right to ship their grain using producer cars. In 2011, producers loaded over 12,700 cars with

grain, demonstrating how valuable a right this is to them. Finally, producers are still offered payment protection for deliveries to licensed primary elevators.

While we celebrate our past, we also look to the future. We are a vibrant organization, ready to take on new challenges. We draw strength from a proud past while we evolve to meet changing demands.

Along with the dedicated employees of the Canadian Grain Commission, I look forward to another century of collaboration with our stakeholders to assure to the continued success of Canada's grain industry.

*Elwin Hermanson
Chief Commissioner*



CGC guarantees Canadian grain quality worldwide

Quality assurance makes Canadian grain superior

BY RON FRIESEN

The owner of Singapore's largest bakery chain sits in a high-rise office tower gazing out over the world's busiest ocean port. Any day now, a ship carrying wheat from Canada is scheduled to arrive and unload its cargo for milling.

The baker is already planning his production and quality-control program for months ahead, based on grain from half-way around the world he has never laid eyes on, much less inspected.

But he isn't worried. He knows he will almost certainly get exactly the right kind of wheat with the precise specifications he requested. He also knows that, if there's a problem with the bread when it emerges from the oven, Canadian officials will step in to provide technical assistance. Canada is one of the only countries in the world able to provide wheat sight unseen to an overseas buyer with the assurance that it's what he paid for and will perform the way he wants. That fact is due in large part to the Canadian Grain Commission, a federal agency responsible for regulating the country's grain handling system.

How the CGC provides customers with what the industry calls "the best wheat in the world" is a story spanning 100 years this month.

PURPOSE REMAINS

The world was a very different place in 1912 when the Board of Grain Commissioners, the CGC's forerunner, was formed with a mandate to administer the new Canada Grain Act and enforce regulations for grain inspection.

But then, as now, the purpose was the same. The Board of Commissioners would see that farmers would be guaranteed fair treatment for the grain they delivered. They would receive the correct grade with the correct bushel weight. If there was any disagreement, the CGC could investigate and, if warranted, uphold the farmer's complaint.

"The Canadian Grain Commission is an unbiased third party that ensures that all players who have a stake in the grain are treated fairly. That balance would not exist if there were no Grain Commission," says Elwin Hermanson, chief commissioner of the Canadian Grain Commission.

"You have a disciplined system for putting grain into the market and you don't have to deal as often with bad outcomes."

Implicitly, that means end-use customers are treated fairly, too. A regulated, co-ordinated system involving farmers, the CGC, grain handlers and marketers ensures it. Farmers produce the grain, grain handlers market the grain and establish the price; the CGC certifies grades and quality and provides technical expertise and support to overseas customers.



A prize-winning Board of Grain Commissioners display in Italy in 1932.

"A customer in the U.K., for example, can have confidence that when he buys No. 1 Canadian Western Red Spring wheat with 13 per cent protein, when it is shipped, that the Canadian Grain Commission will certify that everything loaded on this boat constitutes No. 1 CWRS 13.0," explains Hermanson.

Satisfying customers at the end of the supply chain may not have been uppermost in the minds of the Board of Grain Commissioners when they first set about their work a century ago. Protecting farmers from unfair treatment by railways, grain dealers and milling companies by enforcing regulations was the main emphasis (see related story).

But as Canada's grain exports expanded, especially after World War II, customers began to demand that, if they were buying wheat from so far away, it had better be what they ordered.

Of course, European millers buying wheat from Western Canada could (and did) come over to observe the harvest. But they still needed to know for certain that what was in those vessels leaving Montreal was what they had purchased.

QUALITY GUARANTEE

Thus was born the "certificate final" — a document signed by the CGC's chief grain inspector certifying that the vessel was loaded with grain equal to the customer's order. It is, in effect, a guarantee by the Government of Canada that what you buy is what you get.

Guaranteeing a specific quality for each load is a remarkable achievement, considering the grain is grown over a vast area under varying conditions that can range from flooding in one part of the Prairies to drought in another and delivered to over

300 country elevators owned by competing grain companies.

That's because the system works co-operatively to produce the right product. Any grain exported through a terminal elevator in Canada must be inspected by the CGC as it goes into the terminal and as it's loaded on to the vessel.

To ensure the grain going into the cargo hold is what the customer requested, samples are taken continuously during loading. A quality check occurs for every 2,000 tonnes, so a load to fill a 20,000-tonne vessel would be tested 10 times as the grain goes in.

What if, for example, nine samples are of the right stuff but one is not? The certificate final will say so.

"We cannot order the vessel unloaded," says Daryl Beswitherick, the CGC's program manager for quality assurance standards. "But what we will tell the grain company is that 2,000 tonnes that went on did not meet specifications. If they remove it, and continue to load grain that meets the quality that was sold, we will certify the whole lot as making spec. If they choose not to remove it, we will certify that 2,000 tonnes did not meet specification."

"The vessel would be able to sail. But what the customer would know when they receive their certificate final is that there are two different qualities within the hold of that vessel."

"If you're loading wheat or barley or peas, the procedure is the same."

How often is a vessel loaded with the wrong grain? "It's fairly rare that instances like this occur," says Beswitherick.

If it does happen, it's up to the shipper and the customer to come to an agreement prior to the vessel leaving the port. Sending

it back isn't practical because the cost for offloading the vessel would be prohibitive. The cost of having an unsold cargo afloat is not practical either. The customer is not left high and dry. The checks and balances of the Canadian grain system extend all the way from the Prairie grain fields to the end user's bakery.

COMPLAINTS INVESTIGATED

If, for example, a customer feels the protein strength of the wheat in his shipment is not as expected, he lodges what's called a cargo complaint. The CGC retains a sample from each shipment for six months. It will take part of the sample in question and test it in the CGC's Grain Research Laboratory in Winnipeg to determine if the grading was correct. The commission can also mill and bake that sample in its lab to see if there really is a protein problem, as the customer alleges.

If the sample performs as expected in the lab, the problem may be at the customer's end. Perhaps there's something wrong with his flour mill or the baking process.

But if a cargo complaint turns out to be justified, the system works to try and correct it.

It may be that the grade and content of the shipment are right but, for some reason, the protein isn't performing as it should. Perhaps the reason is an agronomic one, because soil and weather conditions under which wheat is grown can affect protein functionality.

In that case, the CGC may go over and help the customer work with the grain to produce the desired quality in the final product.

As a result, if an Indonesian buyer blends No. 2 CWRS 13.0 with Australian soft white wheat and Turkish flour to produce steamed buns or noodles, he can rely on the wheat from Canada even though he's using other products in the mix.

"So that buyer in Indonesia can say, 'When I buy this, I know I'm going to be able to use it in such a manner in my plant to upgrade the other ingredients I'm buying,'" Hermanson says.

The above process — inspecting, grading, certifying and providing customer support — holds true for any of the 21 official grains listed by the Canada Grain Act, whether cereals, oilseeds, pulses, mixed grains or other crops.

FARMER INPUT

It's important to note that farmers, who grow those crops in the first place, are directly involved in helping to shape Canada's grain grading system.

Every spring and fall, the Western Standards Committee, a 26-member industry committee, which includes 12 grain producers as well as processors and exporters, meets to discuss grading issues and

» CONTINUED ON PAGE 14



CANADIAN GRAIN COMMISSION 1912-2012

Fair treatment for Western farmers began 100 years ago

Federal agency brought peace to the Prairie grain war

BY RON FRIESEN

It was more than a century ago but bitter conflict between farmers and the early western Canadian grain industry still resonates in the childhood memories of old-timers like Harvey English.

"It was highway robbery. That's what it was in those days," says English, 94. "They were just stealing everything off the farmer that they could possibly steal."

English, whose uncle homesteaded the family farm near Rivers, Manitoba, remembers his father once talking about a producer who delivered a load of wheat to the local elevator and received 88 cents a bushel. A week later, English's dad took wheat to the same elevator and learned the price was now 44 cents a bushel.

Like other grain growers, he felt at the mercy of grain companies and their take-it-or-leave-it attitude.

"Nobody seemed to have any backbone to get out and do something for the farmers at that particular time," says English, who farmed until 90 and was still out on the combine last fall. "It was terrible."

Western Canadian farmers, who either applaud or chafe at government regulations in today's grain sector, can little appreciate what their ancestors experienced in the early days of settlement. The grain trade, if not exactly Wild West, wasn't far removed. Buying, grading and inspecting grain were

largely unregulated, farmers felt exploited and emotions often ran at a boiling point.

The mood among Western grain farmers at the close of the 19th Century was one of "outrage, indignation and frustration," according to Jim Blanchard, a University of Manitoba librarian and local historian.

"There was no doubt in their minds that the CPR, the grain dealers and the milling companies were formed into a monopoly designed to cheat them," wrote Blanchard in his 1987 book *The History of the Canadian Grain Commission*.

"There can be no doubt that there were abuses in Western Canada — this was inevitable in a situation where the railroad and the grain trade held all the cards and the farmer held none."

The tumultuous days of the early 20th century gave rise to the farm movement and the formation of producer organizations with political clout. But what really made the difference was the eventual response by the federal government to demands by Western farmers for fair treatment.

"MAGNA CARTA"

That response culminated exactly 100 years ago with the passage on April 1, 1912 of the Canada Grain Act — sometimes called the Magna Carta of the Western grain grower — and the creation of what is now the Canadian Grain Commission, a

federal agency, to administer it.

It was a watershed in the history of agriculture in Western Canada. In the words of former CGC chief commissioner G.G. Leith: "Then, as now, the Commission's purpose was to protect farmers' interests and, through the Canada Grain Act, to provide a legislative framework for a fast-growing grain industry."

Of course, grievances between Prairie farmers and the grain industry are as old as agriculture in the West. But it's hard to overstate the anger producers felt in those days at what they saw as unequal treatment by grain companies and the railways. It was, as Blanchard puts it, "a state of undeclared war between the two factions involved in the grain industry."

Complaints were many but they generally centred around four main ones: prices, dockage, weights and the ability of producers to ship their own rail cars.

There were actually three prices: the "street price" (offered by the elevator on delivery), the "track price" (received after loading a rail car and then selling it), and the "spot price" (the one at the terminal where grain was sold on the world market).

What angered farmers most, according to former University of Manitoba history professor Gerald Friesen in his book *The Canadian Prairies: A History*, was the spread in prices between street and track prices, probably three to four cents a bushel. Farmers were usu-

ally forced to accept street prices because, as Friesen says, "they could not fill a boxcar within a particular variety and grade of grain within the limited time permitted by the rail companies."

EXCESSIVE DOCKAGE

There were other legitimate grievances, as a Royal Commission appointed in 1899 to investigate the industry discovered.

The Commission found that "a vendor of grain is at present subjected to an unfair and excessive dockage for his grain at the time of sale." It also determined that "doubts exist as to the fairness of the weights allowed or used by the owners of elevators." Finally, it said elevator companies enjoyed an unfair monopoly "by refusing to permit the erection of flat warehouses where standard elevators are situated" and thus being able "to keep the price of grain below its true market value to their own benefit."

The only solution was legislation to regulate the industry, "there being no rules laid down for the regulations of the grain trade other than those made by the railway companies and the elevator owners," the commission's report concluded.

The result was a federal statute in 1900 titled the Manitoba Grain Act.

The act was well intentioned and pushed all the right buttons. It created the post of Warehouse Commissioner to administer the statute. It established rules

for handling grain. It set standards for weights and measures. It required grain-handling facilities to be licensed. And it enshrined in law a grain producer's right to load and ship his own rail car.

The problem, as farmers learned, was in getting the cars they were legally entitled to. It soon became evident the railways' practice was to allocate cars to grain companies before granting them to individual farmers.

LANDMARK CASE

It wasn't until 1902 that a landmark court case upheld the right of farmers to access producer cars. Brought by the newly formed Territorial Grain Growers, it accused the station agent at Sintaluta, Saskatchewan of not complying with the law by giving cars out of turn to elevators. The court ruled in favour of the farmers.

The railways may have had to supply producer cars but they didn't have to like it. Glen Franklin, who farms at Deloraine, Manitoba, says his grandfather once shipped a producer car around 1911 which mysteriously disappeared from the system. Tracked down after more than a year, the car was finally unloaded, Franklin's grandfather got paid, but he never did receive an explanation.

Did the car vanish on purpose? "It was certainly a possibility, I suppose," Franklin says.

Part of the problem with continuing inequities lay with the

» CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

make recommendations to the Commission about grain grades and standards.

According to a recent CGC statement, the committee works to "make sure changes to the grading system reflect the interests and concerns of all stakeholders in Canada's grain sector, including producers."

The committee "constantly review(s) Canada's grading system so that it continues to be relevant to the grain sector and to buyers of Canada's grain," says the statement.

The committee employs subcommittees to collect information about grading issues for specific crops. There are four subcommittees for wheat, barley and other cereals, oilseeds and pulses.

Chuck Fossay, who farms at Starbuck, Manitoba, sits on the wheat subcommittee. He says the group looks at all grading factors to distinguish one class of wheat from another. Those can include bushel weight, protein levels, allowable levels for fusarium head blight, or dockage.

LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

By setting such standards, the CGC creates a level playing field for farmers when marketing their grain to different buyers, Fossay says.

Say, for example, the minimum weight for No. 1 CWRS is 60 pounds per bushel. A buyer looking for a heavier weight might demand 65 pounds per bushel. In that case, the producer could



Grain Commission reinspection staff provide independent, third-party analysis of grain grades and quality.

say, "sorry, the CGC says the minimum weight for that grade is 60 pounds and if you want more, you'll have to pay a premium." And the CGC will back up the farmer.

"So you're not dealing with four different buyers who have four different standards for the grain you're showing them," says Fossay. "You may be dealing with four different buyers but there's one standard set by a third party."

Grading and inspection are only one part of the puzzle for

ensuring grain quality. Another important piece is the variety-registration system, in which the CGC plays a central role.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency administers the variety registration system, and the CGC is responsible for evaluating new varieties from a quality perspective coming forward out of co-op trials for registration. Once a year, in Saskatoon, Banff or Winnipeg, the Prairie Grain Development Committee (PGDC) meets to receive data from the Grain Commission on those varieties

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1912-2012 CANADIAN GRAIN COMMISSION 100 YEARS



An early scene at Wolseley, Saskatchewan. Farmers in the early days of grain production believed they were at the mercy of elevator agents for grade and price.

Manitoba Grain Act itself. For one thing, it applied only to “the Inspection District of Manitoba,” since Saskatchewan and Alberta were not yet part of Confederation. By the time those jurisdictions achieved full provincial status in 1905, they were producing more wheat than all of Manitoba, though technically not under the statute.

But a greater problem was that the railways and grain companies, the Sinaluta case notwithstanding, paid little attention to the Act, says James Zastre, a Canadian Grain Commission community relations officer.

“There were these rights that were given to producers under the Manitoba Grain Act but most felt that the grain companies and railways ignored them. Many producers felt they had no voice, they had no organization at the time and most of them probably didn’t even know they were being denied any rights,” Zastre says.

It was a critical period in the history of Western Canada. Although the Liberal government of Wilfred Laurier had a strong interest in

settling the West, large chunks of it were still virgin territory. Many immigrants, lured by the promise of cheap land, came from politically oppressed countries and harboured a deep suspicion of elevator companies telling them the grade of their grain. How could you encourage people to come to Canada and homestead in a remote corner of Saskatchewan if you couldn’t guarantee them fair treatment for the crops they grew?

THE CANADA GRAIN ACT

Worse still, there appeared to be no avenue for complaint. You took a wagonload of grain to an elevator and immediately felt at the agent’s mercy. If you didn’t like his decision, you could take the grain back home. You didn’t know what your rights were because nobody had told you. Communication was sometimes difficult because of cultural differences and a language barrier. The very sociology of the Prairies in those days cried out for a solution.

That solution came in the form of the Canada Grain Act of

1912. It built on its predecessor, the Manitoba Grain Act, only with teeth.

Zastre says the pre-1912 approach to solving problems was piecemeal — single-issue approaches for resolving multi-faceted grievances. Different authorities had different responsibilities. There was no single message to give to producers who felt they were being wronged.

The Canada Grain Act changed that. All matters regarding grain industry regulation were combined under one umbrella.

Now you had a package deal simultaneously looking after a lot of things related to the industry. You also had a federal government telling farmers they had a right to fair treatment under the law. And if you felt you still weren’t being treated fairly, an independent tribunal served as an arbiter.

In short, the Canada Grain Act served two purposes, Zastre says. It provided solutions to problems. And it let people know, through their farm organizations or otherwise, that they had rights backed by the law of the land.

“It was an avenue of communication,” says Zastre. “I don’t say the Commission was out there spreading the word. But there was somebody that people knew they could talk to.”

Adds Doug Langrell, CGC corporate development advisor: “The commission, as a federal organization founded by an act of Parliament, gave a kind of sanction to the rights of farmers in a way that UGG or any of the Pools could not.”

Indirectly, this helped immigration because it drew on the role of government that appealed to people coming to Canada in the first place, says Zastre. It enabled government to say, here are rights you didn’t have back home. Grain companies had less leeway in making decisions because now there was oversight.

PRODUCER CAR PROTECTION

Producer cars were one example. Episodes such as the railway losing Franklin’s grandfather’s producer car were not uncommon. But the Board of Commissioners, as the CGC was originally called, put a stop to that, says Zastre.

The Commission ensured that cars were properly numbered and recorded by an independent body. If producer cars were not distributed the way they were supposed to be, someone was watching and something would happen.

Another change occurred when the government began building inland grain terminals. Facilities at Moose Jaw, Saskatoon and Calgary were constructed soon after 1912. Suddenly, there was less shipping pressure after the harvest season because more grain could be stored on the Prairies. There was less urgency for farmers to sell their grain immediately for fear prices would be lower if they waited.

How did grain companies and

other major players accept all this regulation?

Zastre says the industry struggled against some provisions, especially those in the Manitoba Grain Act. But the 1912 legislation brought a kind of peace to the sector. It was no longer an unregulated market in which anything went. That was a blessing for farmers.

But in a strange sort of way, it was a double-edged sword also benefiting grain companies because it helped ease the cut-throat environment which prevailed before, says Langrell.

“Companies were not always in fair competition for farmers’ grain,” he says. “While they certainly wanted to get the grain for the best price from farmers so they could pass it on for the best margin or profit, they couldn’t risk significantly undercutting the competition.”

Having standardized procedures also helped. Sampling was a good example. In the old days, a company could take a pail of grain from the back of a farmer’s wagon and that was the sample, like it or not. Now the commission set a procedure for sampling grain. You took a probe into a boxcar or truck and extracted samples at five points — one in the middle and four from each of the corners, two feet in.

That was an advantage to both the farmer and the company, says Zastre. The farmer knew his grain would be sampled consistently in a certain way. It was also an advantage to companies because it meant there was one less thing to argue about and they could get on with the business of buying and selling grain.

“It helped pour oil on the waters,” Zastre says. “There was less disruption. Producers could be sure they were getting a fair deal. If they felt they weren’t, they had some avenues for appeal. And the grain companies knew the other guy had to do the same as they were doing.”

and assess whether they are good enough to be registered, based on quality factors. Other committee members will study other factors such as disease and insect resistance and agronomics. (The committee also meets in Eastern Canada, with the CGC playing the same role.)

With spring wheat, for example, the quality of a variety has to meet a certain end-use specification. Therefore, as producers make their seeding choices, they know that each variety has certain attributes from a quality, disease and insect resistance, and agronomic perspective. For their part, buyers can expect that a new variety within that class will perform in a certain manner.

Beswetherick says the system has very rigid requirements. If a variety is to be registered, it has to be equal to or better than a certain standard set by the PGDC.

“So a customer who buys registered varieties in a CWRS class knows that, if there are new varieties in there, they’re supposed to be at least equal to what he’s used to getting, or better than he used to get.”

Although the registration process is the same for all crops, quality parameters can vary. Beswetherick notes that criteria for canola, for example, are not as stringent as for some of the wheat classes.

CHANGE CONTINUES

Right now, all this is happening against the backdrop of one

of the most significant developments in the recent history of the Canadian grain industry: the impending removal of the Canadian Wheat Board’s single sales desk for wheat and barley.

How a post-monopoly environment will affect the Canadian Grain Commission is uncertain.

Some believe business will continue more or less as usual, only without a CWB monopoly. Others have serious doubts because the CWB and the Commission are closely linked.

In the meantime, the CGC itself is under the microscope. Suggested changes to the Canada Grain Act would eliminate mandatory requirements for inward inspection and weighing at licensed terminals and transfer elevators. Grain handlers themselves would report inward grain grades and weights.

Some worry the changes, if implemented, would limit the CGC’s role as an independent arbiter and compromise assurance of fair payment to farmers — the very reason the Commission was formed in the first place.

“Regardless of changes proposed, we remain committed to the Canada Grain Act,” explains Hermanson. “That means that, through grain quality and quantity assurance as well as grain safety assurance, we will continue to ensure a dependable commodity both domestically and internationally, for the benefit of producers and the grain industry as a whole.”

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CANADIAN GRAIN COMMISSION 1912-2012

Quality assurance through world-class research stands the test of time

The Canadian Grain Commission's Grain Research Laboratory has been assessing and improving the quality of Canadian crops for more than nine decades

BY VAL OMINSKI

The bright blue paint on the Allis Chalmers roll stands looks conspicuously out of place among the gleaming modern metal in the pilot-scale flour mill on the 16th floor of the CGC Grain Research Lab.

Miller Dave Turnock thinks they are about 80 years old and have also seen duty at the lab's former location in the Grain Exchange Building. They may even have been housed in the very first Grain Research Lab, located in a postal station on Main Street and Magnus Avenue in Winnipeg's North End.

The CGC Grain Research Lab is that kind of place — where new research and technologies are building upon past efforts in order to provide quality assurance for Canada's evolving grain industry.

THE GRL'S EARLY DAYS

When the Board of Grain Commissioners (now the CGC) was formally established in 1912, a beefed-up inspection and grading system was introduced. The board wanted a research lab to oversee moisture testing, to test wheat quality through milling and bread baking activities, and to test flax for oil content.

By June 1914, the Grain Research Lab was up and running with a staff of five.

E.J. Birchard, the first director (chief chemist), was a crusty and determined individual who began by setting acceptable levels for moisture in grain, thus helping producers get more reasonable prices for damp grain.

He also expressed concerns about the grading system, and questioned whether grade prices actually reflected the value of the grain.

This was good news for farmers — but not so for the rest of the industry. Birchard's research was caught up in ongoing disputes between the grain trade and producers, with the result that the federal government shut the GRL down in 1923.

A stubborn Birchard continued to work in the empty lab, until — as a result of lobbying from farmer groups and members of Parliament — the GRL reopened. It coincided closely with the move to the Grain Exchange Building in May of 1927, where the lab joined the CGC's Winnipeg offices.

Once back in business, Birchard undertook a number of programs that would help establish the quality of Canadian wheat and define the GRL:

- extensive protein testing of red spring wheat, beginning in 1927;

- quality testing of samples from all grains and oilseeds moving to market;
- monitoring of moisture tests done by inspectors
- limited quality testing of new varieties;
- participation in grain-drying research with three Prairie universities.

Birchard also began sending the results of the GRL's quality testing program to Canadian and foreign millers, and pushed for enhanced use of these publications in a variety of languages. This marketing tool is still a cornerstone of the CGC quality assurance program today.

Birchard's final contribution was a trip in 1932 to Italy, in order to demonstrate the lab's quality assurance work, promote the use of Canadian wheat, and gather market intelligence.

As the 1930s unfolded, the GRL continued to gain prominence under the leadership of its new director, W. E. Geddes. It acquired the Durum Research Lab and its durum milling and pasta-testing equipment from the University of Manitoba — including a spectrophotometer for studying pasta colour.

It began work, in conjunction with the Associate Committee on Grain Research, to test promising new varieties of wheat and barley. It also began working with other national and international organizations to research rust resistance and test new Canadian rust-resistance varieties, among other projects.

The GRL played an important role in helping to establish the new wheat variety Thatcher in the marketplace.

THE WAR YEARS AND BEYOND

During World War II, the lab continued its protein survey, moisture measurement and quality testing functions, although due to limited resources and staff, little new research could be undertaken.

It was, however, able to study the effects of long-term storage on grain sitting in terminals and bins due to a lack of customers. An entomologist was added to the team, insecticides were used, and for the first time, the GRL began testing for chemical residues.

In 1942, the GRL acquired the Malting Barley Lab from the National Research Council.

After the war, with J. A. Anderson at the helm, staffing was brought back to its full contingent and research flourished once again. Work was done on dough qualities, reactions that cause durum colour to fade during processing, and compounds that increase the viscosity of barley.

Work continued also on grain-drying research, and in 1951, when the harvest was wet and large numbers of farmers dried



A.E. Birchard, the Board of Grain Commissioners first chief chemist, pushed for a scientific method of evaluating grain quality.



Allis Chalmers roll stands in the CGC lab have been in use for at least 80 years.

their grain for the first time, the GRL tested all farm-dried grain for milling and baking qualities. It also provided a free sample-testing service that helped farmers adjust their grain dryers.

In 1954, Anderson spelled out the five priorities for the lab as it moved into the second half of the 20th Century:

- assessing the quality of each new crop and informing domestic/foreign customers;
- recording the quality of all grades of grain at port providing lab services to the inspection branch;
- collaborating with plant breeders in the development and testing of new grain varieties;
- serving as the main centre for research into the quality of cereal grains.

He noted that research was most important, because "the improvement of all other services depends upon progress in research."

Today, almost 60 years later, these priorities still continue to define the Grain Research Lab.

Another major contribution of Anderson's was his yearly overseas travel with the Canadian Wheat Board to promote Canadian grains and oilseeds, both to existing customers and to potential ones such as China.

G. N. Irvine, who would eventually succeed Anderson, worked with the CWB to train the grain technical officers in the Canadian

Wheat Board's newly created technical services and marketing department. When he became director in 1963, he increased the amount of time he — and other staff members — spent overseas providing technical support to the CWB.

As well, to further bolster market development, Irvine established a technical services section within the GRL to study problems or potential problems in milling and baking of Canadian wheat in foreign countries.

As the 60s moved toward the 70s, the GRL's work in the testing of new varieties, an essential step prior to licensing, gained international respect — so much so that it collaborated with the U.S. Crop Quality Council to test the quality of American varieties.

A NEW ERA

A move in 1973, along with the rest of the GCG head office, into a modern building near the famed corner of Portage and Main heralded a new era of research, technology, achievements, and expansions for the GRL.

Keith Tipples, who became director in 1979, was a vital part of these exciting times. His work included a pioneering study of wheat protein strength, which enabled the lab to do more meaningful evaluations of bread-baking qualities and potential new varieties.

Tipples also showed how the

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» CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

level of alpha-amylase enzyme found in wheat can affect quality — depending on the end products and specific baking methods used. Some markets such as Japan require sound top-grade wheat with a very low enzyme activity, whereas for other markets such as China, the moderate enzyme activity of No. 3 CWRS wheat may be perfectly satisfactory for their end uses.

In a recent interview, Tipples said that this and other research meant a different approach to looking at quality in wheat.

"We developed new areas of expertise, which allowed us to develop more sophisticated techniques of measuring quality," he said.

With the overhaul of the grading system in the early 70s, the lab worked with inspectors to relate the physical appearance of wheat to the quality required for its end use. If a particular type of damage did not negatively affect end use, there could be more tolerance to this damage.

"In this way, we maximized the amount going into the top grade, while protecting top quality," he said.

Another important highlight during this time were the achievements of the residue analysis section.

"This was a new, state-of-the-art lab that could provide detailed reports of toxic residues in parts per billion," Tipples said. "It assured buyers and users that Canadian grain was free from unacceptable levels of heavy metals, pesticides and mycotoxins."

During this era, new momentum and equipment were added to the GRL's flour mill, so that it could replicate, on a pilot scale, milling techniques of customer countries. This enabled the evaluation of Canadian wheat in foreign pasta, noodle and bread making.

Also during the 70s, a new oilseeds section — which had been created in response to the growth in rapeseed production — had almost immediate success when

it developed a rapid procedure for estimating erucic acid. This allowed for segregation of new, low erucic acid varieties.

Shortly after, Jim Daun, who worked in rapeseed and canola research at the GRL for 31 years, established specifications for glucosinolates and erucic acid — thereby helping to create the official definition of canola. He also developed a method of glucosinolate measurement; he was recently recognized by the Canola Council of Canada for his work.

The development of near-infrared technology for reliable rapid protein analysis in wheat was another world first, said Tipples. Protein segregation had been

gation can take place, and cargoes can be certified for classes of wheat and varieties of barley.

"We developed the technology to do this," Burnett said. "We are doing extensive work in DNA identification, and have become a world leader in this area."

In 2009, the GRL used its DNA expertise to mitigate a crisis in the Canadian flax industry. The terminated GMO variety Triffid had somehow made its way into European shipments and the commodity was quickly shut out of the EU marketplace.

"We worked with industry to develop a protocol for DNA testing in a matter of weeks," said Burnett. "The border re-opened to

During the Second World War, the lab continued its protein survey, moisture measurement and quality testing functions, although due to limited resources and staff, little new research could be undertaken.

introduced along with the new grading system, and this technology revolutionized the process. (See related article.)

When Tipples retired in 1998, Bill Scowcroft led the GRL into the 21st Century.

THE GRL TODAY

Blue Allis-Chalmers stands aside, if Birchard and some of his immediate successors were to visit the Grain Research Lab today, most of it would be unrecognizable to them.

For example, wheat and barley variety identification is no longer done on a visual basis. Both DNA identification and polyacrylamide gel electrophoresis, a technology that uses electric currents to create protein profiles for comparison purposes, are being used to monitor varieties as they move through the system, said Peter Burnett, current GRL director.

At port, it means variety segre-

gation can take place, and cargoes can be certified for classes of wheat and varieties of barley.

Another industry-response development at the GRL is a new pulse section, created as a result of the recent increase in pulse acreage, Burnett noted. One aspect of its research, the measurement and comparison of the cooking quality of peas from different samples, has led to the invention of the Mattson cooker, which can cook individual kernels.

This invention is now being used by research labs around the world.

Also in pulse research, image analysis is being investigated as a way to provide accurate photographs as reference for lentil grading. It is anticipated that this technology will address the problem of colour fading that occurs over time in actual samples.

Image analysis is also being used



Carlot inspections taking place at the CGC's original inspection room at the Winnipeg Grain Exchange building.

to count the undesirable colour specks in noodles and pasta.

Grain-safety testing and monitoring at the GRL is more important than ever as a result of changing world standards, but now in addition to pesticide, mycotoxin and heavy metal testing, the GRL regularly tests for fallout from nuclear accidents — something that would have had early GRL researchers scratching their heads in puzzlement.

Another recent GRL achievement, said Burnett, has been its work with breeders to develop low cadmium-accumulating varieties of durum wheat in order to meet international food safety standards.

Differentiating protein in wheat is now routine work, as a result of the 20 near infrared machines in use at the GRL. In addition, this technology is now being used to differentiate chlorophyll in canola to protect oil quality.

In the area of barley research, Marta Izydorczyk and her team are using a rapid visco analyzer to predict how long malting barley will retain its ability to germinate. This in turn predicts how quickly it must be used after harvest and how long it can be stored.

These wide-ranging research activities all contribute to the GRL's mandate, as set out in 1954, of surveying the annual harvest for quality, monitoring export shipments, and assisting in variety evaluation.

While so much has changed in the way this is done, the basic premise of providing quality assurance has remained the same. Like the blue roll stands, the Grain Research Lab has served the CGC and the Canadian grain industry solidly and consistently over the years, helping to enhance and maintain Canada's reputation in the international grain marketplace.

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One GRL scientist and his revolutionary technology

Protein makes the world go round; the trick is finding instruments that can measure it

BY VAL OMINSKI

Protein has always made the wheat world go round, but it became even more important in the mid-60s when some of the world's major wheat producers began selling wheat according to protein content.

In response, the Canadian Grain Commission developed a method for segregating wheat based on protein content — thereby increasing the number of samples to be protein tested from about 40,000 to over 500,000 annually.

Testing was done using the century-old Kjeldahl method that was time consuming and sometimes inconsistent — until the Grain Research Lab's Phil Williams streamlined it and enabled improved precision.

Still not satisfied, Williams, an analytical chemist, took the step of investing in an all-new

technology. In February 1972, he bought the first near infrared spectroscopy instrument in the world for the CGC.

Unfortunately, it didn't perform well, he said, so he began working with the American company that produced the instrument to develop an improved version. It was called the automated digital analyzer, and it evaluated 10 samples a minute — compared to a time frame of two hours per sample with the Kjeldahl method.

In 1975, the CGC began using the ADA to test point-of-origin samples. It worked for 18 years, Williams said, and completed 11 million tests.

"In the first year of use, we saved an estimated \$350,000," he said.

Williams continued to work with the manufacturer to develop an updated instrument that could test whole kernels, as opposed to ground samples,

and in the early 80s the CGC put the new version into a number of grain terminal elevators in Thunder Bay.

Over the years, Williams worked with various manufacturers as the use of near infrared technology expanded, and has assisted in the calibration and adaption of nearly 50 new instruments.

Under his influence, the CGC converted completely to the newest of the new whole grain instruments in the early 1990s. The rest of the world has followed its lead, and near infrared technology is now a standard international method for protein testing.

"Grading and protein analysis are part of the mosaic of wheat," Williams explained. "I love it; it's my life."

In 2002 he retired from the CGC, but is still active in advancing new technologies in the agriculture industry.

1912-2012 CANADIAN GRAIN COMMISSION 100 YEARS

Breaking into grain inspection was tough, but the rewards were worth it

Women have risen through the ranks in grain-inspection field

BY VAL OMINSKI

Debbie Pankewich has come a long way since she walked the decks of ships at Thunder Bay and sampled outgoing grain cargoes by hand.

Hired in 1979 by the Canadian Grain Commission to work in the weighing program, by 1982 she was one of a small group of female “pioneers” working in the inspection program. Traditionally, both disciplines had been a man’s domain — and Pankewich knew she was on ground-breaking territory.

“The microscope was on you and you had to prove yourself to other staff and to management,” she said. “For me, it was a motivating factor.”

Over the next 30 years, that motivation took her up the corporate ladder, first in Thunder Bay, then on to Winnipeg where she eventually established the national monitoring program that reviews the work of grain inspectors across the country.

When Pankewich moved on to Montreal, and then to Vancouver as manager of inspection services for the eastern and western regions respectively, it was fitting that her replacement was also a woman whose early days included hand-sampling in the inspection program before working her way up. Laurie Campbell was the first female grain inspector on the Prairies.

“I was a rarity in what some

when automatic grain-sampling systems take representative samples from each rail car going into a given port. Samples are first cleaned to assess dockage, and preliminarily inspected for moisture and protein. Then a grain inspector visually assesses and assigns the sample a grade which forms the basis of payment to the producer. Grain is exported using a similar process, and all information is stored electronically.

Gone are the days of inland (primary) elevator inspection on grain destined to port — and in the very early days, of breaking the seal on rail cars, climbing in overtop the grain, and thrusting a probe down to acquire samples. Gone, too, are the days of hand-sampling aboard ships.

According to Pankewich, not just the physical work of the job, but also the health and safety regulations have evolved. Back in her day, she said, “only the fittest would survive.” Many moved on.

She stayed, and today she manages an inspection program with over 175 employees who grade all grain moving in and out of west cost port facilities, and at service centres in Calgary and Saskatoon where farmers can bring or send samples for personalized grading at a nominal cost.

Campbell, meanwhile, runs the lab that checks the work of these and all other CGC grain inspectors from across Canada. She and her staff select graded



Laurie Campbell, the CGC’s first female inspector on the Prairies, was hired in 1986.

she no longer deals directly with producers.

“I really miss having that face-to-face contact and assisting them in understanding the grading system,” she said.

Campbell is still farming herself near Teulon, Manitoba, and said

she is grateful to the CGC for allowing her to work her vacation schedule around her farm work.

Pankewich, too, is appreciative of the opportunities afforded her by the CGC. During her various capacities, she has travelled domestically and internationally

to promote the quality assurance programs that make Canadian grains so reputable worldwide.

“The CGC has allowed for growth, development and movement,” she said. “I’ve loved the opportunities and the challenges — and I’ve taken them and ran with them.”

“The microscope was on you and you had to prove yourself to other staff and to management. For me, it was a motivating factor.”

— Debbie Pankewich

might consider a man’s world — I was in the last part of an era,” Campbell said. “It was tough walking into an elevator, but once they learned I was a farmer myself, it was much easier.”

Initially hired in 1986, by 1998 Campbell had become manager of Inspection Services for the prairie region, and in 2009, when the region was amalgamated into what is currently the central and western regions, she moved into her present position as manager of the national monitoring program.

She is adamant about the importance of inspection and grading, and the way they are done.

“You either have an aptitude for it or you don’t,” she said. “But you also have to develop a very unique skill set that needs to be constantly honed, to be sure you stay sharp.”

“You look at a kernel of wheat and you have to be able to distinguish between degree of damage and the direct correlation to qualities for milling and baking. Because of Canada’s reputation for producing top quality, we can export grain to customers based on a simple document attesting to this quality — something that a lot of countries currently can’t do.”

The inspection process starts

samples from approximately three per cent of all railcars that go into ports, and a larger percentage from export cargoes, reviewing the grading that has been done in order to make certain current grain standards and guides have been met.

This process helps ensure that grain is consistently graded the same way, regardless of where across Canada it is being done, and also helps identify any training needs that may be required by inspectors, Campbell said.

“The process is not to point fingers, but to ensure our inspectors have the training and skill they need in order to provide consistent grading and analysis,” she said.

To maintain consistency in the lab, equipment is precision-checked each day before use — including the machine that exactly divides down all components of samples, the screens used to separate dockage, the protein testers and the moisture meters. Precision scales are calibrated every day, and even the grading lights have an expiry date because they affect how the grain will be seen.

Despite her obvious passion for her job, there is a downside, said Campbell — and it’s that

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CANADIAN GRAIN COMMISSION 1912-2012

Nancy Edwards: keen for the challenges of wheat research

Her career path has focused on better understanding processing qualities in wheat and durum

BY VAL OMINSKI

When Nancy Edwards, a biological technology grad from Red River Community College, joined the Grain Research Lab as a technician in 1976, little did she know that one day she would be the scientist responsible for the lab's bread wheat research group.

Edwards went on to achieve her PhD in Food Science in 2002, thanks to the support and encouragement of now-retired GRL scientist Jim Dexter and other lab colleagues.

She built upon a decades-old tradition that started after the Second World War, when staff with potential and interest were encouraged to further their education. The difference is that they were all men; Edwards became one of the first female scientists at the GRL — and she did it while holding down her job.

In 2005, she was promoted to her current position, where she is responsible for quality evaluation of wheat, as part of the GRL's annual harvest survey. In addition, she monitors CWRS cargoes leaving from the East, West or Churchill terminals and produces class profiles for marketing support.

Edwards has done groundbreaking

work identifying baking and dough-mixing characteristics of durum wheat — not for traditional pasta making, but for bread making. She looked at durum lines from 14 different countries, in order to identify which proteins could make a variety suitable for bread-baking quality.

The end result could be new markets for Canada's durum wheat crop.

"I work on puzzles all the time," Edwards said. "For example, the bread-baking qualities of durum were not what I expected — and I needed to ask 'why.'"

Edwards also assesses new bread wheat lines for quality characteristics, as a member of the wheat, triticale and rye quality evaluation team that is part of the Prairie Grain Development Committee. She has recently created a new method for presenting data that makes her team's job easier.

Her next big project might not be yet known, but it could involve absolutely anything that affects the processing quality of wheat.

"There's always a new challenge around the corner, waiting to be solved," she says.



Edwards has done groundbreaking work on the use of durum wheat for breadmaking.

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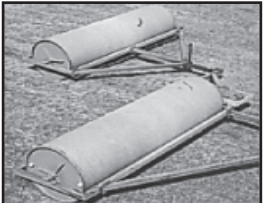
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Machinery Miscellaneous

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Nufarmer News Advertorial

New strategies for controlling Glyphosate Resistant Kochia.



Grant Deveson says the practice of rotating herbicides has been largely forgotten when it comes to glyphosate.

Glyphosate resistant kochia is not just coming to Canada. It's already here. Even more troubling, it is poised to spread quickly unless farmers start taking preventative measures.

This past year, Agriculture and Agri-food Canada researchers confirmed the presence of glyphosate tolerant kochia plants in the Lethbridge region of southern Alberta. It is a weed that has already reared its head in several US states, including Nebraska, Kansas and Colorado.

"Kochia is a highly competitive weed that spreads extremely quickly," explains Nufarm Commercial Manager, Grant Deveson.

The agriculture industry is taking this news very seriously. There is a real concern that this new strain of resistant kochia will be hard to contain for several reasons.

Kochia is a highly prolific seed producer. In addition to spreading seeds through the wind, kochia is a tumbleweed. It can travel quickly and cover great distances – dispersing seeds along the way. Once pollen from glyphosate resistant kochia crossbreeds with other plants, the genetics responsible for the resistance can be passed on.

Farmers and seed producers throughout Western Canada are being urged to reevaluate their burndown practices – and target kochia with products that offer a different mode of action.

"Agronomists and scientists have preached the importance of rotating herbicides. But for whatever reason, this practice has largely been forgotten when it comes to glyphosate. Taking the proper steps now will help slow the spread," Deveson says.

Nufarm, a Calgary-based herbicide manufacturer, has recently introduced two new products that are proven to eliminate kochia in a spring burndown application: CleanStart® and Authority®. As Group 14 products, both provide an effective means of controlling glyphosate tolerant kochia plants.

CleanStart®: Kochia control ahead of all key crops.

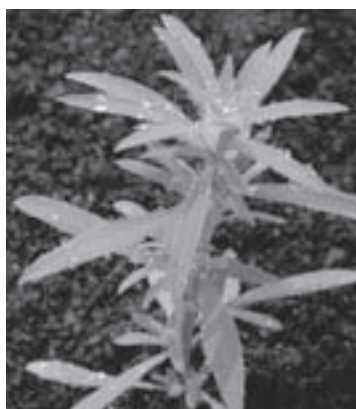
CleanStart® has become recognized as an advanced burndown solution for safe control of kochia and a broad spectrum of weeds ahead of pulse and canola crops.

But what is not as widely known is that CleanStart is also registered for wheat, barley, flax, soybeans, potatoes, corn and oats... which makes it ideally suited for addressing glyphosate resistant kochia in most key crops grown on the prairies.

"Because it is registered for so many crops, is easy to tank mix and is quite reasonably priced, CleanStart is being touted as the new line of defence for controlling glyphosate resistant kochia," Deveson reveals.

CleanStart is formulated with carfentrazone and glyphosate. It is the carfentrazone component that provides control of actively growing kochia plants on contact.

This product provides dependable control of kochia plants 4" tall or less. In addition, CleanStart will control Roundup Ready® volunteer canola from the 1 - 3 leaf stage, spring germinating dandelions and all weeds that are controlled with glyphosate.



Deveson says CleanStart can be applied on its own or topped up with additional glyphosate for sharper control of larger weeds, winter annuals and perennials. Being a contact herbicide, it's important to stick with the necessary water volume (10 gallons/acre). CleanStart can be applied pre-seed or up to three days post-seed.

Authority®: Kochia control for specialty crops.

Authority® is a next generation selective pre-emergent herbicide. It is registered for peas, flax, sunflowers, and chickpeas. This soil applied residual product is activated with moisture, and forms a barrier in the soil to keep kochia out.

The secret is sulfentrazone: a, Group 14 chemistry that prevents aggressive weeds from emerging. Kochia, wild buckwheat, lamb's quarters and pigweed are among the weeds Authority will control..

"Authority is incredibly safe... but don't let that fool you," Deveson says. "It does a number on some pretty hard to kill weeds. That's what makes it such a welcome option for those growing these sensitive specialty crops."

And that's not all.

Deveson notes there are a number of other Nufarm products growers can use to provide early season kochia control. **Nufarm 2,4-D** Ester and **Amitrol 240** can both be tank mixed with glyphosate, and will take out resistant kochia. Meanwhile, **Valtera™** is a Group 14 residual soybean herbicide that does an exceptional job.

Do your part to fight resistance.

Herbicide rotation is an essential part of any weed management strategy. As we're starting to realize, this applies to glyphosate as well. Ask your retailer or crop advisor about these and other options for early season kochia control.

Fighting resistant kochia in-crop.

If you miss it at burndown Deveson says Nufarm has two exceptional products for taking down kochia (including glyphosate resistant plants) in cereal crops.

Estaprop® is one of the best products available for controlling kochia in-crop. It is a very well established Group 4 chemistry known to clean up even heavily infested fields. Lately, there has been much talk surrounding Nufarm's launch of **Enforcer™**, which contains two proven modes of action to battle all types of kochia.

"Moving forward, Enforcer may emerge as the best in-crop broadleaf product for fighting the spread of glyphosate resistant kochia," Deveson concludes.



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NEW NAME FOR EGG FARMERS

The Alberta Egg Producers name is gone and growers will now be known as The Egg Farmers of Alberta (EFA). The changes were unveiled during the EFA annual general meeting held in February. David Webb, marketing and communications co-ordinator, said the marketing board chose the name “Egg Farmers of Alberta” to more accurately represent the 150 egg producers in the province. Research has shown consumers have positive perceptions about the word “farmer” and equate it to honest, hardworking and trustworthy people who own a family farm, he said.



U.S. HOG HERD GROWS

The U.S. hog supply grew modestly this past winter amid record-breaking births, but herd growth was tempered by fluctuating feed costs and concern that domestic pork sales may slow, analysts said. The U.S. Department of Agriculture on Mar. 30 reported the U.S. hog herd as of March 1 at 102 per cent of a year ago. Cash hog and wholesale pork prices were the highest ever late last year, but hog and pork prices have gradually come down as Chinese pork buying slowed. Also, U.S. shoppers have been slow to buy pork for spring grilling. — Reuters

LIVESTOCK

It’s not just cows and sheep that benefit from chowing down on pasture.

Expert says grazing poultry is not a bird-brained idea

GRAZING GURU ▶ Bert Denning says putting chickens or pigs on pasture has many benefits but strong management is needed



Pastured poultry can be raised in a “chicken tractor,” an open-bottom cage that can be moved easily. PHOTO: LAURA RANCE

BY ALEXIS KIENLEN
AF STAFF | RED DEER

Grazing is for the birds — or should be, says an Alberta Agriculture official. It’s not just cows and sheep that benefit from chowing down on pasture, business development officer Bert Denning told attendees at a recent Alberta Farm Fresh Producers conference. Poultry need some grain and other nutrients in their diet, but chickens can get about 20 per cent of their nutrient needs from grass, and turkeys about 50 per cent, he said. Along with lowering feed costs,

grazing poultry can improve nutrient cycling and land quality, reduce insect numbers, lower labour and machinery costs, and improve the taste of poultry meat, he said. In fact, Denning prefers the term “management-intensive grazing” as it suggests animals, plants, soil, land and people should be considered as parts of a whole system. But livestock producers must be careful not to overgraze, he said. If less than 50 per cent of the leaf area is grazed, there will be very little effect on the roots. But plants that have been grazed severely will take longer to grow back while lightly grazed plants will produce more roots and more top growth.

“The amount of substance you have on top is directly related to the root system,” he said. “If you manage a pasture correctly, you will have a really healthy root system underneath and you’ll have more drought tolerance.” However, as yield increases, quality may go down. “It’s a catch-22, because you want a healthy plant, but once a plant reaches maturity it might not be terribly palatable for some grazers, like chickens,” Denning said. The best time to graze depends on the species and the type of crop. “If the plant is growing fast, like in May and June, you graze

fast and you graze lightly,” he said. In the middle of summer or fall, animals can be allowed to graze more and stay on pasture for a longer period. Poultry grazing can be done by using “chicken tractors” or special structures, such as pens on skids. Denning recommends using chickens to graze a pasture after cattle have been on it. Pigs can also be grazed, but tend to root and dig holes, so they are best on bushland or land that needs to be dug up. Mature pigs can get more nutrients from grass than younger pigs. Denning said the best way to create a grazing program is by planning, monitoring and learning.

“It’s a catch-22, because you want a healthy plant, but once a plant reaches maturity it might not be terribly palatable for some grazers, like chickens.”

BERT DENNING



BY BERNIE PEET

Time to start thinking about group sow housing

START NOW ▶ With a phase-out of sow stalls almost inevitable, producers need to start evaluating different systems

When the new *Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Pigs* is published in draft form this summer, it will very likely include a requirement that sow stalls be phased out over a period of time. Producers will be able to house sows in stalls for a period after breeding, in order to allow checks to be made for returns and a first pregnancy test to be carried out prior to grouping. Keeping sows in stalls for a period of, say, 35 days post-breeding, also allows any loss of body condition in lactation to be substantially corrected by having the ability to feed individually.

After the financial battering producers received between 2007 and 2010, there is still very little enthusiasm for new investment or expansion, as witnessed by the almost static sow numbers in the latest census data. However, even with a 10-year phase-in time, producers must start to think — sooner rather than later — about their options and try to understand the factors that need to be considered.

Industry unprepared

While there is good research data on some forms of group housing available in Canada, there is very little large-scale commercial experience and certainly no good comparative data. At this point the industry is quite unprepared to launch into

a major change in housing systems. The danger is that producers make changes to their barns that are not only inappropriate for their circumstances and reduce performance, but also compromise sow welfare.

There is a huge amount of experience with group housing in Europe, especially in the U.K., Denmark and the Netherlands. It will be essential to maximize the use of this information rather than trying to reinvent the wheel completely. Herd size in Canada is generally larger than in most European countries and this factor will influence the choice of system. Also, in our climate, it is unlikely that producers will wish to build straw-bedded systems. The need to use slatted floors will also influence the type of group housing.

Group-housing options

When considering group-housing options, it should be borne in mind that sow stalls provide individual feeding, minimize competition for feed, avoid aggression and provide ease of management. Not all of these

benefits will be completely realized in a group-housing system. Some aspects that need to be considered when choosing and designing group housing include:

- **Group size:** In most systems group size is determined by the number of services per week and the type of feeding system used. Where feed cannot be rationed individually, it is usually best to split each week's served sows into two or more groups according to body condition and to house gilts separately.

- **Large group sizes** (40-60 sows/week) allow static sow groups with electronic sow feeding (ESF) to be used. With smaller numbers of sows bred each week, sows have to be added to and removed from a large ESF group each week, which is termed dynamic grouping.

- **Bedded or slatted floors:** Most group housing can be designed with slatted floors, providing sows are in fixed groups. European experience has shown that dynamic groups on slatted floors with an unbedded lying area may result in unaccept-

able levels of foot and leg injuries. However, a combination of well-bedded lying area and a dunging area overcomes this problem. An alternative would be to use a special bedded pen for grouping, then transfer sows to an unbedded pen once they had established their dominance hierarchy.

- **Space requirements:** Recommendations for lying areas are:

Sows 14-15 ft.2 (1.3-1.4 m2)

Gilts 13 ft.2 (1.2 m2)

Where floor feeding is practised, additional solid lying area is required so that sows can move around easily during feeding. Excess space may lead to soiling of the lying area, depending on the system. The amount of dunging area required is generally in the range of 7-10 ft.2 (0.65-0.9 m2) giving a total space requirement of 21-25 ft.2 (2.0-2.3 m2).

- **Pen layout:** In systems with troughs or individual feeding spaces, the pen layout is largely determined by the feeding-space requirement. Large dynamic groups provide much more flexibility in design. Generally, the length of the pen should not be more than 2.0-2.5 times the width. Electronic feeders should be located so that adequate access is provided, otherwise aggression may occur, especially around the feeder entrance.

- **Degree of remixing:** Sows that return or are found not-in-pig may remain in their original

group or be remixed, depending on the system. In dynamic groups it is not necessary to remix sows because the group contains sows at all stages of pregnancy. In weekly or fixed groups, sows that return can be remixed with newly weaned sows.

However, as this leaves a space in the pen that cannot be used, some producers prefer to leave sows in their original groups. This creates the need for additional small pens which can be used to house sows for the last few weeks of pregnancy, when their contemporaries have been moved to the farrowing barn. Working out a clear policy for remixing is an important part of the design process.

- **Handling facilities:** Routine tasks such as pregnancy testing and vaccinations are easily carried out in group systems, especially where ESF is used because sows are very docile. ESF feeders usually have the facility to automatically separate sows into a holding pen after they have fed to allow certain tasks to be carried out. In all group systems it is advisable to have a handling crate for procedures such as lancing an abscess, foot trimming or blood testing.

In my next article, I will review the group-housing options currently available and how they compare.

Bernie Peet is president of Pork Chain Consulting of Lacombe, Alberta, and editor of Western Hog Journal



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ALMOST FEEDING TIME



Thankfully walking under a grain auger isn't included as a superstition as Murray Jorgensen prepares his cattle's feed this Friday the 13th on his farm east of Bassano, Alberta.

PHOTO: KEVIN LINK



The beef industry is losing the image war

FROM THE HIP ▶ The beef industry needs to sell its product based on health and nutrition

BY BRENDA SCHOEPP

Considering that children now spend only one per cent of their time reading books or magazines, the future shopper will look quite different than you and I. Not only will the children of today be unlikely to read the newspaper, they will be even less concerned about the sales flyer.

How do we reach the next generation of consumer and what is it that we need to say? With 61 per cent of a child's reading time online or on the cellphone, we can expect that they will find food there. In urban areas this is already true — 32 per cent of Europeans buy their food with a mobile device and 74 per cent say they plan to do so in the future. This means that to capture the future generation of shoppers, we need to be a "virtual beef industry."

Although kids still like television and will spend up to 28 per cent of their time in front of the tube, they are making buying decisions based on the Internet.

There are more products online but most important is the interaction that they can be part of.

For example, when a shop brought in a stunning blouse, the owner put a picture on Facebook. Comments caused an interaction between poten-

tial buyers and by the next day, all sizes were sold out.

When children and young adults can communicate what is cool and what is not, it gives them a personal investment in the product.

The question about future retailing is not so much about technology, as youth are quick and capable. The question is of retail ethics and what they

drinks and pharmaceuticals. Do children really want this or are they being told they want it? Take a look at a retail flyer. What do you see? Very little of that flyer is devoted to true food — fruit, milk and pure juice, raw vegetables and meats. The rest is an assortment of products that sell sugar, salt and fat, which are addictive.

Selling good food

It is our role to ensure that the industry we work in provides that information for the future shopper. We know that as much as processed foods can harm, pure food can also heal. Selling an image of health as it relates to all of life is important to the beef and all the agricultural industry. We cannot assume that the future shopper will know us so we have to ensure that they can find us.

If the beef industry fails to make serious investment in social media, product presentation, delivery online and be dedicated to the future consumer, we will perish. As one retail adviser so bluntly put it, "You must always try for the next level. Not 100 per cent but 120 per cent to get the experience of WOW. Sometimes as adults we are just too realistic."

Creative marketing is targeted at young people. Take the name Fish N Chips, which is no ordinary small french fry company. Fish N Chips is the brand of shoes distributed by Base London for teenagers that you can order online. The brand name separates the product from the old retail "shoe store." The Facebook interaction makes it cool to wear footwear from Fish N Chips.

When we look at beef, I am not sure the label "chuck steak" is going to turn the

teenager on and am certain that the meat case turns most young girls off. Who is chuck anyway? What is a steak and how do I cook it? Who likes steak and is it cool to eat? Someone said this chuck guy is tough, should I even eat beef? The answers to these questions as they are posed on social media will determine the buying behaviour of the young customer.

We have an opportunity to ensure that all the information is available to the buyer and that beef is cool to eat. And when we make a claim, we need to stand by it. The recent assault on the industry regarding "pink slime" should be lesson enough. The meat industry is defending the practice. That is the position of a loser. Why are we in the position of even discussing this? The world is transparent and the consumer has only begun to unravel the secrets behind food processing. Our children are making decisions today that will influence them for a lifetime based on the information on the Internet and through social media. Beef needs to be there.

Brenda Schoepp is a market analyst and the owner and author of Beeflink, a national beef cattle market newsletter. A professional speaker and industry market and research consultant, she ranches near Rimbey, Alberta. brenda.schoepp@ccwireless.ca or www.brendaschoepp.com

The meat industry is defending the practice. That is the position of a loser.



hope to convince your child to buy.

The processed food business is a powerful lobby and one only has to shop to know it. With the exception of the outer aisles, the other aisles in a grocery store are filled with processed product. To put together a single meal may only mean one stop or one shop for a meal in a box. It is an easy sell of fat, sugar and salt.

The world's largest food companies sell addictive products such as tobacco, soft

We cannot underestimate the intelligence of our children and one has to wonder if all the information available to them won't change the face of retail. They can look up great recipes, new vegetables, and nutritional information and put the pieces together. I think they do know what they like to eat and apart from pizza, they do care about themselves and they have the ability through technology to interact with other consumers and make good choices.

"Pink slime" pushes processor into bankruptcy

FINELY TEXTURED BEEF ▶ The market has changed due to consumer backlash

REUTERS / Ground beef processor AFA Foods filed for bankruptcy protection April 2, citing the impact of the uproar over a meat filler dubbed "pink slime" by critics.

Meat processors have faced a backlash over the use of an ammonia-treated beef filler they call "finely textured beef." Food activists have campaigned to have it banned, but supporters say the product is safe to eat.

AFA is one of the largest ground beef processors in the United States and produces more than 500 million pounds of ground beef products annually, the company said in documents filed in U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Wilmington, Delaware.

In filing for bankruptcy, it cited "recent changes in the market" for its products and media coverage related to the filler, and said it was seeking a sale of some or all of its assets. AFA owner Yucaipa Companies, the investment firm founded by Ron Burkle, could not immediately be reached for comment.

The backlash over "pink slime" has prompted companies such as Beef Products Inc. (BPI) to



The beef product known as pink slime or lean finely textured beef is displayed on a tray during a tour March 29, 2012, of the Beef Products Inc.'s plant in South Sioux City, Nebraska, where the product is made. REUTERS/NATI HARNIK/POOL

halt production at some of its plants and has led some big U.S. supermarket operators, including Safeway Inc. and Supervalu Inc., to say they will stop buying the ammonia-treated beef.

The impact of the controversy is far reaching, said Gary Acuff, director of the Center for Food Safety at Texas A&M University in College Station.

"The public view of this product is pretty damaged at this point," Acuff said. "I'm not sure they'll recover from something like this."

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Tips on practical heat detection

BEFF 911 ▶ It's best to only AI for one or two cycles and then use good-quality cleanup bulls

BY ROY LEWIS, DVM

When looking into any artificial insemination program, several goals must be kept in mind. Achieving pregnancies is of course the most important. Improving your genetic base is always a desire of any breeder whether you are a commercial operator or seed-stock breeder. In order to be successful though, costs both for supplies and labour must first be considered.

Irregardless of all the programs available heat detection is still a very important key in overall success. Methods to assist in this are the use of detector patches, heat detector paint or marker (gomerized) bulls. The patches can lead to errors when they discharge from cows rubbing them on bush, and with light rubbing they can be partially discharged releasing some of the red colour. You want to see a complete red colour to verify a cow is in heat.

Gomers bulls can be very beneficial in smaller breeding groups. I have tried the numerous ways to create a marker animal including implanting open cows and juicing up steers with testosterone. The best procedure I have found is using a smaller, quiet bull, either from your herd or a known herd and performing an epididymectomy on him. Your veterinarian will know how to do this procedure. This is the simplest, most economical surgery and the bull can be

shipped after that season. Use a poorer-grade animal, preferably with smaller testicles. The cost of the procedure is much cheaper than overwintering the bull till next season.

Chin ball markers are a great help but a word of caution — let the bull get used to the marker without any ink in it for several days. Otherwise fences, watering bowls and everything around will be marked till the bull gets used to wearing this new device. Changing ink colour can aid with errors in confusing cows already bred. Many colours of ink are available.

Even though these marker bulls are full-penetration breeders, disease risk is very low since virgin bulls are used from a known source. It has been found that the natural act of breeding with a gomer may increase the AI rates a small percentage as well. Marker bulls should not be considered if the group is too large or if synchronization is being done. Otherwise the bulls get overworked, burnt out and basically don't know which way to turn. In the situation of large groups manual detection is still the best by spending time observing towards dawn or dusk.

Synchronization

Synchronization programs, if successful, concentrate heat-detection times over just a few days. If wishing to synchronize large groups of heifers, a program using MGA at 0.5 mg per head for 14 days, withdrawing it and either waiting for the second heat (first heat is not a fertile one), or using a prostaglandin 15 to 19 days after withdrawal of the MGA will synchronize most heifers. If your heifer pen is large you may want to stagger groups of heifers so calving does not overwhelm you the following year. Be warned this program does not work successfully in cows.

Several programs have been developed to synchronize cows; some are very labour intensive but conception rates can be very good. Hired labour

for breeding can be utilized if AI is not done by the producer. One shot of prostaglandin if given sufficient time (at least 45 days) after calving should have 65 to 75 per cent of cows coming into heat over five days. Other programs use GnRh first followed by prostaglandins in seven days which will bring most cycling in over one to two days. The more elaborate CIDR or PRID programs have been talked about in other articles.

Other programs are available and each should be explored with your veterinarian for the best one suited to your operation. Make sure nutrition is adequate, phosphorus and energy are the two keys for cycling to occur.

The biggest mistake many producers make is to get caught up in the glamour of AI and lose sight of the fact they still need to get the cow or heifer pregnant early. It's best to only AI for one or two cycles and then use good-quality cleanup bulls. Heat detection is still desirable even if naturally breeding is occurring for several reasons. It ensures the cows are actually cycling.

Especially if new, young, virgin bulls are used, hand mating should occur for the first couple of breedings. This ensures these newcomers are actually getting a successful breeding in. Mark down dates on any breedings observed. This information can come in handy next year at calving if problems arise or if cows need to be induced. Only a very few cows should be coming back at the next heat otherwise the bull should be rechecked. I know of numerous incidences where diligent farmers have averted a disaster by carefully watching if cows were returning to heat.

These hints hopefully will allow you to have a successful breeding season with high conception rates while at the same time enjoying genetic gain. Happy breeding!

Roy Lewis is a large-animal veterinarian practising at the Westlock Veterinary Centre. His main interests are bovine reproduction and herd health

Does feeding DDGS affect manure nutrient levels?

FEED FACTORS ▶ Study finds increase in N and P content but tempered by other factors

BY REYNOLD BERGEN, CCA
SCIENCE DIRECTOR
CALGARY

Distillers dried grains with solubles has become a popular livestock feed source, but it has some significant differences than feed grain.

Fibre, protein, fat, and mineral levels are about three times more concentrated in DDGS than they were in the original grain. Although cattle can use the fibre, protein and fat from DDGS for energy, the increased protein and mineral levels in it may be problematic.

When cattle consume more protein than they need, the excess protein can be metabolized for energy. But protein metabolism also releases nitrogen (N), which is converted to urea in the kidneys and excreted (primarily in the urine). Similarly, if cattle consume more phosphorus (P) than they can absorb, much of the excess P will be excreted in the manure. Provincial nutrient management regulations are increasingly focused on levels of N, P, or both.

In two studies, finishing diets containing varying levels of DDGS were fed to heifers weighing 925 to 1,000 pounds. A different diet was fed to each animal (or pair of animals) for a three-week period. After two weeks of adaptation to the diets, nutrient digestibility was evaluated from a series of intensive feed intake, rumen, urine and fecal measurements. The animals then were rotated to another diet, and this was repeated until all animals had been fed all of the diets.

The University of Saskatchewan study compared a control diet (89 per cent rolled barley, six per cent barley silage, five per cent supplement) to four diets that replaced some of the barley grain with 20 or 40 per cent corn DDGS, or 20 or 40 per cent wheat DDGS.

The Lethbridge Research Station study compared a control diet (83 per cent temper-rolled barley, 15 per cent barley silage, two per cent supplement) to three diets that replaced 20 per cent of the barley and five per cent, 10 per cent or

all of the silage with 25 per cent, 30 per cent or 35 per cent wheat DDGS.

When grain was replaced with DDGS, dietary crude protein and P levels rose as the amount of DDGS in the diet increased. Feed intake did not change a great deal, so this meant that the animals consumed more N and P as more and more grain was replaced with DDGS. Manure and/or urine production also tended to increase as the DDGS content of the diet increased. Greater amounts of N and P were excreted as DDGS inclusion rates rose. The manure had higher N and P values when cattle were fed wheat DDGS than when they were fed corn DDGS.

When silage was replaced with DDGS, dietary crude protein and P levels also rose as the amount of DDGS in the diet increased. But feed intakes dropped as more and more silage was replaced with DDGS. So the increase in dietary N and P concentration that occurred as silage was replaced with DDGS was balanced out by the drop in feed intake.

As a result, cattle ate about the same amount of N and P, and excretion rates for both nutrients were fairly stable as dietary DDGS level increased from 20 to 35 per cent DDGS. But if manure output decreased (due to reduced feed intake), the concentration of N and P in the manure may have increased.

Incorporating DDGS into feedlot finishing diets can increase the amount of N and P excreted by beef cattle and could increase the land base needed for spreading.

When DDGS replaces increasing amounts of grain in the diet, manure N and P levels rise steadily. When DDGS replaces silage in the diet, manure N and P concentrations increase, but this may be partly offset by lower manure production. Under commercial conditions, the N and P content of feedlot manure will also be influenced by bedding, weather conditions and other factors that affect nutrient run-off and ammonia volatilization.

Incorporating DDGS into feedlot finishing diets can increase the amount of N and P excreted by beef cattle and could increase the land base needed for spreading.

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Know the health inspection rules

HIGH STANDARDS ▶ Selling food to the public means following the rules and regulations that protect consumers

BY ALEXIS KIENLEN
AF STAFF | RED DEER

No farm operator wants a ticket for a public health violation — and public health inspectors don't want to have to issue them, says Dan Richen, a public health inspector and supervisor for the Drumheller area.

But the public must be protected, Richen told attendees at a recent Alberta Farm Fresh Producers meeting.

"If you're selling food, you need to know what the regulations are and what the expectations imposed on you are," said Richen, who works in the Environmental Public Health program of Alberta Health Services.

Public health legislation is deemed to be strict liability legislation, which is different than criminal law. For a person to break the law, they simply have to act in a way that violates the regulations. Food processing, manufacturing and distribution regulations are controlled by three different agencies: Alberta Agriculture, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and Alberta Health Services.

"It's a lot easier to demonstrate why someone should do something, rather than telling them they have to do it because it is the law," said Richen.

"We use education, consultation and collaboration, but we also can use enforcement. We try to use a variety of tools and select the one that is the most effective. Sometimes enforcement is the one."

Alberta's public health inspectors conduct about 180,000 inspections annually, and in 2011, inspectors went to court about 40 times. Inspectors have the power to issue orders under the Public Health Act, the right to enter into any public places where food is sold (including garages or sheds on a farm) to ensure regulations are being followed, and disobeying their orders is an offence.

"Although police can't enter some public places without a warrant, we as executive officers of public health, have the right of entry," said Richen. "Refusal to allow us to enter to perform our duties is essentially an offence under the Public Health Act."

Co-operative approach

Public health inspectors try to work on a co-operative basis and will often call ahead if they are going to inspect a small, farm-based operation. Richen encouraged new operators to develop a

business plan and contact their local public health inspector with their plan to deal with specifics. Working areas on a farm operation need to be approved by public health inspectors before renovations occur, he added.

"You must set aside an area that is completely separate from all other activities for all processing, packaging and storage," he said.

Giving any food product to someone outside the immediate family counts as distribution.

Producers who are in the business of selling or processing meat are considered commercial food operators and must comply with appropriate food regulations. All food must come from an approved source, and is subject to inspection by a regulatory agency. Meat sold to the public must be inspected and prepared in a place that has a food-handling permit and if stored on a producer's operation and sold to the public, that area must also be inspected and given a permit.

Richen recommended producers date their processed meats. He noted frozen meats must be kept frozen and fresh meat must be stored under 4 C, so the temperature of the freezer or fridge should be checked regularly. As well, transportation of food products over long distances is regulated and permits are required. Richen recommends producers obtain mechanical refrigeration units for long-distance travel.

Food sold at farmers' markets is given special consideration and falls under different regulations. Public markets, even when called farmers' markets, are not approved by Alberta Agriculture and have different regulations and permit requirements.

"If you're selling meat products, make sure you check that a place that calls itself a farmers' market is actually an Alberta Agriculture-approved market," he said. "A public market is actually just a shopping mall. It's a bunch of vendors in one area."



Meat sold to the public must be inspected and prepared in a place that has a food-handling permit. ©THINKSTOCK



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"Although police can't enter some public places without a warrant, we as executive officers of public health, have the right of entry. Refusal to allow us to enter to perform our duties is essentially an offence under the Public Health Act."

DAN RICHEN

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REFUGE IN A BAG REGS CLARIFIED



Federal regulations on the sale of certified seed have been clarified to allow for “refuge in a bag” blends combining pedigreed insect-resistant seed with non-resistant seed. Such varieties were previously sold by themselves and required growers to plant a certain percentage of their acres to a structured refuge in bars or strips. Wheat midge-tolerant varieties were already sold as a blend but seed companies have since picked up CFIA approval for sale of insect-resistant corn varieties that contain a required five per cent refuge in the same bag.



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Precision ag can't replace soil testing

TRUE TEST ▶ Ross McKenzie says knowing soil types in your fields and regular soil tests are essential in understanding its productive capacity

BY HELEN MCMENAMIN
AF CONTRIBUTOR | LETHBRIDGE

Precision agriculture promises to boost the bottom line by marrying space-age technology to basic agronomics, but research scientist Ross McKenzie says farmers need to be cautious.

That's because the science behind input prescription maps developed from GPS, remote sensing and related technologies is not fully developed, the agronomy research scientist with Alberta Agriculture told attendees at the recent Precision Agriculture 2.0 conference.

Building a variable-rate application map depends on understanding soil variation across a field and methodologies used in other regions can't be easily adopted here because Alberta's soils have formed more recently than soils anywhere else in North America.

“Alberta's soils are very different from those of the U.S. Great Plains,” said McKenzie. “In the Wisconsin ice age, just 10,000 or 12,000 years ago, there was a mile of ice above the present site of Calgary. The southern edge of the glaciers was almost right along the U.S. border, so even Montana soils are very different from ours.”

As a result, variation in soil across Alberta fields is mainly linked to the landscape position and is mostly about soil texture, said McKenzie. Wind weathering has changed some areas, eroding knolls and carrying sandy particles to lower spots.

“It doesn't take a lot of high-tech equipment to learn about the soils on your land,” he said. “You can find your soil type, slopes and the parent material of each soil polygon by looking it up on Alberta Agriculture's soil information site. There's zero cost

and no fancy equipment required.”

After the glaciers, the next thing to affect soils was the climate. In the Brown soil zone, where soil developed under short-grass prairie, dry conditions limited soil organic matter. Slightly more organic matter developed under the mixed-grass prairie of the Dark-Brown soil zone, and even more in the Black soil zone of mixed bush and prairie. The forested northern areas developed the acidic, highly leached soils of the Dark-Grey and Grey Wooded soil zones.

The soil's history

Whenever he's looking at crops, McKenzie said he starts with soil cores to look at moisture levels and crop development. He always points out the horizons and their impact on the crop.

“The soil profile is its history,” he said. “It shows the physical and chemical characteristics of the soil. Soil cores are the real way to see the management zones of a field. But it does take time to get them — and you have to know what you're looking at.”

The thickness of the dark, uppermost soil layer, the A horizon, reflects the organic matter, with low soil organic matter leading to poor soil structure that's more prone to crusting, less water infiltration and less moisture storage. It also suggests low fertility.

“Farmer wisdom along with air photos gives you a good idea of management zones,” said McKenzie. “A topographic map that you make with an on-board GPS unit can help. You may or may not need different management zones. I see a lot of fields with no real variation. Salinity is important if it's there, otherwise I'm not convinced remote sensing or EC

mapping gives you any advantages in managing your inputs. The lushness of the crop and yields aren't the same from year to year — they're not well related to soil zones.”

Get a good sample

McKenzie doesn't miss a chance to make the case for soil testing and taking time to get a good, representative sample.

“The analysis is only as good as your sample,” he said.

He advises 15 to 20 cores for each management area, from either random sites or benchmark areas taken in late fall or early spring, when soil is cool. Send them to a lab that uses analysis methods that suit Alberta soils, including the modified Kelowna method for P.

“Other methods work well for other soils, but all the soil test recommendations have been calibrated for those soils and those methods, but they are useless for Alberta,” said McKenzie. “It's essential that the lab result has been calibrated to yield benefits on the soils where the recommendations are used.”

Get N, P, K, S, pH, EC and micronutrient analyses for all three soil depths, but only get micronutrient analyses every three to five years as they don't change quickly, said McKenzie. Get numbers for N, S, pH and EC in the 12- to 24-inch samples. There may be very little S in the top six inches of soil but lots deeper in the rooting zone, especially after wet years, he said.

“You don't need CEC or per cent base saturation, because our soils are so young and they don't change over time. Texture is similar, it may be worth doing once, but not as a regular thing.”

McKenzie suggested grouping soil sample cores from the areas



Alberta Agriculture's Ross McKenzie says farmer wisdom is another precision agriculture tool.

you think are different management zones, based on your experience, yield maps and/or their landscape position — separating upper- and lower-slope positions.

“Whether you use benchmark sites, or some random sites in each of no more than two or three management zones, you'll probably discover as much as from high-tech mapping,” he said.

McKenzie said he isn't against using some precision agriculture tools, but a long career of studying soils in Alberta has convinced him there is no easy substitute for soil tests. As an example, he cites soil samples he took last summer from upper and lower sites across a field. As expected, most revealed the more fertile soils were in low areas, with coarser eroded soils on high spots. But in one low spot that looked much like every other, organic matter and fertility were low. McKenzie identified that soil as aeolian, a windblown deposit.

“There's no substitute for soil sampling and analysis,” he said.

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Making your bugs work for you

BUG BUSINESS ▶ Environmental farming expert says identifying good and bad insects is the first step

BY ALEXIS KIENLEN
AF STAFF | RED DEER

Some insects are pests, but others are your allies and you want more of them on your farm.

Insects that perform valuable tasks such as pollination, recycling and microbial actions, are obviously good guys, but even some which feed on plants can be helpful, Ken Fry told attendees at the Alberta Farm Fresh Producers conference. A little bit of feeding by an insect can even make a plant stronger by inducing it to compensate and produce more, said the co-ordinator for the Environmental Horticulture program at Olds College.

"You actually get higher yields with a little bit of pruning," said Fry.

He encouraged his audience to think holistically and consider how every action taken will affect the entire ecosystem on a farm. Fry specializes in organics and noted that type of farming uses a variety of methods to improve productivity — including chemicals.

"Chemicals can be one tool to fight pests in the organic tool box, but they need to be sourced from a natural source and used in a naturally compatible way," he said. "They're not a sledgehammer, more like a surgical cut with a scalpel."

Fry said the key to organic growing is understanding natural mechanisms, and accepting a yield loss.

"You no longer have as much control as conventional growers do," he said.

Growers should look at their property as a growing space for beneficial insects and should consider if there are alternate hosts and plant species which can house "beneficials."

"You need to put everything in context and realize that the community of living things exists in an ecosystem of living and non-living things," Fry said. "The non-living, such as the soil, is as much a partner



Ladybugs, which eat aphids, are one example of a beneficial insect. PHOTOS: USDA

in your enterprise as the living, so don't ignore the abiotic (non-living) inputs in your ecosystem."

The first line of defence in pest management is picking the right crop species and cultivars. Fry said producers need to consider what is palatable for the consumer, and what can grow in the region. He noted plants can attract or repel insects. In some cases, plants will produce a chemical resistance to prevent insects from feeding on them. Plants that have too much nitrogen actually become weaker and are less able to fight off insects. An abundance of nitrogen will attract pests to crops.

Biodiversity in the field can reduce the number of harmful insects as they have to work harder to find food sources.

"By putting things in a monoculture, you're playing right into the strong suit of the insect," Fry said.

Creating diverse growth habitats with different types and heights of crops can help bring beneficial insects to a yard. Changes in heights create wind resistance, block disease inoculum and change relative humidity.

"Where the most biodiversity occurs in terms of insects is when you change vertical scales," he said. "You'll see a lot more predators and parasitoids."

Some will reduce the number of pest insects in a field, but will not eradicate them completely.

"Ideally you want equilibrium," Fry said.

Some beneficial parasitoids that feed on other species may thrive on nearby weeds. Beneficial insects may also need some flowering species. Weed management is No. 1, but ornamental, shallow flowering plants will help cultivate



The wheat midge is sometimes mistaken for its beneficial predator, the lauxanid wasp.

"Chemicals can be one tool to fight pests in the organic tool box, but they need to be sourced from a natural source and used in a naturally compatible way."

KEN FRY

desired insects. Hedgerows and beetle banks, shelterbelts and mulches are a good place for beneficial predators and parasitoids to live. Shelter banks and watering sources such as bird baths, sloughs or wetlands are also desired to bring the beneficials in. Fry noted some live in grasslands alongside fields or in ditches, and cutting this grass destroys some of their habitat.

"This land may be taken out of production, but you may give yourself a yield advantage by cutting down on pests," said Fry. "You need to think about what constitutes a useful land use."

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ON GUARD FOR GRUB



A young snowy owl chooses a lofty perch over a stubble field south of Strathmore, Alberta in search of a meal. PHOTO: KEVIN LINK

Empowering women vital for world food supply

CULTURAL ▶ Men own the assets, but women do most of the work

BY MICHELLE MARTIN
LONDON / REUTERS

Empowering female farmers in developing countries is crucial to solving the world's food problems, according to the chair of a panel which advises governments and donors on agricultural development in sub-Saharan Africa.

"If we're going to feed the world and in particular if Africa is going to be fed, we need every tool we can lay our hands on to make that happen and one component of that is to ensure that women fulfil their potential as farmers," said Gordon Conway, chair of the Montpellier Panel.

"Women are constrained by the fact that they don't have enough access to productive resources and they don't have enough access to assets and if they did, they could increase yields on farms by 20 to 30 per cent, which would have a really big impact."

If women upped their production by this amount, the agricultural output of developing countries would rise by between 2.5 and four per cent, which could slash the number of undernourished people by 12 to 17 per cent, according to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization.

Women account for around 43 per cent of agricultural labourers in developing countries.

But poor access to land, water, fertilizers, seeds and technical knowledge is limiting their productivity, Conway said.

"In many ways it's a cultural thing," he said. "Men tend to have the rights to land in particular and the rights to other resources... the woman is doing the work but she hasn't got real access to what she needs."

"Everywhere you go in Africa, particularly in rural villages, you can see that women are often regarded as second-class citizens."



A woman works in a plantation of rubber seedlings in San Pedro March 9, 2012. Women account for around 43 per cent of agricultural labourers in developing countries. REUTERS/THIERRY GUEGNON

Mustard — it's not just for hotdogs anymore

RESEARCH ▶ The meal byproduct from mustard seed crushed for oil has antibacterial properties

U OF A RELEASE

University of Alberta researcher Christina Engels has discovered how to extract a compound from mustard seeds that can protect against food spoilage, and add economic value to a leftover byproduct.

Engels recovered a particular compound — sinapic acid — from mustard seed meal, which shows antibacterial effects against such strains as *Staphylococcus aureus*, *E. coli* and *Listeria monocytogenes*, all of which can cause grave illness and death in humans. Canada is the world's largest exporter of mustard seed.

The results published recently in the *European Food Research & Technology* journal.

Engels' isolation of sinapic acid lends a useful function to mustard seed meal, which is the product left over after the seed is pressed for its oil. While the oil can be used in making biodiesel and in some Asian markets as cooking oil, "the defatted seed meal left over is currently of little economic value," said Engels, who conducted the research to complete her PhD in the U of A department of agricultural, food and nutritional science.

Since most companies don't have the intricate technology required to sort through the many compounds found in plant extracts, the discovery makes it possible to quantify the bioactivity of the extracts with standard instrumentation.

"That means the mustard seed meal can be used as a source for natural food preservatives," Engels said, and could mean more consumer choice.

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GOPHER SERIES • PART III

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Ask a ground squirrel or a gopher

GO FIGURE ▶ Alberta's lone gopher species is actually beneficial, with each individual turning more than 16 tons of soil yearly without disturbing the surface

BY SHERI MONK
AF STAFF | PINCHER CREEK

Although we call them gophers, they are actually ground squirrels and five species call Alberta home. Pocket gophers do exist in Alberta, but they have much smaller eyes, larger teeth and aren't as "cute" looking as the vermin people refer to as gophers.

• **Richardson's ground squirrel** — *Spermophilus richardsonii*

The most common and widespread ground squirrel, Richardson's have large litters of between four and nine young. They are found in prairie habitat, and prefer short grass and dry conditions. They are considered an agricultural pest in Alberta.

• **Columbian ground squirrel** — *Spermophilus columbianus*

This species is larger than Richardson's, and has grey fur with some spots with red fur on its face, forelegs and tail. They are found at higher elevations in alpine meadows of the Rockies, average 3.5 young per litter, and in B.C., they cannot be hunted indiscriminately because of concern over their long-term sustainability. They are still considered an agricultural pest in Alberta, though their range is limited to the foothills and mountain meadows.

• **Thirteen-lined ground squirrel** — *Spermophilus tridecemlineatus*
Easily spotted due to the 13 white



Thirteen-lined – This ground squirrel species is very distinct, and quite rare outside of the Three Hills area. PHOTO: ALBERTA AGRICULTURE

lines running down their body, this species is widespread but dense populations are rare. They are still considered an agricultural pest in Alberta, but are rarely seen outside of the Three Hills area.

• **Golden-mantled ground squirrel** — *Spermophilus lateralis*

Found only in high-altitude mountain ranges, this species looks like a chipmunk because of the white stripe on its sides.

• **Franklin's ground squirrel** — *Spermophilus franklinii*

This species sports a longer, bushier tail than its counterparts, and prefers aspen parkland, shrub land and tall-grass prairie. There are some reported in eastern Alberta, but the species is much

more common in eastern Saskatchewan and Manitoba. They are slightly larger than the Richardson's and can climb trees. They are still considered an agricultural pest in Alberta.

• **Northern pocket gopher** — *Thomomys talpoides*

Pocket gophers create large mounds of soil, often incorrectly referred to as "mole hills." This species lives primarily underground and digs huge networks of horizontal tunnels for underground root grazing. They remain active during winter, and emerge under the cover of darkness to snack on green vegetation in summer. They look huskier and darker than ground squirrels, and have smaller



Columbian ground squirrels are husky, and have reddish fur and are found in the foothills, Porcupine Hills and in alpine meadows. PHOTO: BRIAN MCMILLEN

eyes and bigger front teeth. They are beneficial, with each individual turning more than 16 tons of soil in just one year — without disturbing the surface.

Short lifespan

Ground squirrels can live to the ripe old age of three years, although a large percentage will die before their first birthday. They breed in early March and have a gestation period of four to five weeks, with young emerging above ground at the beginning of May. Technically classified as omnivores, they prefer plain, old grass for a main course.

"They will eat the carcass of another dead animal or insects, but their diet is probably 80 to 90 per cent vegetation," said Phil Marrill, an inspector with Alberta Agriculture.

Anyone who has ever driven down a lonely gravel road between March and June will remember the first time they ever saw a gopher poke its bloody face out from the

innards of his cousin, but that's the exception rather than the rule.

"If it's early, they will surely feed on carcasses because they are hungry, but if you put a bait station out and had grain in it and then a carcass in another one, there would be very little uptake of the carcass," said Marrill.

"It could be moisture and maybe when they're short on minerals or something they'll be a little more attracted to it, too. They seem to scavenge on each other a little bit."

Though as unpopular as the gophers, badgers are a quintessential piece of the prairie, and rely on ground squirrels during the months they are out. In B.C., researchers found the badger population sharply declining, and launched a recovery strategy in 2008. Marrill said he was unaware of any badger population studies in Alberta, but strongly suspects they're on the decline.



Richardson's ground squirrels are the most common species in Alberta, and have light-coloured fur and a slender appearance. PHOTO: BRIAN MCMILLEN



This was a real gopher – a northern pocket gopher. Note the obvious physical difference from the ground squirrel. PHOTO: PHIL MERRILL



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BRIEFS

U.S. organic growers appeal court ruling

BY CAREY GILLAM
REUTERS

A group of U.S. family farmers said March 28 it is appealing its lawsuit against Monsanto Co. to challenge the company's patents on technologies for genetically modified seeds.

The group of organic farmers and seed dealers says its industry is at risk from Monsanto's growing market dominance.

"Farmers are under threat. Our right to farm the way we choose, and to grow pure organic seed and healthy food on our farms for our families and for our customers is under assault," said Maine organic seed farmer Jim Gerritsen, president of the Organic Seed Growers and Trade Association, lead plaintiff in the case.

The group sued Monsanto in March 2011. U.S. District Court Judge Naomi Buchwald, for the Southern District of New York, threw out the case last month, criticizing the groups for a "transparent effort to create a controversy where none exists."

The group of more than 50 organizations filed its notice of appeal, seeking review by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit.

The lawsuit challenges the company's patents on its genetically modified seeds and seeks to prohibit Monsanto from suing the farmers or dealers if their organic seed becomes contaminated with Monsanto's patented biotech seed germplasm.

Agriculture and Food Council seeks members

The Agriculture and Food Council of Alberta (AFC) is inviting organizations and individuals involved in Alberta's agriculture and food sector to apply for membership before April 25, 2012 for the opportunity to take part in all of the advantages available to council members.

AFC accepts membership applications throughout the year, but only those who applied or renewed before April 25 are eligible to vote, nominate or run for the board of directors at the annual meeting in June.

Forms and online payment information can be found at www.agfoodcouncil.com/membership-application-renewal. Individual memberships cost \$50, while organizational memberships cost \$200, plus tax. All applicants must be approved by the board of directors.

Think you know what the future holds? Think again

EQUINE HAZARD ▶ Crop-guzzling horses once posed serious risk to human health in major city

BY SHANNON VANRAES
STAFF/WASHINGTON, D.C.

Next time someone tells you what the future holds, think manure.

Literally.

That's the advice of writer Stephen Dubner, who used the tale of a century-old manure crisis to illustrate the folly of predicting what lies ahead.

"Human beings are terrible at predicting the future," the journalist and co-author of *Freakonomics* told attendees at the Canola Council of Canada conference in the U.S. capital.

At the turn of the last century — as today — there was a food-for-fuel problem. Only then it was grain being used to fuel horses.

"Crops that would have landed on a family's dinner table (were) sometimes converted to fuel, driving up prices and causing shortages," said Dubner.

"And then there are the air pol-

lution and toxic emissions endangering the environment as well as individuals' health."

At that time, horses were the primary means of transportation in cities, and each produced nearly 25 pounds of manure a day. Initially, this was a good thing as it provided farmers on the city's outskirts with valuable fertilizer. But as cities grew, a tipping point was reached.

"As more and more horses flooded into the city centres, there was a glut in the market and the market collapsed," said Dubner.

This was a major issue and a crisis for cities such as New York, which had 200,000 horses in 1900 that collectively produced five million pounds of manure each day.

"The city was really in danger — this was considered a problem of the highest order," he said.

A host of options was considered, including breeding horses that produced less waste, manure

taxes and horse diapers. None were feasible. The issue was so serious that a major conference was called in New York with five days set aside to identify potential solutions. But after just two days, frustrated attendees gave up and went home.

Then unexpectedly, the problem of horse manure disappeared — almost overnight.

"It was solved of course by the invention of the internal combustion engine and the automobile," he said, noting the *New York Times* referred to the car as an "environmental saviour."

There's a lesson here for today, said Dubner: Solutions to problems come from unexpected sources, and rarely from the industry that is the source of the problem.

The same lesson may apply to current crises of global warming and food production, he said.

"One big mark of our arrogance is our belief in our ability to predict the future," he said.



"One big mark of our arrogance is our belief in our ability to predict the future."

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SOIL CONSERVATION ADVOCATE HONOURED



Former senator Herb Sparrow has been honoured for his lifetime of leadership in soil and water conservation with an induction into the Canadian Conservation Hall of Fame. Soil Conservation Society of Canada president Don McCabe (l) made the presentation in Ottawa Mar. 21. Sparrow, a farmer and rancher from North Battleford, Sask., served in the Senate and chaired the committee that produced a report on the state of Canada's soils entitled "Soil at risk, Canada's Eroding Future." That report led to the formation of SCCC, the Eastern Canada Soil and Water Conservation Centre and the Canadian Conservation Hall of Fame. SUPPLIED PHOTO

Consider IPM before spraying

PREVENTION FIRST ▶
Regular cleaning, vent covers, and careful monitoring keys to integrated pest management

BY ALEXIS KIENLEN
AF STAFF | EDMONTON

Growers need to root around in their pest-control tool box and consider insecticide as a last resort, says research scientist Kwesi Ampong-Nyarko.

Prevention is always the better option, the special crop research scientist with Alberta Agriculture said at a recent field day for bedding plants held at Crop Diversification Centre North.

Since it's almost impossible to eradicate insects, growers need to carefully weigh the cost of spraying against the potential economic benefit, he said.

"You have to decide the level where you want to take action," said Ampong-Nyarko.

He advocates integrated pest management, which starts with identifying insects and assessing infestation levels.

"If you routine spray, just planting and then spraying without monitoring the pests, then you are not practising IPM," Ampong-Nyarko said.

Sticky traps, which are changed weekly, can be used to monitor the number of pests. Growers should also scout, inspect the plants, count bugs, and keep annual records of pest levels and damage. They should also record pest management actions taken and their effectiveness.

Plants coming into greenhouses should be examined and kept in a quarantined area; windows and vents covered with insect screens; and greenhouses regularly cleaned. The latter includes removing soil and organic matter from floors and disinfecting pots, flats and trays. Hose ends are a hot-bed for insects and should be removed from the floor, kept in a clean area and covered. Hydrogen peroxide and bleach can safely be used to clean greenhouses.



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COMMUNICATOR RECEIVES AFAC AWARD



Agriculture reporter Dana Zielke of Golden West Radio in High River received the Award of Distinction for Communication at Alberta Farm Animal Care's annual meeting in Red Deer last month. Over a 20-year career, Zielke has taken an active role in helping to get agricultural messages out on a variety of critical issues. Zielke (r) received the award from Clover Bench of the University of Alberta. PHOTO: AFAC

Enrolment opens for CWB's new-crop programs

MIXTURE ▶ The CWB is offering a combination of cash contracts and pools

STAFF / The sign-up period is officially underway for wheat, durum and malting barley growers wanting to get in on the refurbished CWB's new-crop pool and cash contracts.

The CWB on March 29 opened the new-crop pools and programs for the 2012-13 crop year, which begins Aug. 1.

"Farmers can rely on the CWB to provide them with the most effective grain-marketing strategy as they enter a new open-market environment," CWB CEO Ian White said in a release.

"Our programs offer competitive returns and solid risk management, with options designed for maximum choice and minimum hassle."

The CWB, which officially loses its single-marketing desk for Prairie wheat and barley with the start of the new crop year, will offer two pools, three cash-contract programs and malting barley production contracts.

Farmers can now sign up directly with the CWB for some contracts, and choose their delivery point later, the CWB said. They may also contract through their "preferred CWB grain-handling partners."

As of Mar. 30 those partners includes Cargill's 29 Prairie elevators (12 in Saskatchewan, 10 in Alberta and seven in Manitoba) and, more recently, South West Terminal at Gull Lake, Sask., about 50 km west of Swift Current.

Handling agreements are also expected to be reached shortly with all other Prairie grain companies, giving farmers "a wider range of delivery choices than any other contract available," the CWB said.

Sign-up periods for the CWB's new harvest pool and early delivery pool run from March 29 to Oct. 31 and from March 29 to Sept. 28, respectively, or until the pools are fully subscribed, whichever comes first.

White said he expects the CWB's pricing pools to be a popular marketing approach for many growers.

"Our pool contracts provide simple, effective risk management and marketing that ensure farmers will never be forced to settle for the bottom of the market or chase an elusive market high," he said.

"With one CWB contract, farmers are covered in terms of sales planning, execution, foreign exchange and risk management—including the risk from grade spreads, which can be a significant issue for spring wheat in particular."

If market rallies occur after contracts are signed, the CWB said, "only pooling ensures that farmers continue to share in the additional revenue."

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One sure sign of springtime in the Rockies is the arrival of the Canada geese who fill the stubble fields with their honks, as they take advantage of the snow-clear furrows. This flock had settled in the foothills west of Calgary. PHOTO: WENDY DUDLEY

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BRIEFS

Crop insurance eyed for U.S. Farm Bill cuts

WASHINGTON/REUTERS
A federally subsidized crop insurance system seems to be everybody's top priority for the new U.S. farm law. It also is a popular target for cuts.
President Barack Obama, Republicans in the U.S. House, and small-farm advocates separately call for cuts in the program, which has mushroomed into the most expensive part of the farm safety net. It is estimated to cost nearly \$9 billion a year over the next decade.

Arguably, crop insurance is the most widely used risk management tool for U.S. farmers. They bought more than 1.1 million policies last year to cover \$114 billion of production on 265 million acres, or four-fifths of U.S. cropland.

Cost of the program, roughly triple of a decade ago, soared with the popularity of policies that guarantee revenue from a crop.

That's prompted House Republicans to call for a cap on government support while President Obama has proposed cutting \$7.7 billion over 10 years for crop insurance.

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, with 90 member groups, would focus crop insurance on small and medium-size farmers and limit payments to large operators.

Japan to import less food wheat in 2012-13

BY RISA MAEDA
TOKYO / REUTERS

Japan, the world's fifth-biggest wheat importer, plans to buy 6.5 per cent less foreign food wheat in the year to March 2013 in anticipation of higher local production, helped by government initiatives to lift food self-sufficiency.

A panel of experts approved a plan March 28 by the Ministry of Agriculture to buy 4.78 million tonnes of foreign wheat for milling use in 2012-13, compared with the 2011-12 plan for 5.11 million tonnes.

Japan, which keeps a tight grip on wheat imports, sets an import target annually to supplement local crops, and buys foreign wheat via tenders and sells to users at prices revised every six months based on purchase costs.

Japan's lower wheat import estimate came at a time when the world has a surplus of supply due to healthy harvests in major producing countries.

Save money, get more milk with a shorter dry period

DRY FACTS ▶ A shorter dry period reduces stress and health problems for cows, and means you can produce more milk with fewer animals

BY ALEXIS KIENLEN
AF STAFF | RED DEER

Shorter is better when it comes to the dry period for dairy cows, says Daniel Lefebvre, general manager of Valacta, the centre for excellence in dairy production for Quebec and the Atlantic provinces.

“The recommendation to dry cows for 60 days between lactations has been wrong for several decades,” Lefebvre told attendees at the recent Western Canadian Dairy conference.

“This might not be adapted to today’s dairy cows, which produce a lot more milk. When we come to dry them off 60 days before calving, they’re still producing quite a bit of milk.”

This is stressful for the cows, said Lefebvre who recommends a short dry period of 35 days.

During the conventional 60-day system, rations are changed several times — there is a late lactation ration, followed by a fall-off ration high in forage, then a close-up pre-calving ration 21 days before calving, and finally a lactation ration. Each change causes stress in a cow, said Lefebvre, including stress to the mammary gland during dry-off, nutritional stress with each ration change, and physiological and environmental stress from being moved into a new pen or group.

In the 35-day system, cows do not go through the fall-off ration and move directly into the close-up ration close to calving. Fewer transitions equals less stress, researchers from Laval University and Agriculture Canada found in a study of 13 commercial herds in Quebec. In one study, 800 cows — half coming out of their first lactation and half mature cows — were divided into two groups, with one undergoing the conventional 60-day program and half a short dry period. The latter were less likely to suffer ketosis and had a decrease of Plasma NEFA. Mature cows in the short dry period had an increase in retained placentas, but this didn’t seem to cause any reproductive problems. There was a slight decrease in cows with udder edema in early lactation and producers saw less shrinkage of the udder for cows that were dry for a shorter period of time. There was no difference in the rates of clinical mastitis in either system.

Cull rates lower

There were fewer cows culled in lactation in short dry-period management, while reproduction rates were unaffected. And, critically, you need fewer cows to generate the same economic performance.

“It’s more expensive to feed her,

but you get extra revenue so it’s a profitable strategy,” Lefebvre said. “If you’re over quota, then that’s a different story. This is a management tool that can very easily apply to the current situation of the farm.”

When implementing this system, it’s critical to use a single dry-period ration during the entire period and cows should be moved from the lactation ration to the close-up, pre-calving one. Lefebvre recommended producers aim for a dry period of 35 days as research has found periods of less than 30 days increases mortality rates, reduces production, and ups the risk of antibiotic residues in the milk.

Some cows simply can’t tran-

sition to a 35-day dry period and should remain on the conventional cycle, said Lefebvre. Cows that produce 20 kilos of milk 60 days prior to calving are the best candidate for the short dry cycle. Cows going into their first dry period can also be included in the short dry period cycle, as they tend to produce more milk in their first lactation.

Lefebvre stressed the importance of maintaining accurate breeding records and well-balanced rations. Gradual ration change is preferred over abrupt ration change.

“Minimizing stress and maximizing comfort is the key to the short dry period cycle,” he said.



Each ration change during a dry period causes stress on the animals, says a Quebec researcher. ©THINKSTOCK

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“The recommendation to dry cows for 60 days between lactations has been wrong for several decades.”

BRIEFS

Cargill not commenting on IPO rumours

REUTERS / U.S. agribusiness Cargill Inc. said on March 28 it had no comment regarding a market rumour that it was planning an initial public offering.

“Our company does not comment on market rumours,” Cargill spokeswoman Lisa Clemens said.

Talk about an IPO among traders and investment bankers surfaces periodically about Minneapolis-based Cargill, a player in world agribusiness for more than a century and one of the world’s largest privately held corporations. Cargill routinely issues a “no comment” on such rumours.

Cargill in 2011 repeatedly denied speculation that it would carry out an IPO. Cargill spun off its majority stake in fertilizer maker Mosaic Co. in 2011, partly to maintain its private company status and partly to enable Cargill family trusts to diversify their holdings.

Agribition launches 2012 scholarships

Canadian Western Agribition’s annual scholarships are open for applications for 2012.

“One of Agribition’s strongest goals is to promote innovation in agriculture. There is no better way to foster innovation than to feed the minds of the young people who will be our industry’s leaders in the near future,” said Marty Seymour, CEO and general manager of Agribition.

Established in 1994, the Agribition Scholarship program has awarded over \$150,000 in scholarships. The fund receives contributions annually from private donations as well as from other Agribition events.

The Canadian Western Agribition Scholarship program is intended to provide financial support and incentive to support young Agribition participants seeking higher education.

To qualify for one of the \$1,000 grants, applicants must have participated during a past Agribition as an exhibitor (such as in a livestock show, 4-H, grain and forage classes or active trade show exhibitor). Applicants must be pursuing a post-secondary or graduate program that is at least two years long. Scholarships are provided to help cover costs of the second or subsequent year of an education program in Canada or U.S.

The deadline for applications for this year’s scholarships is July 1, 2012. For a scholarship application, visit: www.agribition.com/Show_Information/Education/Scholarship/.

STAMPEDE RECOGNIZED FOR INNOVATION



The Calgary Stampede received Alberta Farm Animal Care’s Award of Distinction for Innovation at the AFAC annual meeting in Red Deer last month. The Calgary Stampede has implemented a number of new initiatives to enhance animal welfare, including developing codes of practice and carrying out both internal and third-party assessments on animals in transportation, agricultural exhibits and rodeo. Dr. Ed Pajor of the University of Calgary (l) presented the award to Paul Rosenberg, the stampede’s vice-president of programming. PHOTO: AFAC

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Time is right for free trade agreement push

HUNGER GAMES ▶ Food security is becoming increasingly important as world hunger increases with its population

BY SHERI MONK
AF STAFF | EDMONTON

A seasoned trade negotiator says trade agreements will do a lot to open markets for Canadian beef, but once they're open, a second ingredient is needed — customer demand.

"Despite all the constraints and problems there may be, the future for Canadian agriculture and for Canadian meat production and beef production, I think is really very bright," John Weekes told a seminar for members of the Cattlemen's Young Leaders program here last month.

Weekes, an Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency (ALMA) board member, served as Canada's ambassador to the World Trade Organization, as ambassador to GATT during the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations and as a Canadian negotiator for NAFTA. He is now

senior business adviser for the law firm Bennett Jones.

Weekes says that politically, now is the time for the Canadian beef industry to really push for increased foreign market access. With more than 50 per cent of Canadian beef now exported, increased growth has to come from other countries.

"There's a lot of opportunity in taking advantage of markets in Europe and Asia where there's still increasing demand for meat, and it's growing quite rapidly in places like China and Korea," Weekes said, adding that markets in Asia and the EU are significantly more valuable on a per-kilogram basis than exports to the U.S. However, the potential payoff is often offset by high tariffs.

"The barriers to foreign access are often quite high and this is particularly true in Asia where you have tariffs, for instance in Korea on beef and pork, of 40 per cent.

Beef tariff in Japan is 38.5 per cent, and through a trigger mechanism if there's a certain volume going in it can go up to 50 per cent, and you can see similar numbers when you look at other markets," Weekes said.

Falling behind the U.S.

A recent free trade agreement between the U.S. and Korea means U.S. beef and pork can be imported for less, and tariffs are being reduced annually with a total phase-out in 15 years. "You can already see the order books drying up on Canadian pork exports to Korea right now," Weekes said.

He said the Canadian government is responding. "The Harper government has an ambitious trade negotiations agenda. It's perhaps the most ambitious trade agenda we've ever had."

New talks with Korea look promising to reignite negotiations, preliminary talks have begun with



Japan's beef tariff is 38.5 per cent, and can go up to 50 per cent.

Japan, India is on the table (albeit not for beef,) and talks with the mega-market of China are progressing.

With a smorgasbord of nations as possible export destinations, it can seem overwhelming to know which countries to target.

"It's very important to set some priorities. You can't just say, 'Well, we want everything.' It's just not manageable to go about achieving everything. You should figure out where your key markets are — and this has been done to a large extent — and what the priority barriers are," Weekes said.

Consumer demand

As the government works on opening the door to foreign markets, Weekes says it's critical that work to create consumer demand is done at the same time. Market access isn't worth a red cent if no one is buying the product.

"You can already see the order books drying up on Canadian pork exports to Korea right now."

JOHN WEEKES
TRADE EXPERT

"Canada is a relatively small player and I think we need to make clear to our partners what it is we're trying to achieve," said Weekes, emphasizing that industry cannot give the government mixed signals on trade policy. "We need to work together in advising the government on trade negotiations. If the industry comes at them with fractured voices as to the direction they should be taking, inaction is the most likely result."

Weekes said that with a surge in bilateral free trade negotiations among many countries — what he calls "competitive liberalization" — the time to act is now. Many countries are feeling pressure to sign agreements they believe will increase their security. However, the very meaning of security may be changing, Weekes said.

"Increasingly I think people are not just looking for security of energy supply but are starting to look for security of food supply," he said. "We're now seeing a transition to a world that is beginning to run short of food resources. We're going to be responding to pressures to supply these other markets, which is certainly a much more favourable game to be in."

Weekes said ALMA's priority in its business plan has been to increase foreign trade opportunities.

"I think it's really interesting that a provincial government agency has put this as its No. 1 priority, and that's quite challenging from the perspective of sitting in this place to think about how you can advance those interests from this vantage point."

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ELECTION FORUM

Farm and rural issues



Danielle Smith
Wildrose Party

Raj Sherman
Liberal Party

Glenn Taylor
Alberta Party

Albertans go to the polls to elect a new government April 23, and farm and rural issues will be important in many constituencies. *Alberta Farmer* asked all leaders of all five of the main parties to answer questions on their farm and rural policies. Three agreed to respond — Liberal Leader Raj Sherman, Wildrose Leader Danielle Smith and Alberta Party Leader Glenn Taylor. Their responses follow:

AF: Supply management is the most successful sector of Canadian agriculture. Yet it does not fit with those who favour free market ideology. What is your party's position on the future of supply management in Alberta?

Sherman: Supply management has delivered safe milk, egg and poultry products to consumers at reasonable prices that are quite stable and it's provided our producers with income stability. We realize that our markets look very attractive to dairy and poultry producers in other countries where costs of production may be lower. And their leaders may be pressuring our national leaders to open up this trade. It might be something we'd have to take up with Ottawa.

Smith: Our membership hasn't taken a position on supply management one way or the other. We don't think we can do something on this at the provincial level. Our members did take a position on the Canadian Wheat Board and we supported the federal government, which is why I was able to speak on it vocally. I haven't gauged where our members are on this. At this point, silence means we will stick to the status quo on the supply management issue.

Taylor: We recognize that it is federally managed and we understand that there is a push by big food business to get rid of the supply boards. We don't see a huge push by consumers or the supply-managed groups to get rid of the system. We develop our policies by consulting with the people affected and experts in their field and try to

bring common sense to the issue. As far as we see the system is working well, it provides a safe and secure source of eggs, poultry and milk and our producers are receiving a secure source of income. Supply management is a cornerstone of the ag economy of Alberta

AF: Does your party support provincial government research into genetic engineering of barley and wheat, which are mainstream crops in Alberta?

Sherman: Research should be as broad ranging as possible so that farmers can access grain varieties and technologies that meet their needs. We need genetic engineering to make the production leaps needed. We are supportive of research as a matter of principle.

Smith: I understand we do plant-breeding research in the province and we have no problems with genetically modified crops grown by farmers. Alberta has an opportunity to be a leader in plant breeding so we support research. We don't have a position one way or another on GM research, but we support maintaining the plant-breeding research being done right now.

Taylor: Yes, we support GM research into those crops. We understand that can lead to better yields and we believe that good science can lead to good results. We understand that there is a demand for organic crops, but we also believe there will be a demand for GM crops and we believe in market choice.

AF: What is your position on the

sale and development of more public land for irrigation and more publicly funded development of irrigation infrastructure?

Sherman: Any sale of public land should be by an open and transparent process. We believe that the development of that land, for irrigated crops, housing or other changes should involve open public consultation including consideration of its ecological value. We know irrigation investment has been good for Albertans. Irrigation farmers have been able to produce bigger, better crops with less water through improved irrigation efficiency.

Smith: Irrigation is one of our greatest agricultural opportunities. The economic results are pretty compelling. But I haven't heard of any proposals from the irrigation districts for any expansion but we are open to any ideas. We need to look at the economics, but I am open minded to any proposals.

Taylor: We believe that development needs to proceed in an open and transparent method. We support what the Alberta Irrigation Projects Association is doing in helping developing and renovating irrigation infrastructure. We believe investing in technology to conserve more water for irrigation. We support more development in irrigated production, but we want it done in a responsible way. It shouldn't be political or based on emotion.

AF: The government has indicated that it will be initiating a review of water allocation in the southern Alberta area. What priority in your view does agriculture have for water allocation?

Sherman: We will work within the goals of the Water for Life strategy. Irrigation is a huge part of this goal. Southern Alberta would not have the vibrant economy it does without irrigation. We'll need to hear all viewpoints in looking into the most

responsible way to manage the South Saskatchewan River Basin. We believe that water for human consumption comes first, but agriculture is sure a close second.

Smith: We support the first-in-time, first-in-right principle for allocation. Irrigation districts have been the first in usage and it seems to be working right now. It's more an issue of water management and in our policy our members have stated they want more opportunities for on- and off-stream storage which would increase allocations. I do worry with the present stewardship act that the government has the right to reallocate water rights without proper compensation or recourse to the courts. We think that is the wrong approach.

Taylor: We want to engage everyone in the discussions. First we want to ensure a safe supply of drinking water to the residents of Alberta — that's our first priority. Agriculture would be second because of course we have to eat. We have to recognize the expanding demand for water for residential, agriculture and industrial use. We can do this more efficiently. But we don't support water becoming a commodity, where water licences are sold to those with the deepest pockets.

AF: What is your view on public funding or tax credits for ecological services provided by landowners?

Sherman: To some extent we do this by compensating farmers for predator damage for instance. We realize farmers provide us all with valuable service by caring for the ecology of their area. We'd be open to discussions on providing some benefit — tax credit or funding to compensate the farmer/landowner for ecological services that benefit us all. Harmonizing production agriculture and ecological benefits is in everybody's interest and is something we'd want to be part of.

Smith: I think the Nature Con-

servancy, the Southern Alberta Land Trust and others are doing a good job getting easements and compensation for landowners. I haven't heard anything about more tax credits, but we are open to listening. I am a believer in the voluntary approach to this matter and oppose the stewardship act having government making the decisions. The concept of paying people to keep land in a pristine condition is something I am generally in favour of. We need to look at all the options to make that work.

Taylor: We support methods that allow farmers to receive payment for conserving land in such areas as ecoservices, carbon capture, no till and others. We want to assure landowners that there is a value in keeping land as it is.

AF: Will you repeal Bill 43 and allow cattle, sheep, hog and potato producers their democratic right to actually vote on checkoff refundability?

Sherman: Each industry should be entitled to decide for itself how its marketing and research organization is funded and what activity, so we would favour allowing producers to vote. I recall this legislation and discussed it with some producers, it was contentious, and I understand it caused a lot of division between cattle industry groups.

Smith: That issue divided producers right down the middle and arbitrarily repealing it would probably divide the community again. Anytime you are making decisions that affect the producer we believe that it should be done by plebiscite. We heard that there was a demand for more accountability, we also heard that there should have been discussion on a directional check-off. At this point we would have to have a consultation with all those involved before any action is con-

► Continued on next page

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Q&A



sidered. There should have been a democratic vote at the beginning. We have 16 candidates with an agriculture background so I expect that this will be a robust conversation.

Taylor: We are not interested in doing that unless we hear a large groundswell of support from producers, which we are not hearing. I don't understand the issue in great detail. We do believe in consultation before actions are taken by government, not after.

AF: *Wind farms continue to be controversial. Would you favour a complete third-party review of that business to get to the real story?*

Sherman: We are in favour of more transparency, but feel this should go beyond just this sector and include related utilities. For instance, we will end the cabinet's ability to approve power lines in secret without public input. We will force power companies to conduct their business honestly — market manipulation will mean significant fines.

Smith: We are against subsidies to private business that create an unlevel playing field. We don't want to see an unfair advantage to certain sectors, some feel there is a disadvantage against coal. It seems to me right now in Alberta with our natural gas resources, that is the best way forward for more power generation.

Taylor: We are in favour of a diversified electricity generating system. But we are not in favour of propping up an industry with subsidies. If it's profitable let the free market reign. Yes we would favour a review of wind power generation to see if it's actually profitable. We need to get a better understanding of all methods including generating power on farms. We need to review the entire system.

AF: *Does your party support keeping the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency?*

Sherman: Yes we support keeping it. The initial investment in the single agency for research and market development has been made. If changes are needed, better to change ALMA than to start again from scratch.

Smith: Once you create something arbitrarily, you don't want to remove it arbitrarily. When it was first created there were a lot of people frustrated that these decisions were being taken out of the hands of industry. Obviously we will want to have a consultation whether it has served its purpose or what it should be. I am very concerned with it getting into business giving direct subsidies to individual firms. I don't mind the idea of doing research.

Taylor: Yes, we want to keep it. It funds research for the industry and that's good for the future of the livestock industry and for the next generation.

AF: *Do you favour the legalization of hunt farms in Alberta?*

Sherman: We have no policy on this matter that I am aware of, but from a personal view I don't support this idea. I support hunting in

the wilderness and that is where it should be.

Smith: It's a big issue and we are divided on it, our MLAs will have a free vote if it comes up again in the legislature. It divides urban and rural; we have not taken a position on it.

Taylor: It's not something we have discussed so I am not well informed on the issue on either side of the question.

AF: *What is your position in including farm workers and farm owners in mandatory OHS and WCB programs?*

Sherman: It would help farm workers whether they're temporary foreign workers in greenhouses, market gardens or workers in other more extensive operations. Other provinces can do it, why not Alberta? We could consult

farmers and find out challenges. I am an emergency room doctor so I am well aware of what accidents and injury can do to devastate lives. I have also seen instances of child labour in the Fraser Valley. We believe workers and operators need this type of protection.

Smith: I am sympathetic to farm workers getting proper coverage. But I don't believe government should be regulating family homes or the family farm and the two are sometimes the same. We can't have officers interfering with the family home. But workers do need coverage; I don't know if WCB is the only answer. I understand that there may be better coverage under the insurance a lot of farms already carry. There are many options that we need to look at.

Taylor: I feel we need good safety rules on the farm, but when it

comes to the industry side we are going to have change. We have bigger, larger farms using bigger equipment, we need safe working conditions for the employees. There is a challenge with the family farm; how do they get work done? We have to wrestle with what is a corporate farm and what is a family farm. We believe agriculture is a heritage industry and we need to protect its viability, but we also need to recognize the changing world we live in.

AF: *Property rights and the government legislation surrounding it is a controversial issue with landowners. What is your party's position on the legislation?*

Sherman: It is undemocratic to make decisions in the cabinet room without open consultations or even reasons, and denying a landowner recourse to the courts following such actions is medi-

eval. Government should make its policies based on an open process that Albertans can put their faith in and ministers must be able to defend those policies without the perception that government would take action against people who offend them.

Taylor: The whole process needs to be reviewed. There are good parts to the legislation, but flawed policy comes from a flawed process. It all needs to be revisited; the problem is people don't trust the process. We need to see what works, and what didn't but we don't believe it all needs to be thrown out. We are not interested in fear-mongering, but we believe it can be made better.

Smith: *As Wildrose's position on landowner legislation is well known, we did not submit this question to Danielle Smith.*



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CWB hopes to continue to supply most wheat to Japan

PREMIUM ▶ Wheat board will focus on quality rather than lower-value commodity wheat



CWB chief Ian White says the new grain company will focus on serving premium-paying customers like Japan. PHOTO: ALLAN DAWSON

BY ALLAN DAWSON
STAFF

The Canadian Wheat Board has the inside track on the lucrative Japanese market for Canadian milling wheat.

White told a meeting in Somerset, Man. last month that he had just returned from Japan and is encouraged about prospects in that premium market.

"I think they (Japan) want the CWB to be their main supplier and we hope to be able to do that."

CWB wheat exports to Japan have averaged 1.2 million tonnes annually over the last 10 years, but one farmer questioned whether the CWB can maintain that volume given that others can now compete for the sales.

"The Japanese value long-term relationships," White said. "We know it's a competitive world and we are going to have to compete in that world, but they are saying to us that they will give us the first look at the business, particularly if we can deliver them the quality and the continuity that they are used to."

White said the CWB might not be able to compete in commodity markets where buyers focus on getting the lowest price.

"We understand that and we will be competing in there where we need to, but we will also try to keep away from those markets where we can," White said.

Glencore is a commodity trader, he said. The company that wants to buy Viterra usually sells on a multiple-origin basis, allowing it to source wheat where it's the cheapest.

"We'll be selling the grain that we take from Canada and selling to customers who value quality," White said. "So we see our place very much more down the end of the market... dealing with customers who value that and who will deal with a company like the CWB and generally pay a bit more because we have a relationship with them, we know them and we can satisfy their needs."

The CWB has the authority to buy and sell wheat produced outside of Canada, but doesn't expect to do so often, White said. Sometimes customers want lower-quality wheat to blend with Canadian wheat and now the CWB can provide both.

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PHOTO: AFAC

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Calgary woman contracts hantavirus, lives to tell tale



DEADLY DUST ▶ Cathy was infected after sweeping the floor near some firewood contaminated with mouse feces and urine

BY SHERI MONK
AF STAFF

One week, Cathy was a vibrant and healthy wife, mother and music teacher. The next, she was fighting for her life in a Calgary hospital, wondering whether she'd see her son's next birthday. Cathy K. (her last name withheld by request) was exposed to hantavirus around Halloween of 2002, when she was 44 years old. She, her husband, and their five-year-old son were living on an acreage just seven kilometres east of Calgary. One day, her husband discovered a mouse nest

while rearranging the woodpile just outside the patio doors, which prompted her to say, "Oh great, now we're all going to get hantavirus and die." Some of the wood was later brought into their home, and when Cathy swept the area next to where it was stacked, she believes she inhaled dry mouse feces and urine which became airborne. On a Friday three weeks later, she began to feel some flu symptoms, and called in sick to work. On Saturday, she still felt ill, but felt well enough to attend a family gathering the following day. She missed work again on Monday, recovered enough to return to

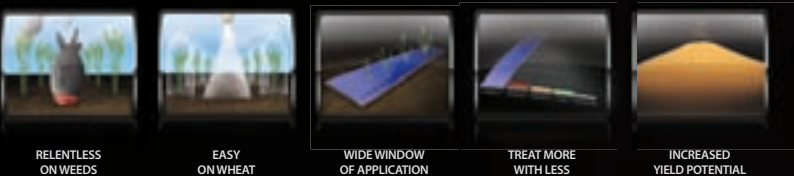
work on Tuesday, but then took a turn for the worse and stayed home for the rest of the week. "On Saturday morning, I got up and I said my destination was the doctor, or the hospital," she said. "We just have to go. I tried to shower and I was out of breath. I was really weak." Cathy said it never occurred to her to go to the doctor earlier because she assumed it was just the flu. In retrospect, she said she believes her falling blood oxygen levels were impairing her judgment and ability to evaluate how sick she truly was. She wasn't coughing, and didn't notice any shortness of breath until that Saturday, but the ongoing weakness

was a symptom of hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS). **Plummeting blood pressure** When the virus invades the body, the immune system responds by attacking certain cells that harbour it. The internal structure of the cells is damaged and they leak fluid. This causes the lungs to slowly fill with fluid, restricting oxygen intake, and can also cause a dangerous drop in blood pressure. In other words, Cathy was slowly drowning in her own fluids. Unaware of how serious her condition was, Cathy opted for a medical clinic instead of a hospital. "When I got to the clinic, I laid down on the floor," she said. "I'm

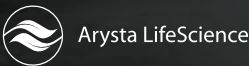
a teacher, I'm a professional — I don't go into someone's office and lay on their floor in front of their reception desk." The alarmed receptionist took her to the doctor right away. "I think he thought I was faking it. He tried to take my blood pressure and I had no reading. It was not measurable," she said. The doctor told Cathy to go home and take some Tylenol. "And then I said I'd been throwing up water, and it saved my life. He said to go immediately to the ER." Cathy's husband rushed her to Rockyview Hospital. Too weak to sit up, she laid down in the back of the van. By the time she arrived, she couldn't walk. She was admitted and treated with oxygen, which initially helped. But even with the oxygen therapy, her blood gas levels continued to worsen and she was moved to the ICU in the middle of the night.

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"I looked up and there must have been seven people around me — respiratory techs, nurses and doctors — and then I heard them say that if I thrashed, they'd hold me down."

CATHY K.
SURVIVOR

"I looked up and there must have been seven people around me — respiratory techs, nurses and doctors — and then I heard them say that if I thrashed, they'd hold me down." She realized the medical team was about to intubate her (inserting a tube to provide rapid respiratory assistance). That was her last memory before entering a three-day drug-induced coma. In total, Cathy spent 13 days in the hospital. Had she not received medical attention when she did, she would have been dead within hours. She credits her survival to an exceptional medical team and plenty of prayer. A small woman to begin with, she was only 90 pounds after leaving hospital. But unlike many others who experience scarring in their lungs, she was lucky and doesn't suffer from the same debilitating symptoms other survivors must cope with. The experience was life changing, and humbling. Cathy's faith is stronger now, and she said she feels as though she was spared. "I feel it was a miracle." Cathy and her family have since moved back to the city, and she continues to work as a music teacher. She urges people not to gamble with hantavirus. "You must take this seriously... Farmers are healthy, strapping men, but this can knock them down and kill them. It can take their lives."

HANTAVIRUS: Rare, but often deadly



SAFETY FIRST ▶ When cleaning out areas that could have housed mice, take precautions such as goggles, a mask and gloves

BY SHERI MONK
AF STAFF

In the giddy delight of longer days and warmer temperatures, many landowners will take to cleaning outbuildings and machinery without realizing it could expose them to a rare but often fatal disease.

Hantavirus is contracted by inhaling infected droplets from rodent urine, saliva and feces. There are many hantaviruses, but the one found in Canada is the Sin Nombre Virus (SNV) and its vector is the common deer mouse. The resulting disease is called hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) and it is fatal in 30-40 per cent of cases. By conducting surveys on deer mice in Alberta, it was learned that as little as one per cent or as much as 35 per cent of the deer mice population carry the virus, depending on region and localized conditions.

Its discovery in North America is relatively recent, and dates back to 1993 to the Four Corners area of the southwest United States, although it has likely existed long before it was found here.

Alberta was home to the first Canadian case in 1989. Since then, there have been approximately 60 cases in Canada, 42 of which have been found in Alberta, and 10 were fatal.

The peak infection time is during



It can be hard to tell rodent species apart when they are infants, like this one. It is best to err on the side of caution and assume all rodents as a possible hantavirus vector. PHOTO: BUDDY SIMMONS

April, May and June and 70 per cent of victims are ranchers or farmers. The number of incidents in the spring may be attributed to increased activity in outbuildings that had been left undisturbed all winter, allowing mouse nests, feces and urine to accumulate.

The course of the illness varies, but the incubation period is typically two weeks, though it can be as short as a few days, or as long as six weeks. Initially the patient will experience fever, chills, muscle aches, headaches, nausea and stomach problems. As the disease progresses through the next three to seven days, the symptoms become increasingly severe. The victim may

develop a secretion-producing cough and a shortness of breath which mean fluid is accumulating within the lungs. Low blood pressure and reduced heart efficiency may follow and death may follow.

There is no treatment specific for HPS, but early detection and admission into the hospital improves the patient's prognosis. With supportive medical care such as intubation and oxygen therapy, a victim's critical systems may be supported enough to avoid mortality. Recovery can take months or even years, and ongoing fatigue is commonly experienced by survivors.

Better safe than sorry

BY SHERI MONK
AF STAFF

- Living in a rural area puts you in danger of being exposed to hantavirus, but you can reduce the risk:
- Take steps to reduce the rodent population, but don't kill their natural predators.
 - Keep pet food and horse feed in plastic rodent-proof containers. Reduce potential nesting sites by keeping your property clean and woodpiles 100 feet away from the house.
 - Guard your home by setting traps, sealing possible entrances, and securing food sources. Take action if droppings are spotted.
 - Dampen droppings, nests or carcasses with diluted bleach in a 1:10 ratio and wait 10 minutes for the solution to take effect. Use disposable gloves, and dispose of waste and carcasses in a double plastic bag or by burning.
 - Before cleaning a building which may have housed mice, open the doors and windows and air it out for at least 30 minutes both before and after disinfecting for cleanup. Dampen droppings, nests or carcasses with bleach solution, damp mop, and NEVER sweep or vacuum.
 - Wear an appropriate mask (dust masks don't offer enough protection) such as the NIOSH-approved 100 series filters, or a respirator with P100 cartridges. An N95 mask may also be used, and are commonly sold in pharmacies and used in influenza outbreaks. Wear goggles and full clothing to reduce skin exposure.
 - After cleanup is complete, dispose of gloves and mask, and wash goggles with hot, soapy water. Soiled clothing should be removed immediately and washed in hot, soapy water before being dried thoroughly.
 - Talk to your family and remind them to take precautions. Learn the symptoms and, if in doubt, seek medical attention and mention possible hantavirus exposure.

Sources: Public Health Agency of Canada, the Government of Alberta, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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Alberta Angus breeder elected V-P of Canada Beef Breeds Council

BULL MARKET ▶ It's been a long time coming, but the market looks strong for all cattle sectors

BY SHERI MONK
AF STAFF | PINCHER CREEK

David Bolduc says Canadian purebred cattle raised today aren't as good as they used to be. They're better, says the newly elected vice-president of the Canadian Beef Breeds Council (CBBC).

"We all think that the cattle we raised years ago were really good cattle, and they probably were, but I truly believe that the cattle we raise right now are the best cattle most purebred breeders have ever raised," says Bolduc.

"There's a lot of exciting stuff happening in the purebred industry right now with genomics and now we're going to get a far better evaluation of our cattle than we've ever had before."

Along with his wife Margaret and his son Matt, Bolduc operates Cudlobe Angus with his brother Dyce and his family near Stavely. Together, they run 400-500 cows and they host an annual production sale. The family has been in the purebred business since the 1800s.

Bolduc is current president of the Canadian Angus Association board of directors.

The CBBC is comprised of members representing all breeds with the shared goal of advancing Canada's purebred stock throughout the globe, through embryos, semen and live cattle. Though the CBBC's mandate hasn't changed, the market has, and for the first time in a long while, everyone seems bullish on beef cattle.

"We'll try to improve exports of Canadian genetics into some of the growth areas of the world. Beef cattle is really on the upbeat. I just read an article that one guy is predicting that investments in the cattle industry right now would be better than investments in gold — and gold has been relatively strong the last few years," says Bolduc.

There are several market factors contributing to the demand-pull reality of the beef business today. The world population is larger and hungrier, emerging nations are beginning to be able to afford a taste for beef, and cattle supply is tight.

"When we were in Argentina last fall at the Angus World Secretariat meetings, there were 19 countries there in which they raise Angus and they were seeing record-high grain prices and record-high beef prices. Agriculture is actually going to become

quite prominent as we go forward here, with the population growth," Bolduc says. "I think the beef cattle industry is going to be a significant part of that. There's so much of this planet that's not arable to farming, but it is productive as far as grass and forage and ruminants are obviously the way we're going to harvest that."

Bolduc says advances such as genomics, coupled with Expected Progeny Differences (EPDs) are allowing producers to continue building on breed successes.

"The best part about this is the optimism in our youth. Probably for the first time in a whole generation of people who have raised purebred livestock, I think our youth are excited about being involved in the industry because they can see the potential of actually making a living there without having off-farm employment," Bolduc said.

Bolduc will serve a one-year term as vice-president. Byron Templeton representing Hereford was elected as president, Allan Marshal (Charolais) will remain on the executive as past president, and Rod Remin (Speckle Park) and Anne Brunet-Burgess (Limousin) are also members of the executive.



Along with his wife Margaret and his son Matt, David Bolduc operates Cudlobe Angus with his brother Dyce and his family near Stavely.

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Market access to China key to expanding Canadian canola exports

TARRIFS ▶ Blackleg concerns set aside as Canada works to negotiate better access to China's growing market

BY SHANNON VANRAES
STAFF WASHINGTON, D.C.

If you're thinking of heading into the canola markets, it might be time to brush up on your Mandarin and Cantonese.

China and its growing economic influence featured prominently during discussion on growing export markets at the Canola Council of Canada's (CCC) convention in the American capital, largely because it is expected to feature prominently in future agricultural exports.

"There is certainly strong demand from China, and strong growth in their demand for the products we produce, the oil, the meal and for the seeds," said Patrick Van Osch.

The Richardson Oilseed Ltd. executive and CCC chairman, said although there have been issues exporting seed to China following blackleg concerns raised in 2009, he is concentrating on the industry's long-term relationship with China.

He also noted that when seed exports were stymied by Chinese quarantine policies, the export of canola oil and meal increased dramatically.

"I think the market is going to be there. Yes, there is going to be some challenges that come up from time to time over the years, but in the end, the demand is growing," Van Osch said.

Beijing-based Ruojun Wang agreed, explaining China cannot increase its domestic production of rapeseed.

"Generally speaking it is the amount of arable land that limits Chinese production," said the CCC consultant and professor at China Agricultural University.

Along with the CCC, he is working to introduce canola meal into farms as a high-quality feed, through workshops and seminars.

"In China, it works best to show people how it works, otherwise they say 'when we see it, then we will believe it,'" Wang said.

Changes to Chinese diets may also increase demand for canola meal as livestock feeders seek more protein sources.

"This also generates good competition with soy, it gives an opportunity to bargain — you can't put all your eggs in one bucket," said Wang.

High tariffs

But Canadian exporters say more still needs to be done to deal with issues of market access in China, including the levelling or elimination of trade tariffs.

Currently, canola is subject to a nine per cent tariff while soy is subject to a three per cent tariff.

"Our goal is to eliminate tariffs in the markets we serve," said Jim Everson, vice-president of corporate affairs for the CCC. "Our second goal is to eliminate the differentials in trade tariffs between canola and the products we compete with."

Wang said it is canola processors in China that pay the tariff, but that the cost eventually trickles down to producers.

"It would be calculated into the price the importer or crusher pays for the seed or product... so in some way the tariff differential is coming out of the farmer's pocket," he said.

Everson said the current federal government has been promoting a level playing field for canola as it works on international trade agreements.

He noted Prime Minister Harper visited China in February, along with Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz.

"Building, maintaining and growing global market access is critical to all of us," said Everson. "And canola is the largest agricultural product shipped to China by a country mile."

But Van Osch cautions against overlooking other trade partners in the wake of China's rising economic status.

"There is certainly a lot of talk about China, and certainly it has been a game changer over the last 10 years," said Van Osch. "But when you look at our canola

industry as a whole, we should not forget there has been significant growth in the U.S. market as well."

Canada exports 85 per cent of the canola it produces to about 55 different markets.

Canada's ambassador to the U.S., Gary Doer, emphasized the importance of the trade relationship between the two countries during the convention.

"Agriculture, canola being part of that of course, is a \$38-billion two-way trading relationship between Canada and the United States," he said. "And of that, about \$3 billion is represented by canola."

But Doer also noted the Canadian government is working on securing greater access to Chinese markets, along with other Asia-Pacific countries.



Canadian Ambassador Gary Doer speaks to members of the canola industry during the Canola Council of Canada's Washington, D.C. convention.

PHOTO: SHANNON VANRAES



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▲ DRYNESS

EUROPEAN FARMERS CONCERNED

Farmers in Western Europe are concerned that persistent dryness could further cut yields following an unusually cold winter. In France, dry weather has allowed farmers to sow spring barley and spring wheat on damaged fields worst hit by freezing weather. An estimated 700,000 hectares, may need to be replanted. In Germany, arctic-style weather earlier this winter may have damaged grain crops more seriously than expected, but the rapeseed outlook remains positive. British crops are in generally good condition but in Spain, the driest winter in 40 years will cut yields of winter grains by 30 to 60 per cent. — Reuters

AUSTRALIA SAYS LA NIÑA DEAD

A weather pattern blamed for heavy rains and crop destruction in the Asia-Pacific region over the past two years has run its course slightly ahead of schedule, forecasters in Australia said March 27. The Australian Bureau of Meteorology said climate models indicate the weather phenomenon known as La Niña has come to an end, after earlier this month predicting it would drag on for a further month or two. Sea surface temperatures across the central tropical Pacific Ocean were now at neutral levels, according to the bureau. area because of the late rains,” said Andre Pessoa, director at Agroconsult analysts. — Reuters

WEATHER



Spring forecast – will above-average temps. continue?

STUCK ▶ During March, Alberta was between two systems, missing the record heat farther east



BY DANIEL BEZTE

With record warm weather covering much of Central and Eastern Canada during March and cold weather settling in over the West Coast, most of Alberta experienced a little bit of both. While it might have seemed and felt that March didn't measure up this year, I think that was just because the regions to the east saw such incredible weather, which made Alberta feel like it was being left out.

When all was said and done for March, both the Edmonton and Calgary regions ended up recording above-average mean monthly temperatures. Edmonton recorded a mean monthly temperature of -2.8 C which was nearly 2 C above the long-term average. This was Edmonton's fifth month in a row with above-average temperatures. Calgary had a mean monthly temperature of 0.6 C in March, which was 2.5 C above the long-term average. This made March the eighth month in a row with above-average temperatures for Calgary.

Precipitation during March came in right around average for both Edmonton and Calgary, with Edmonton recording 18.7 mm and Calgary reporting 17.6 mm. This is the second month in a row with near- to above-average precipitation, reversing a six-month trend of below-average precipitation.

Over much of agricultural Alberta, March could best be described as fairly steady or persistent. The weather patterns during the month didn't change much, with Alberta basically stuck between two very different weather patterns. That doesn't mean that the day-

to-day weather didn't change. Short periods of nice warm weather were replaced by short periods of cooler weather as the two patterns battled it out. This allowed for a fair number of storm systems to track through Alberta, resulting in the average to above-average precipitation.

Outlook for the spring

The question that seems to be on a lot of people's minds is whether Alberta will see the above-average temperatures continue into spring and will they be accompanied by dry or wet conditions?

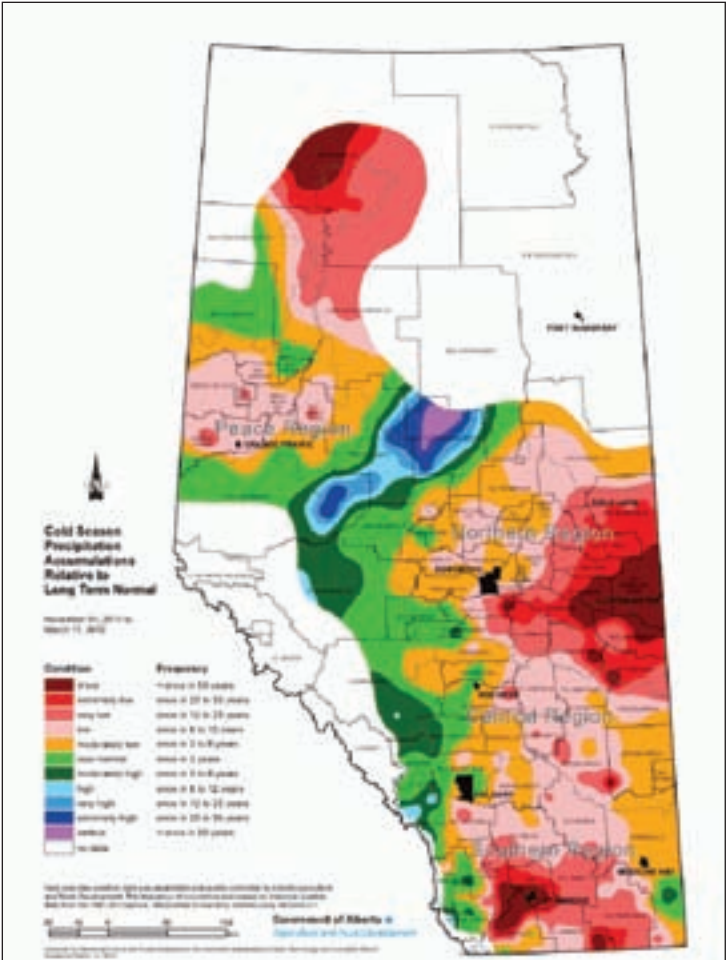
According to Environment Canada, April will see average temperatures over all of Alberta. The average conditions will then transition to above-average temperatures over southern regions in May, with near-average temperatures continuing in the more northern regions.

It does look like it will be a fairly dry spring, according to Environment Canada, as they are calling for below-average amounts of precipitation over southern and western regions,

with only the northeast seeing near-average amounts.

Over at the *Old Farmer's Almanac*, they are still singing from the same songbook and are calling for below-average temperatures. They have been calling for this over the last five months and have yet to get it right. They are also calling for below-average precipitation. The *Canadian Farmers' Almanac* appears to be calling for near- to below-average temperatures, with above-average precipitation. They mention stormy and showery conditions several times in both April and May, along with the terms pleasant and cold a couple of times.

Finally, here at *Alberta*



This issue's map shows the precipitation across Alberta from Nov. 1 through to Mar. 11. A good portion of the province saw very little precipitation during this period. The only regions to see average to above-average amounts where the extreme western regions along with a corridor northwest of Edmonton and southeast of Grande Prairie.

Farmer, I am calling for average to above-average temperatures to continue into spring. The current medium-range weather models have been jumping back and forth between mild weather moving in and a cold snap breaking out. Lately the models have been leaning more towards the milder forecast, so I am going to go with that. Along with the mild conditions I think that Alberta will continue to see near-average precipitation, with a turn towards drier conditions in May.

Now as usual, we'll have to sit back and wait to see just what Mother Nature is going to dish up for us this year... she usually has a few things up her sleeve!

Agriculture Canada's budget chopped

DETAILS AWAITED ▶ AAFC facing major cuts but how it will affect farmers is not yet known

BY ALEX BINKLEY
AF CONTRIBUTOR/OTTAWA

Agriculture Canada will have its \$3-billion-a-year budget chopped by 10 per cent during the next few years — but details are scarce.

Both the Canadian Federation of Agriculture and Grain Growers of Canada said they wouldn't judge the budget until they learned more about how the reductions will be implemented.

"Although on the surface the cuts look large, we are reserving judgment till we have more details regarding which programs will be trimmed," said Richard Phillips, executive director of the Grains Council of Canada.

"Potentially, these widespread cuts may not touch critical areas. We will be looking for more detail where the cuts are coming from."

One of the few specifics relating to agriculture in Finance Minister Jim Flaherty's budget is that Agriculture Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency will collaborate on research.

His organization will be watching to see if this move "will translate into more agriculture research and scientists on the ground," said Phillips.

"Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada was one of 10 departments to see cuts in the double digits," noted Ron Bonnett, president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture.

While the federation supports moves to increase efficiency in the department, if "the cuts result in hampering the success of farmers' businesses and rural communities, then this will be an area of concern we will address and will work with the government to identify solutions," said Bonnett.

"We need to maintain a strong agricultural industry and support our producers to ensure Canada continues to compete successfully within a changing global economy."

CFIA cut

The Agriculture Department's budget will be cut by nearly \$15 million in the 2012-13 fiscal year and the CFIA will have to reduce spending by \$2 million. Next year, the cuts will rise to \$158.4 million and \$56 million respectively and by the third year reach \$253 million and \$56.1 million. A government spokesman said the combined \$2.6-billion budget allocation would become permanent, although annual funding would fluctuate depending on circumstances.

Money will have to be allocated later for Growing Forward 2, which is to come into effect next year, and other programs.

The department expects to save money by consolidating the delivery of grants and contribution programs and by streamlining management of the Farm Debt Mediation Service, according to budget documents.

The Canadian Grain Commission will also receive \$44 million during the next two fiscal years while it transitions to a self-sustaining agency. The Conservative government tried to overhaul the commission when it was in a minority, but hasn't acted on the issue since winning the 2011 election.

The budget also promised expanded rural high-speed Internet service through a spectrum auction in 2013 that will impose increased service requirements on successful bidders.

While the government will cut CFIA's annual funding, it plans to allocate \$51.2 million during the next two years "to strengthen Canada's food safety system."

A spokesman said the details on both the savings and the additional safety measures would come later. The new money would go toward completing the implementation of the food safety recommendations contained in the Weatherill report on the deadly listeria outbreak of 2008 — an effort that has already resulted in the hiring of hundreds

of new inspectors and beefing up of other food safety operations.

Some farmers and food businesses might also benefit from accelerated writeoffs announced in the budget for equipment used for heat or electricity generation from farm, plant and wood waste as well as solar- and wind-powered equipment.

Despite a lot of talk in the budget about boosting research and innovation, there were no initiatives for increased agricultural research, said Bonnett.

And while tax breaks for renewable energy projects are welcome, the "CFA believes the tax support for clean energy generation needs to be expanded to include energy generated from animal waste, as well as plant residue," he said.

NEWS

IGC sees record world corn crop in 2012-13

BY NIGEL HUNT
LONDON / REUTERS

Global maize (corn) production is projected to rise to a record 900 million tonnes in 2012-13, outstripping demand for the first time since the 2008-09 season, the International Grains Council said April 2.

The IGC, in a monthly report, also cut its forecast for the global maize stocks at the end of the 2011-12 season following a lower-than-expected estimate for U.S. inventories issued by the U.S. Department of Agriculture March 30.

"The supply-and-demand outlook for maize is projected to remain quite tight in 2012-13 but a large crop, including a major upturn in the U.S.,

is expected to be not entirely absorbed by demand, leaving room for a modest rise in stocks," the IGC said in a monthly report.

U.S. farmers will plant the most corn (maize) in 75 years to cash in on higher prices, topping expectations due to surprise reductions in soybean and spring wheat sowings, according to a U.S. government report.

The IGC forecast maize stocks at the end of the 2012-13 season would rise to 129 million tonnes.

Maize consumption in 2012-13 was seen rising by around 2.2 per cent to 893 million tonnes with growth slowing following a 3.7 per cent climb in 2011-12.

The IGC projected the 2012-13 world wheat crop at 681 million tonnes, marginally above the prior month's forecast of 680 million but still shy of previous season's 696 million.

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