Provincial addresses predation
Manitoba livestock producers will see an increase in wildlife damage compensation beginning in April

BY JENNIFER PAIGE
Co-operator staff/Brandon

Manitoba livestock producers will soon see higher compensation rates for animals injured or killed by wildlife.

Beginning April 1, the maximum value for domestic animals killed or injured by natural predators will increase from $2,000 to $3,000.

"Creating an environment for producers to succeed in Manitoba is vital to building strong rural communities in our province. Financial stability, especially during production shortfalls, provides an important level of support to the people who contribute greatly to Manitoba's economy," said Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Ron Kostyshyn during a presentation at Manitoba Ag Days Jan. 19.

The Wildlife Damage Compensation Program is cost shared between the federal and provincial governments and is administered by the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation.

More crop insurance coverage for less in 2016
Grade guarantees will be introduced for feed wheats, including Faller, Prosper and Elgin ND

BY ALLAN DAWSON
Co-operator staff/Brandon

Manitoba farmers will get higher crop insurance coverage in 2016 and pay less for it, Agriculture Minister Ron Kostyshyn told Ag Days attendees Jan. 19.

"Premium rates will decrease by an average of about 11 per cent compared to last year's premium rates and this is due to the removal of the high 1989 (crop insurance) losses from 25 years ago..." Kostyshyn said.

"When combined with the average increase in coverage this results in a four per cent average decline in premium per acre."

Prices for insured crops are up five per cent on average. When combined with an average two per cent increase in probable yields, it results in a seven per cent increase in insurance coverage.

Other changes include a new grade guarantee for feed wheat, the option to insure higher-generation pedigreed seed and test plots, the addition of some vegetable crops, expansion of the Pasture Days Insurance Pilot Program and higher payouts for livestock destroyed by wildlife.

"We all know business risk management programs are an essential tool when we talk about agriculture," Kostyshyn said. "We continue to improve upon it in a co-operative way with the federal government, provincial government and producers."

Crop insurance premiums are based on a 25-year rolling average of loss experience, Craig Thomson, Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation’s vice-president of insurance explained in an interview.

"If we have a good year, like this year, it’s a positive loss experience," he said.

"This year we dropped off a bad year (1989 when crops suffered because of drought) and picked up a good one and that makes for a positive impact on our premium rates."

Over all, the dollar value of insured crops is up. Red spring wheat is flat, oats are down 12 per cent, barley is up 23 per cent, canola is up 14 per cent, soybeans are down three per cent and corn is up 27 per cent.

There will be a grade guarantee for some of the new higher-yielding American Dark Northern Springs wheats, as well as feed wheats in the Canada Western General Purpose (CWGP) class.

Grade guarantees
As of April 1 varieties designated as Canada Western Interim Wheat (CWIW) will have
A gritty new tool in the war against weeds

Weed and feed your crop with blasted soybean meal

By Shannon Van Rooy
Managing Editor
204-792-4382
lvan@fbcpublishing.com

Crops

Soybeans tell the salinity tale

The crop has limited tolerance for saline soils

By Cory Willcox
Farm Media
204-954-1456
cory@fbcpublishing.com

LIVESTOCK

A new cattle code

Dehorning and castrating older animals now require pain control

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READER’S PHOTO

Hand-held weed blasting unit used to control weeds in organic plots.

PHOTO: SAMUEL VARTMAN

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CROPS

Precision agriculture

From robotic tractors to big data, it’s making a difference on your farm

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STAFF

Researchers with the University of Illinois have come up with a new tactic in the war against weeds: abrasive weeding.

"Abrasive weeding," a strategy that may prove most useful for small-scale organic growers, is proving to be "surprisingly effective," university researchers say in a release.

In conjunction with plastic mulch, abrasive weeding reduced final weed biomass by 69 to 97 per cent compared to non-weeded control plots, said agronomist Samuel Wortman.

Abrasive weeding uses an air compressor to blast weed seedlings with organic grit. In the University of Illinois study, grit was applied through a hand-held siphon-fed sand-blasting unit connected to a gas-powered air compressor, the release said. It was housed down crop rows with a walk-behind tractor.

A number of grit sources were tried including walnut shells, granulated maize cob, green-sand, and soybean meal.

Wortman said he found no significant differences between the grit types in terms of efficacy. "When it leaves the nozzle, it’s at least Mach 1 (767 m.p.h.)," Wortman noted. "The stuff comes out so fast, it doesn’t really matter what the shape of the particle is."

Researchers said it is important to use this type of treatment on transplanted crops that are substantially larger than the weed seedlings. But despite some shredding damage to the crops, yields were 33 to 44 per cent greater yields than in non-weeded control plots.

An additional benefit of weed blasting is the potential for growers to use organic fertilizers, such as soybean meal, as blasting material. "We expect that abrasive weeding could contribute between 35 and 105 kg nitrogen per hectare to soil fertility," the idea that a grower could both fertilize and kill weeds in a single pass is appealing, but the researchers cautioned that it is still unknown whether the fertilizer would be available for plant uptake within critical windows.

Testing is continuing on different horticultural crops, including broccoli and kale, with and without additional weed control methods. "Early results suggest that the presence of polyethylene mulch or biodegradable plastic mulch strongly enhances the success of weed blasting, as compared with straw mulch and bare soil," the release said.

Because ricocheting particles can pose a risk to the applicator, Wortman advises using protective eyewear.

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Precision agriculture

From robotic tractors to big data, it’s making a difference on your farm

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www.manitobacooperator.ca

EDITOR / FGC EDITORIAL DIRECTOR
Lori Ross
law@fbcpublishing.com
204-744-6572
MANAGING EDITOR
Dave Bailet
bailetd@fbcpublishing.com
204-744-6571

NEWS STAFF / REPORTERS
Allie Dvoracek
ald@fbcpublishing.com
204-455-2364
Warren Borcher
torcherw@fbcpublishing.com
204-666-4675
Lanae Dvoracek
ldvoracek@fbcpublishing.com
204-744-6575
Jennifer Hoyle
jhoyle@fbcpublishing.com
204-744-6496

ADVERTISING SERVICES
Carmela Haining
Monday to Friday: 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Rm 204-944-5763
Fax 204-291-4348

CIRCULATION MANAGER
Heather D’Alessandro
dallessand@fbcpublishing.com
204-744-5770

PUBLISHER
Lynda Tripp
ltrip@fbcpublishing.com
204-944-5774

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES
Steve Bouchard
204-744-5779
sbouchard@fbcpublishing.com

S E N I O R A D V E R T I S E M E N T S ADVERTISING SERVICES

Carmela Haining
Monday to Friday: 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
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Fax 204-291-4348

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Farmers pay but have no say

One industry official says farmers cover most of the Canadian Grain Commissions budget but the commission isn’t accountable to farmers

BY ALLAN DAWSON

Farmers pay for Canadian Grain Commission (CGC) operations so they should have a bigger say in how it operates, says Rick White, the chief executive officer of the Canadian Canola Growers Association (CCGA).

“It’s (CGC) a Government of Canada agency and farmers are paying full freight on it now (because of cost recovery). It’s one thing to go to full cost recovery, but full cost recovery with absolutely no (farmer) control and no representation around that government agency is not right.”

The CGC, which regulates Canada’s grain industry and ensures grain quality, has been recovering 91 per cent of its annual operating costs of $66 million to $70 million through user fees since Aug. 1, 2011. While most of the CGC’s revenue is collected from grain companies, including a $1.80—a tonne out clause on grain exports, it’s widely accepted that companies pass the charges back to farmers.

The current contributor around $5.2 million a year to fund the CGC’s Grain Research Laboratory, which does work seen as benefitting Canada.

In an interview, White suggested the CGC become a Special Operating Agency (SOA), but the commission is up to the full-time chief executive officer and board of directors. But it never happened.

The Harper government brought forward a similar plan, along with other proposed changes to the Canada Grain Act and CGC in several bills that were never passed. However, in its last bill on the matter, C-48 introduced more than a year ago, the government dropped the proposal.

“You just can’t do that,” White said. “It’s not accountable to farmers and it’s the farmers who pay the bill.”

The other option is for the government to cover most of the CGC’s operating costs as it once did, he said.

Unsuccessful lobby

Farmers and grain companies argue unsustainably that since many CGC services are compulsory and benefit Canada’s economy, the government should pay for them.

Interestingly, the CGC became a Special Operating Agency in 1991 under the Mulroney Progressive Conservative government.

It said the change would give the CGC more flexibility, including the ability to borrow funds.

Last week a CGC official said he didn’t know when the agency, which reports to the agriculture minister, ceased being an SOA.

In the late 1990s, the Chrétien gov- ernment proposed scrapping the commis sioner model in favour of a presi dent-CEO and board of directors. But it never happened.

The government also planned to cover most of the CGC’s operating costs, but that’s a tough one to do on the fly,” he added.

The former government also planned to require feed mills, which currently are not part of the program, to participate.

Rick White, CEO of the Canadian Canola Growers Association, says since farmers pay most of the Canadian Grain Commission’s budget, the commission should be more directly accountable to farmers.

PHOTO: ALLAN DAWSON

Organic producers could see net profit levels range from $100 to $300 per acre

Know your cost per bushel, not just per acre, says farm management specialist

BY LAURA RANCE AND LORRAINE STEVENSON

Organic production is one way for small farmers to improve their viability, an analyst told a seminar at Manitoba Ag Days in Brandon.

Roy Arnott, who does annual cost of production budgets for MFRD, said the gross return over operating costs in conventional agriculture is a margin of 20 to 40 per cent. That margin is what farmers have left over to pay for land, equipment, and living costs.

In organic production, this margin is typically 50 to 60 per cent.

That increased profitability level equals increased viability for smaller farms,” he said. "They are able to pull out a higher profit margin."

Based on estimated costs and returns for various crops in 2016, Arnott said organic producers could see net profit levels range from $100 to $300 per acre.

For conventionally produced crops, these net profits range between $10 to $50 per acre.

What’s important is that farmers can control their own numbers and know their operating and fixed costs.

“I firmly believe that cost-of-production planning is a key point of any farm operation,” Arnott said. “It’s something you have to do, whether you’re conventional or organic,” he said.

“Cost per acre is great, but you don’t sell acres. You have to know cost per bushel.”

Arnott presented the organic production budgets for 2015, encouraging farmers to use provincial budgets as a reference to calculate their own farm’s cost of production per bushel.

He also flagged a new spreadsheet, the MFRD farm management calculators, now available through MFRD.

“ ‘It’s based on the COP so it’s simple and easy to use and easy to learn how to use,” he said. “It help you to figure out that all-import ant cost-per-bushel basis plus a per-acre and total-one basis.”

It looks at a bunch of different things, the break-even, margins. It can help you track your grain sales and help you calculate your break-even on your remaining unsold bushels,” he said. “Even for some one good with numbers in their head, that’s a tough one to do on the fly,” he added.

The new spreadsheet also includes a ‘what if’ model for knowing the implications of decreased yields or prices as the season advances, or how equip ment purchases, or land pur chasing, or rents will affect the bottom line.


lorraine@fpubco.com

Laura@fpubco.com

The Manitoba Co-operator | January 28, 2016

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lorraine@fpubco.com

Laura@fpubco.com
Social change is never easy

January 28, 2016 marks a significant milestone in the history of this province. A century ago Manitoba became the first government in Canada to allow women to vote.

Many of us with roots in Prairie settlement have our own family stories to tell. In my own case, it was learning through distant relatives that my great-grandmother, Mrs. W.H. Guest (Elizabeth), was one of the signatories to a petition to government in 1894.

Laura Rance
Editor

Let science speak without bias

Objective, rigorous science stands on its own merits

BY BRIAN RANSON

I think the Manitoba Co-operator is an advocate for the theory that observed warming over the past century is dangerous climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions, primarily resulting from agricultural use of fossil fuels and cattle farming.

However, according to the theory of anthropogenic global warming (AGW) I have never read or heard the scientific evidence that would support the claim that AGW is occurring.

Cam Dahl’s “What does ‘science-based mean?’ poses an excellent question whether one is considering pest management regulations or greenhouse emissions control standards. Readers will have heard that the scientific consensus is that AGW is occurring.

Cam Dahl is the executive director of the Manitoba Department of Agriculture and Rural Initiatives. He is also a member of the Manitoba Climate Change Council.

Brian Ranson is a former MLA and Manitoba finance minister. He also served as chairman of the Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board. He lives near Woodlands.

OUR HISTORY: January 1991

The Manitoba Co-operator | January 28, 2016

I've ad from our January 17, 1991 issue reminds us when the Prairie Pools operated XCAN, their own domestic and export marketing company.

The front-page story that week reported that Grains Minister Charlie Mayer had announced that legislation would be passed to implement two new support programs, GRIP and NISA, for 1991-92. They were necessary because new and looser regulations on grain trade war, and speaking to the annual meeting of the Western Canadian Wheat Growers, Mayer called for the Western Canadian Wheat Growers to boycott European goods in retaliation for EU subsidies.

The support programs required provincial participation, and the Manitoba Agriculture Minister Glenn Findlay was reportedly not as effusive as the federal announcement had been made without consulting the provinces. GRIP participation would tighten provincial finances, so to make room in the ag budget, Manitoba axed a $9-per-tonne livestock feed subsidy.

Brian Ranson is a former MLA and Manitoba finance minister. He also served as chairman of the Manitoba Hydro-Electric Board. He lives near Woodlands.
Because I love you

Two widows discuss how forward planning helped their families carry on following the farm accidents that claimed their husbands

Jay Fox and Brian Van Camp both died in farm accidents involving loaders right before Christmas, leaving their families in shock and still trying to run their farms. Jay and Angie were Outstanding Young Farmers in Manitoba and leaders in the cattle industry. Brian and Maggie were also leaders in their community and agriculture. This is an excerpt from a longer article in which these women talk openly about how they’ve kept their farms operating and emerged happy…yes, happy. The complete article can be found on the Manitoba Co-operator website www.manitobacooperator.ca.

MAGGIE: When my husband died, I was 46 years old, had three teenage children and owned a 100-acre farm with a big old farmhouse. We had 23,000 chickens in the barn and shares in my husband’s family’s farm. I also worked part time as an associate editor with Country Guide and had been happily married for 21 years. Suddenly, I was a widow and all these blessings became overwhelming.

Do not underestimate grief and do not overestimate you or your family’s ability to function when someone dies or has an accident on your farm. All I knew was one thing: I was not going to let that moment define me. But, I needed a way out of it. Preplanning gave me that road map.

What I found was that if I knew exactly what I had to do on any given day, then I could do it and it gave me strength.

In the morning I’d write down a to-do list for the farm and for my family, and included a two or three what I called DAs (death administration).

The funeral home also gave me a list of personal changes, I was executor to my husband’s will and I had to switch over the farm businesses. There was a mountain of paperwork — like cancelling passports, reading insurance policies, switching the name on the business accounts — but I found I could only do a couple of things a day. It took me almost a year to get through most of that stuff.

My sister also helped me write a list of treats that I got to do once I had accomplished the hard stuff on the to-do list — things like reading a book, going for a walk, having lunch with a friend, a nice cup of tea. It was a daily reminder to take care of myself in all of the muck.

Third list

I had a private third list. At night I’d write down three things that gave me hope.

Simple things like my daughter playing her guitar, or the sunrise I saw on the way to the barn. Things that made me feel alive and grateful.

Good planning gives you time and choices. That’s a gift you want to leave your family, especially with a farm business.

Angie Fox and I call it, “Getting your crap in order,” because both of us had experienced all the crappy paperwork and fallout from the death of our husbands. However, as we started talking and sharing stories, we became more and more grateful to our husbands for being prepared.

Attached to our “Because I love you” list that I hope you begin filling out right away. Every person and farm is different, but it’s a starting point.

ANGIE: When you lose someone you love, you get lots of advice. Everyone can relate to death; it happens and we can’t avoid it, but sometimes it hits a lot closer to home.

There’s a big difference between the executor of Great-Aunt Edna’s estate and planning life after losing your husband.

Farm family businesses are complicated matters because everyone is grieving. For me, it took all the strength I had to get through each day. I had four kids who needed me and they were grieving too.

But I also had a ranch: I had cows to feed, waterers to thaw, the feed, lot pens were full of calves, the culls needed to be shipped and I needed to take care of the business.

Life has a way of continuing, even if you don’t want it to. So how do you carry on? What do you do to prepare?

Absolutely everyone needs to have a plan. It’s not only responsible, but a gift to those you leave behind.

I became a widow at 33 years old, but when it came to the matters of a funeral I knew what Jay wanted…

I knew what songs he loved…

I knew what his dad, me and the other kids as a family and tell the kids to love you list.” Get your business in order. And most importantly, never give up on happiness.

Like Angie, I’ve never felt so loved as I did after my husband died. The community, my family, our church and especially my friends carried us. Although we were overwhelmed with offers to help on the farm, not everyone can easily step in to those roles. It would have taken longer to train them than for us to do the work.

And I really couldn’t afford for something to go wrong because someone simply didn’t know you, see, our farms are specialized and we were missing not only a labourer but, a manager and a key decision maker. Death can put a farm on hold.

So close your eyes. If you died right now who could step in immediately and keep things running?

ANGIE: Maggie and I want to encourage you to be brave. Talk about your wishes, complete your “Because I love you list.” Get your business in order. And most importantly, never give up on happiness.

The Fox family: (l-r) Charlee, Major, Angie, Porter, Devon (hat). PHOTO: JANE LUCAS PHOTOGRAPHY

The Van Camps: (l-r) Male, Kate, Maggie, Matthew and Pepper the dog. PHOTO: JANE LUCAS PHOTOGRAPHY

SUGGESTED HEADINGS FOR YOUR OWN FAMILYS’ “BECAUSE I LOVE YOU” LIST:

- The help: Short-term help, longer-term help;
- Standard operating procedures;
- Passwords, location of keys;
- Lists and location of important documents: RSRP, TSPFA, and other investments, insurance policies, bank accounts, business agreements, lease agreements, mortgages, vehicle ownership;
- Names of personal trusted adviser and mentor;
- Professional contacts: accountant, lawyer, banker, electric, dentist, chiropractor, financial adviser, processor, elevator manager, commodities broker, input suppliers, veterinarian, equipment dealers and repair vendors;
- The Fit-Kit: locks, mechanics, electrician, plumber, furnace, septic, water, security systems;
- Legal power of attorney, executor, guardian, organ donation, cremation, funeral arrangements.
a grade guarantee of No. 2 CWIW. Currently, Fuller, Prosper and Elgin ND are in this class. The Canadian Grain Commission (CGC) has announced Aug. 1 the CWIW class will be the same for Fuller, Prosper and Elgin ND.

‘We heard changes are coming,’ Thomson said. ‘We’ve taken the approach we will react after the change has happened. It’s dangerous to try and insure something based on speculation.

All other varieties insured as “feed wheat” will have a grade guarantee of No. 1 CWGP. (The CGC has announced it’s ending this year the CWGP class and replacing it with the Canada Western Special Purpose class.)

If harvested production grades below the guarantees a grade factor is used to reduce the production counted for claim purposes.

The insured dollar value for feed wheat is based on a weighted average of the forecasted market returns for the three grades the producer is insuring separate from insured production.

If the producer decides not to insure such plots the RED can be insured as feed wheat,” MASC says. In a summary of changes for 2016.

Winter wheat
Several years ago the CGC moved the Red Winter class to the CWGP class. It’s actually worth.

Last year, Manitoba farmers grew almost 30,000 acres of CWGP, making it the second most popular winter wheat behind Emerson at 78,000 acres.

Starting this year farmers can choose to not insure high-genera- tion winter wheat plots (breeder, select or foundation seed) and plots sown for other than production if a producer decides not to insure such plots the associated production must be kept separate.

The list of crops eligible for the Hail Insurance Program, MASC says.

New direct-seeding deadline for canola is Jan. 25.

The maximum coverage for straw- berries, which is now considered an aggregate risk, has been increased to $3,000 per acre from $2,000.

Hail Insurance is now available on winter wheat, pumpkins, peppers and leeks, which are also optional CHHO crops.

Basic hail insurance premiums are slightly higher in certain risk areas due to the relatively high losses in 2015.

Insurance credit
Starting April 1, cattle producers can get a one-time interest rate credit of 0.25 per cent when financing livestock through MASC’s Stocker Loan program if they purchase a Western Livestock Price Insurance Program (WLPIP) policy, Kostyshyn announced Jan. 18 in Brandon.

‘This interest rate cut is an effort on our part to get people to think about the Western Livestock Price Insurance Program,’ Thomson said.

‘It’s a good combination.’

Introduced in 2014, the WLPIP for cattle and hogs provides Manitoba farmers with protection against price risk. The program has been working, Thomson said.

‘We think we’ve paid out around $600,000 in 2015, which is pretty substantial,’ he said. MASC, which started offering licensed pedigreed seed inspection services last year, will again in 2016, Thomson said.

Most crop insurance premiums are shared 40 per cent by farmers, 36 per cent by the federal government and 24 per cent by the province.

MASC’s premiums rates for each crop are determined by the crop’s designated Risk Area and claim his- tory, which establishes eligibility for any premium discount or surcharge.

Excess Moisture Insurance not in jeopardy despite multimillion deficit
BY ALLAN DAWSON
Co-operator

Manitoba’s Excess Moisture Insurance (EMI) program has a $20 million deficit after 10 years of operation, but it’s not under threat of being scrapped.

“We know we’ve got to have a way to do this and possibly make some tweaks in the way it works, but there’s no panic at all,” Craig Thomson, Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation’s (MASC) vice-president of insur- ance, said in an interview last week. “We’re not going to say ‘we’ve got to drop the program.’ That’s not the case at all. We look at it the other way—it is working. People have collected from it because there have been some wet years.

Earlier this month a report released by the Agriculture Risk Management Review Task Force flagged the EMI deficit, stressing EMI is important to Manitoba farmers and that the federal and provincial governments that help fund it must look at ways of ensuring it’s sustainable.

The task force was appointed by Agriculture Minister Ron Kostyshyn last year to look at ways to mitigate the impact of climate change on farm support programs and on farmers.

Actuarial soundness
EMI is a Third-Party Agreement—part of Agrimarketing in Manitoba—and must actuarially sound. When deficits grow, normally premiums rise and cover- age falls. But the task force noted higher premiums might discourage farmers less prone to excess moisture from using the program, which according to the task force “is not viable without universal participation.”

‘Are there methods of dealing with that? That’s what we’ve got to come up with. We don’t want to put a huge burden on producers and governments to bring the deficit into a normal level,’ German said.

Most of the 10 last years have been wet in many parts of the province. A couple of dry springs would shrink the deficit, Thomson said.

Last year 56 million was the payout under EMI on 9,700 acres, after the 10-year average was 227,000 acres. That’s down significantly from 2004 when 63 million was paid on 795,000 acres too wet to seed.

The report was 2019 when $162 million was paid on 2.7 million acres. Thomson said.

The final figures haven’t been calculated, but Thomson said lower crop insurance payouts in total 2015 will add to the program’s surplus. Although there were 63 million in reinsurance payouts on a million acres—mostly on canola and canola May — producers market data will well below the 10-year average “so we will have a surplus to add to the fund balance.”

Thomson said.

In 2014, MASC paid out $170.2 million in claims result- ing in $32 million being added to the program’s reserve fund.

When the reserve funds add to the target range of one to 1.5 times pure premium MASC reduces the premium rate, which leaves the producer premium, which is the case in 2016, Thomson said.

We know we’re going to have to review it (EMI) and possibly make some tweaks in the way it works, but there’s no panic at all.”

Craig Thomson, Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation’s (MASC) vice-president of insurance, said in an interview last week.

“We don’t want to say ‘we’ve got to drop the program.’ That’s not the case at all. We look at it the other way—it is working. People have collected from it because there have been some wet years.

Thomson.

The MBP has been lobbying the province of Manitoba and not just in Manitoba, it is some- thing that is having a global impact,” said Melinda Ger- man, manager of general management of the MBP. “One of the biggest argu- ments we have always had is that when producers are losing calves to wildlife, they are not being paid for what that animal is actually worth.”

“The MBP has been lobbying for better compensation for predator losses for years. We have a working group made up of government folks and industry, which has been looking at solutions to this. We have been going with different ideas and proposals about what needs to happen because we do think it’s a significant challenge here,” she said.

Losses caused by wildlife are costly and could have major im-pacts on an operation especially when profit margins are thin.

“Seeing this response from government is very significant and very much appreciated,” said German.

While the increase will be welcomed by the industry, Ger- man says that there is still more that could be done.

“One of the things that we have always discussed going about milling is maybe looking at ways to tie losses to what is ac- tually happening in the market and having a bit of a fluctuating response,” said German. “We have too kind of a process here in the Western Livestock Price Insur- ance that might not recognize the impact of an im- mense, so it is an option.”


PREDATION Continued from page 1

According to Kostyshyn, the hike in compensation has been made in response to producer feedback and is aimed to better reflect the actual weight of the animal.

The province will also adjust compensation for young ani- mals, increasing the amount to reflect the estimated value at the weaning practical weaning weight, rather than at the time of loss.

A welcomed increase
Predation and compensation rates were highly discussed issues at the Manitoba Beef Producers (MBP) district meetings, which were held throughout the province this past fall.

‘Predation has been a huge issue for us in Manitoba and not just in Manitoba, it is some-
Province lifts limitation on pasture insurance

The pasture insurance pilot program that was limited to 90 producers last year is now open to the entire province.

BY JENNIFER PAIGE

Producers who graze their cattle have a new option for protecting themselves from underperforming pastures.

Ron Kostyshyn, minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, announced January 19 that the province has lifted limitations on the pasture days insurance program.

The program is designed to compensate producers who have had to remove livestock from pasture and start supplemental feeding earlier than expected.

“We really encourage producers to take advantage of things like the pasture, price or forage insurance. These are important tools for producers to be able to utilize and mitigate some of that risk, so we were really pleased to see that program open up,” said Melinda German, general manager of Manitoba Beef Producers.

Administered through the Manitoba Agricultural Service Corporation (MASC), the program was initiated last year as a pilot project with a limit of 90 producers. It will run for the next three years with no limitation on participation.

“This is the first year we can promote it province-wide,” said Craig Thomson, vice-president of insurance operations with MASC. “We should find out if it will catch on or not.”

MASC has 18 crop insurance offices throughout the province but only promoted the pilot out of two of its offices in 2015.

“We think we’ve paid out around $600,000 in 2015, which is pretty substantial. The program is working,” said Thomson.

MASC assesses the acres entering the program and calculates how many cattle the pasture should handle for ‘X’ number of days. Over time, coverage is based on the cattle producer’s history.

Removing participation restrictions will give the province an idea of how widely the program will be and whether it is a tool it should continue to offer.

“We have seen insurance be a real hit and miss and I think that usage really depends on the demographic of the producer in the industry. For so long this industry has been self-insuring and taking care of their own business needs, so it is a big change for some producers,” said German. “But, when these tools become available to producers and the industry has the chance to provide feedback into government to improve the programs, it is a win-win in my mind.”

MASC is offering a one-time 0.25 per cent interest rate cut on its stocker loan program for producers who also purchase Western Livestock Price Insurance.

“This (interest rate cut) is an effort on our part to get people to think about the Western Livestock Price Insurance Program. It’s a good combination,” said Thomson.

The Manitoba Co-operator | January 28, 2016
Tories challenge MacAulay on chief of staff

The Conservatives’ agriculture critic alleges a ‘serious conflict of interest’

STAFF

The federal Conservatives want the House of Commons’ agriculture committee to probe the hiring of a Canadian egg-processing heiress as chief of staff to the agriculture minister.

Tory Agriculture Critic Chris Warkentin on Jan. 20 called on both Agriculture Minister Lawrence MacAulay and his new chief of staff, Mary Jean McFall, to testify before the standing agriculture committee “at the earliest opportunity.”

Warkentin, a northwestern Alberta MP, said he wants MacAulay and McFall “to explain to Canadians how the Liberal government has justified this glaring conflict of interest.”

Warkentin specifically cited McFall’s “past, present or future ties to her family’s large corporation, Burnbrae Farms, which for a period of time was also her employer.”

He also noted her 12-year stint as a director on the board of Egg Farmers of Ontario, which he described as “a lobby group representing specific industry interests relating to her family’s corporation.”

McFall, Warkentin said, has given “no adequate explanation for how she will be able to conduct herself fairly when she advises on policy or potential trade deals that may impact her family’s corporation.”

Burnbrae Farms, a producer and processor operated by the Hudson family in eastern Ontario for over 120 years, today sells eggs nationwide. McFall is a great-granddaughter of the company’s founder, Joseph Hudson.

Given McFall’s family’s “viable stake in one of Canada’s key agricultural industries, this places her and by extension your ability to exercise fair judgment into question,” Warkentin wrote in a Jan. 21 letter to MacAulay.

McFall, a lawyer by profession, served as Burnbrae’s general counsel for about three years before joining Belleville, Ont.-based law firm Templeman Menninga in 2007, working out of its offices in Brockville and Kingston, handling mainly corporate and commercial law.

McFall also ran unsuccessfully for the federal Liberals in last October’s general election in eastern Ontario’s Leeds-Grenville riding, losing to Tory incumbent Gord Brown by a spread of 3,858 votes.

“MacAulay, Warkentin said, “has not adequately assured Canadians that his chief of staff will not use her new position to advance her family’s private financial interest. How can hardworking farm families trust that their minister is receiving unbiased advice?”

Senior adviser

In federal cabinet ministers’ offices, the chief of staff is considered the minister’s most senior political adviser, and manages the minister’s office, including budgets and staffing. The chief is also the minister’s liaison with senior department officials, the prime minister’s office and other ministers’ chiefs of staff.

McFall’s “ability to make an unbiased decision when a specific policy may affect Canada’s egg industry immediately comes into question,” Warkentin wrote to MacAulay.

“The public, Warkentin added, “should know whether McFall has committed to recuse herself from any discussion on trade deals, supply management or the supply-managed egg industry.”

According to political news website Politics, McFall started as MacAulay’s chief of staff in late December.

WHAT’S UP

Please forward your agricultural events to daveb@fbcpublishing.com or call 204-944-5762.

Feb. 3: Brookedale River Agricultural Conference, 8:30 a.m., Brookedale River Community Hall, 320 Veterans Lane, Beaupre. For more info call MAFRD at 204-268-6094.

Feb. 3-4: Manitoba Swine Seminar, Victoria Inn, 1808 Wellington Ave., Winnipeg. For more info call 204-475-8585 or visit www.manitobawwwswine.ca.

Feb. 4-5: Manitoba Beef Producers annual general meeting, Victoria Inn, 3550 Victoria Ave, Brandon. For more info or to register visit www.robbeef.ca.

Feb. 5: Farm Credit Canada Ag Outlook 2016, 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Victoria Inn, 3550 Victoria Ave, Brandon. For more info or to register visit www.fcc-fac.ca/en/ events/ag-outlook.html.

Feb. 10: Manitoba Sustainable Energy Association (ManSEA) conference and annual meeting, 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., Manitoba Agriculture GO Centre, 1229 Queens Ave, Brandon. For more info visit www.mansea.org or contact wdigby@mymts.net or 204-727-1394.


Feb. 14-16: Western Canadian Holistic Management Conference, Victoria Inn, 1808 Wellington Ave., Winnipeg. For more info or to register visit www.wchmc.ca.

March 3: Manitoba Turkey Producers annual meeting, Victoria Inn, 1808 Wellington Ave., Winnipeg. For more info call 204-489-4835.

Tory Agriculture Critic Chris Warkentin calls on Agriculture Minister Lawrence MacAulay and his new chief of staff, Mary Jean McFall, to testify before the standing agriculture committee “at the earliest opportunity.”

Mary Jean McFall PHOTO: LINDSAY MULLINS/LIBERAL CA
Higher grain revenue on Canada’s Prairies helped lead to record full-year revenues and offset a lower fourth-quarter gross for Canadian Pacific Railway (CP) — as the company warned of substantial job cuts ahead.

The railway on Jan. 21 reported overall net income of $1.352 billion on record revenue of $6.712 billion for 2015, down from $1.476 billion on $6.62 billion in fiscal 2014. For its fourth quarter (Q4) ending Dec. 31, CP booked $319 million in profit on $1.687 billion in revenue, down from $451 million on $1.76 billion in the year-earlier period.

CEO Hunter Harrison noted the company also posted a “record-low” full-year operating ratio of 60 per cent, for which he credited the company’s “committed, hard-working employees across the network.”

Against “challenging” economic conditions and lower commodity prices, he said, “we continue to focus on what we can control — lowering costs, creating efficiencies and improving service.”

CP on Jan. 21 reported moving about 285,000 carloads of Canadian grain in fiscal 2015, down from 291,000 in 2014. Of that grain handle, about 80,000 carloads were moved in 2015’s Q4, up from 75,000 in the year-earlier period.

Despite the lower handle, CP booked Canadian grain revenue of $1.068 billion for the year (up from $988 million in 2014) for revenue per carload of $3,750, up 11 per cent. For its 2015 Q4, CP reported Canadian grain revenue of $296 million (up from $267 million in the 2014 Q4) for revenue per carload of $3,707, up four per cent.

Among its other sectors, CP reported revenue per carload of $3,326 on U.S. grain for 2015, up 14 per cent from 2014, brought in $1.35 billion in net income in 2015, down from $1.476 billion on revenue of $6.712 billion for 2015, up 14 per cent from 2014, up five per cent, for revenue per carload of $4,410, up 16 per cent. In its potash sector, CP moved 124,000 carloads in 2015, up five per cent, while revenue per carload was down two per cent at $2,887.

In the fertilizers and sulphur sector, CP moved 62,000 carloads in 2015, up five per cent, for revenue per carload of $4,410, up 16 per cent. In its potash sector, CP moved 124,000 carloads in 2015, up five per cent, while revenue per carload was down two per cent at $2,887.

‘Regrettable’

Reuters on Jan. 21 reported CP’s separate announcement that it will press forward with plans to streamline operations and cut back its workforce in 2016 by nearly 1,000 people, or about seven per cent.

“This is a story of recognizing up front the things that you cannot control, which is the economy, and then doing something about those that you can, like your operating performance.”

Last year they eliminated 1,800 staff, now they’re putting another 1,000 out of work despite the fact that they brought in $3.35 billion in net income in 2015,” Brian Stevens, Unifor’s national rail director, said Jan. 21 in a separate release.

Unifor quoted Transport Canada as issuing an order to CP last week citing working conditions for train crews that “create excessive fatigue” and seeking changes to practices that pose “an immediate threat to safe railway operations.”

CP managers, Stevens said, “were told that some of their crews were being worked to the point of exhaustion and now they plan further staff reductions.”
Some cattle producers balk at volatility in futures

Shakiness in energy and equities leaves markets erratic

Volatile futures markets are causing many Manitoba cattle producers to hold back their supply of feedlot cattle, according to some, but not all, market observers.

"Volumes were low, so I wasn't really able to establish a decent market this week," said Dave Nickel, a producer at Gladstone Auction Mart, which reported a 184-head sale on Jan. 19.

Cattle futures have been erratic after strengthening at the start of the year, and producers are waiting to see where those prices will head next.

"The futures are pounding back and forth and everybody is kind of unsure what they're doing," he said.

Robin Hill of Heartland Livestock Services at Virden said volumes increased at his 2,809-head auction on Jan. 20, but added that volatility in the futures market is causing some uncertainty among buyers.

"One day it's up two or three points, and then the next day it's down the same, so we had some highs and lows," he said.

Prices at local auctions are stronger than in December, and buyers were aggressive this week, especially at the 808-lb. level, he added.

"As far as I'm concerned, there are lots of buyers for cattle, it's just the uncertainty about the volatility in the markets."

Futures markets were turbulent at the start of the year, but demand concerns from China and general instability in outside markets — such as crude oil, equities and currencies — have contributed to the futures market's challenge. "The futures are pounding back and forth on a daily basis," said Perillat.

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"We will not allow a domestic shortage to take place," Bury told local radio station Radio 10. "If some region requests authorization to import, we will grant permission."
The Bank of Canada took centre stage Jan. 20 with its decision not to lower interest rates. Bank governor Stephen Poloz told reporters the decision was based partly on the federal government’s promise to boost infrastructure spending, along with the state of the weakened dollar.

Jan. 21 saw the loonie record its largest single-day jump in recent memory, which weighed down canola. Large funds stayed mostly on the sidelines and farmer selling held steady while crush margins levelled off.

By the end of the week the volatility had cooled off and canola was back into a nearer-normal trading range.

In the U.S., CBOT (Chicago Board of Trade) soybeans recorded minor losses during the holiday-shortened week as demand worries entered the market. Soy oil prices and slumping stock markets pressured CBOT soy. However, dryness in key regions of Brazil tempered the losses.

Corn futures posted solid gains for the week as export sales were better than expected. Speculative funds also engaged in short-covering, which helped corn futures hold their ground. On the other side of the coin, prices also felt the weight of the crude oil meltdown as demand for edible oils waned.

Wheat futures were a mixed bag as weather in the Black Sea region and U.S. Plains threatened winter wheat supplies. Lower oil prices and slumping stock markets pressured the vegetable oil market generally as energy markets churn.

The oilseed complex was triggered in Minneapolis, off of which the Canadian dollar dropped to 68 U.S. cents at one point during the week before rallying above 70 cents. Global markets, including the TXS and Dow Jones, were also roiled by the plunging price of oil. The faltering state of China’s economy exacerbated the situation. Both stock markets lost hundreds of points early in the week before stabilizing and climbing higher by week’s end.

The vegetable oil market was generally lower, with palm oil exports out of Malaysia dropping significantly, according to cargo surveyor data.

While the loonie’s downward action makes canola a bargain in many buyers’ eyes, it still depends on what country they’re in and how their own currency is being affected. For instance, Russia’s ruble has been pressured more severely than the loonie, giving that country’s wheat exporters a definite advantage.

Volumes were on the light side due to the shorter week as U.S. markets were closed for Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Speculators took the time to briefly enter the market and advance their positions.

Florida soft wheat contracts were taken on a wild ride for the week ended Jan. 22, ultimately posting modest gains in a market that was pushed up and down by volatile energy markets and subsequent currency action.

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New requirements in place to mitigate pain during specific procedures

Provincial extension veterinarian says the new Code of Practice requirements make calves easier to handle and typically allow faster recovery due to reduced stress levels.

By Jennifer Paige

Changes to the National Beef Code of Practice, which took effect earlier this month, place new requirements on producers to provide pain control for dehorning and castration in cattle that are older than nine months.

“At the stage where the horn bud is not attached to the bone, we do not actually attach it to its skull until it reaches three to four months old. ‘At the stage where the horn bud is not attached to the bone, we do not have to use pain medication, you are welcome to, but it is not required according to the Animal Care Act,’” said Tomlinson.

Benefits

Tomlinson said there are a number of benefits to making these management changes. Calves are more comfortable and easier to handle, they travel better, suckle more and typically recover faster because of reduced stress levels.

“There are certainly some economic benefits and reasons why we should be doing this,” said Tomlinson. “Stress caused by pain affects the animal’s cortisol levels and that causes a decrease in immune function, lowering the ability to fight off infection, it also decreases weight gain and has an impact on reproductive hormones.”

Additionally, having these standards in place aids in addressing consumer concerns over animal welfare and provides sector groups with more material when talking with the public about production methods.

“By and large, producers are the best stewards of the land and the best people to care for those animals, but a lot people don’t see that or don’t understand what we do. So, they ask questions around these painful procedures and around the management of pain,” said German. “The code is a really important document, not only because it helps producers see the goals but it is also a document that other groups look at. It helps us tell the story of what we are doing in our management practices to those outside of the sector.”

Staggered implementation

The age requirement to provide pain control for dehorning and castration will be adjusted again, from nine months to six months, on January 1, 2018.

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“That will give us some science-based data that will tell us how much pain medication we really need in these calves. We certainly need more research on this and there is also a need to develop more user-friendly medication options.”

The Beef Cattle Research Association has also released a video explaining the new requirements, which also includes information on various pain control products. www.beefresearch.ca/pain

writer@jenniferpaige@gmail.com
Farmers have ramped up construction of swine barns in Iowa, home to about a third of U.S. hogs, as they take advantage of cheap feed and demand for pork from countries including China and Mexico.

Some are also looking to add space for the heavier pigs now favored by customers and to cater for extra piglets as sows become more fertile, experts said.

But with hog prices near six-year lows and profits slashed from 2014 when porcine epidemic diarrhea virus (PEDv) ravaged supplies, adding numbers to the U.S. herd could cut incomes further this year, experts say.

Last year, Iowa farmers built 280 barns capable of holding more than 1,250 head, over 60 percent more than 2014 but shy of the 347 constructed in 2012, according to data recently released by the state’s Department of Natural Resources.

“There is a demand from our customer for heavier market weights, five to 10 pounds heavier than two years ago,” said Allen Whiley, who oversees raising hogs at Iowa Select Farms.

“At the same time our sow productivity has increased, meaning there are more pigs weaned and marketed per sow,” he added. U.S. sows on average gave birth to a record 10.53 piglets in a litter in the September-November quarter.

Josh Flint, a spokesman with pig farmer and pork producer The Maschhoffs, said the company had contracted with some Iowa family farmers for new finishing barns.

The company, which says it produces enough pork to feed 16 million Americans a year, did not expand in 2015 and has no plans to do so this year.

The U.S. hog inventory hit 68.3 million head as of Dec. 1, the highest since tracking began in 1988 when the U.S. Department of Agriculture started collecting data.

“Generally, I think the farmer who partners with us to build a finishing barn is looking to diversify their source of farm income,” said Flint.

Farmers view building a hog barn as an effective way to increase income without having to expand corn and soybean operations.

But pork profits are already weak and could head lower this year, Iowa State University economist Lee Schulz said.

ISU estimates that Iowa producers who take hogs from birth to slaughter made a profit of $7.93 per head in 2015 — little better than a 10th of the $61.85 per head in 2014 when PEDv-constricted supplies sent hog prices climbing (all figures US$).

This year, farmers could struggle to make any profit in the first half, the university predicts, with annual earnings sliding to $5.41 per head.

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**www.ManitobaSwineSeminar.ca**
LIVESTOCK AUCTION RESULTS

BY MARK ELLIOT
Co-operator contributor

Ewes were represented by two Dorper-cross ewes. The bidding was strong for these 98-pound ewes. However, these ewes did not reach the top prices compared to the last sale. Then ewes brought $156.80 ($1.60 per pound).

There was extremely strong bidding for rams. A 185-pound Dorper-cross ram brought $275.65 ($1.49 per pound). Two 173-pound Dorper-cross rams brought $222.11 ($1.27 per pound).

There were no heavyweight lambs for this sale.

Market lambs were well represented but prices did not reach the last sale’s prices. The lighter-weight lambs produced a higher bidding price. The 95-pound lambs received a price range from $1.60 to $1.63 per pound. The 95-pound lambs brought $1.50 per pound. Twenty-five 94-pound Cheviot-cross lambs brought $146.64 ($1.41 per pound). Once again, the bidding did not reach the top of last sale’s prices. The majority of the lambs was in the price range from $1.84 to $2 per pound. Nine 91-pound Cheviot-cross lambs brought $1.68 per pound.

There was a strong demand and interest for the lightweight lambs. A majority of the lambs was in the price range from $2 to $2.09 per pound. Two 70-pound lambs brought $1.76 per pound. Nine 88-pound Suffolk-cross lambs brought $141.44 ($1.60 per pound). A 68-pound Suffolk-cross lamb brought $113.40 ($1.69 per pound). The selection of goats was very limited. There were no goat does. A 240-pound Boer-cross goat buck brought $350 ($1.46 per pound). Twelve 83-pound Boer-cross wethers brought $177 ($2.13 per pound).

Report clearly indicated that the prices of the heavy lambs had decreased, with even less demand for the lightweight lambs. The new-crop lambs have dropped from before Christmas and the first sale of the new year. The past many months, the goat prices have remained constant or steady. This past sale showed lower bidding which is unusual.

YEARLY PATTERN FOLLOWED, WITH FEWER ANIMALS DELIVERED

Producers supplied 175 sheep and goats for the January 20, 2016 sale at Winnipeg Livestock Auction. Following the lower quantity of sheep and goats, this continues until near the Easter market period.
Biosecurity practices for horses

Infectious organisms are effective ‘hitchhikers’ so avoid sharing water buckets and equipment at shows.

**CAROL SHWETZ**

**Horse Health**

**B**iosecurity measures do not need to be complicated or expensive undertakings to be effective. In fact the simplest of practices can make the most difference. Infectious and contagious diseases are not random events, rather the disease requires a chain of events to manifest — like the perfect storm. The viral, bacterial, parasitic or fungal pathogens merely capitalize whenever opportunity exists.

The most significant defence a horse has against infectious diseases will be its own immune system. The immune system is an invisible quality of health, which provides resistance against infectious disease. It successfully uses combinations of antibodies, messenger proteins, and specialized cell bodies to maintain a state of well-being. Providing horses with appropriate nutrition, movement, optimal air quality, adequate rest and easing stress, where possible, strengthens the immune system, which in turn protects the horse.

Vaccinations can play a role in a horse’s immunity, yet vaccines alone do not equal immunity against non-human pathogens. Veterinarians customize vaccination programs based on the individual needs of each horse, acknowledging currently relevant diseases, the level of risk to the affected individuals and recommending which, when and how to best vaccinate.

**Greatest risk**

The greatest risk to biosecurity is the infected and thus contagious horse. Therefore it is of value to know healthy horse behaviour and vitals. Healthy horses have clear eyes, no nasal discharge and a normal attitude and stance. Be mindful of the ‘ill’ or perhaps ill horse. Most infectious diseases are accompanied by a fever. The normal rectal temperature for a horse is 36.5 to 38.5 C (97.5 to 101.5 F). Remember the 4s are a fever. i.e. 40 C/104 F.

At equine events, develop the ability to recognize the ‘ill’ or horses and keep you and your horse at a distance. Also, be courteous if the ‘ill’ horse is yours and please remove it from the venue. Simple practices such as avoiding nose-to-nose contact and minimizing interactions between unfamiliar horses, staying away from confined spaces with poor air quality, and not sharing community waters dramatically reduce the rate of exposure between horses, and so decrease the chances of animals getting sick.

The next level of risk is “anything” that takes a contagious horse as the secretions of an infected horse have the potential to transfer their pathogenic cargo to other horses. Pathogens are in effect ‘hitchhikers’ and need a vehicle for transmission. Know their vehicles.

Commercial “anything” carries a risk to transfer pathogens i.e. water sources, tack, feeding supplies, grooming equipment, trailers, housing — even, and especially, communal “people” with their shoes, clothes and boots. While travelling with horses practise “safe” sharing or maybe no sharing if possible.

**New arrivals**

Disease introduction at the home site is most likely to occur when new animals are introduced, or when animals take off site, commingle with other horses, and then return home. Isolation for 30 days is ideal since most infectious diseases will express themselves in that time.

During these 30 days, observe the new animal(s) for illness, and integrate them into your health-care program. If horses are continually moving to and from the farm to shows, races, training, and competitions, it is advisable to group them separate from the ones that remain on the farm. This measure can be particularly relevant with broad mares and young foals. Although it may be impossible to control all movement of horses and/or “horses” people through a farm, one can monitor and direct the traffic of highest risk.

Since most infectious organisms can use organic material as a shield, removing manure, dirt, and debris from transmissible objects with soap and water, it is the first and perhaps the most essential step in hygiene. This step is necessary prior to the use of any disinfectant. The pathogenic burden can be reduced by up to 90 per cent by simple cleaning. Once organic material is removed and the objects are rinsed of soapy residues, disinfectants can then effectively penetrate and disarm the offending organism. It is necessary to adhere to contact times when applying disinfectants in order to achieve sufficient elimination of the pathogen.

Commercial disinfectants like Virkon can be used for disinfecting grooming equipment, tack, trailers, stalls, car tires, and works well in footbaths. Although one part household bleach to 10 parts water is a good general-purpose disinfectant as well, it can be rather harsh on chemically sensitive items. It is further advisable to separate clothing and footwear used with animals, if possible, and commonly used when at home.

Carol Shwetz is a veterinarian focusing on equine practice in Millville, Alta.
Global and regional temperature anomalies

Globally, 2015 was the warmest year, at 0.9°C above the 20th-century average

BY DANIEL BEZTE  
Co-operator contributor

Last issue I finished by saying that I would hopefully be able to continue our look back at 2015 by exploring some of the top weather stories from our part of the world. Between then and now, both NOAA and NASA released their 2015 global temperature data and I figured we should spend some time checking out their numbers, along with some of the great graphics that they’ve created, to show just what is going on. After looking at the graphics I started thinking about our long-term temperature anomalies and decided to plot what’s been happening in southern Manitoba since 1940. So this article will be a little shorter than usual, but with a lot more graphics. I’ll give a little bit of an explanation on some of the graphics, but will leave most of the interpretation to you, as you know what they say: a picture is worth a thousand words!

Looking at graphs produced by NOAA and NASA that show global temperature anomalies for 2015 and going back to 1880, two things jumped out at me. The first was that 10 of the 12 months of 2015 saw record global monthly temperatures. Second was the fact that only the North Atlantic and a small area near the southern tip of South America had below-average temperatures. Looking at the time series graph, you can really see how global temperatures have shown a steady increase since the 1980s. It was this plot that got me thinking about how our part of the world’s temperatures are comparing to the global trend. I’ve gone through my numbers a couple of times and I am pretty sure I haven’t made any glaring or stupid mistakes with the data. I used Winnipeg’s data simply because it was the easiest data set for me to work with, and when we look at monthly and yearly temperatures and temperature trends, there is very little difference between Winnipeg, Brandon and Dauphin. The graphs show the temperature anomalies, which is a fancy way of saying the difference between the actual temperature and the long-term average. The coloured line is the actual data, and the black line is a five-year running mean, which helps to show longer term trends in the data.

What surprised me a little bit was that on an annual basis, while the trend in our data kind of mimics the global trend, we are not seeing the same magnitude of increase.”
Salt of the earth
Salinity exists in Manitoba, but producers might not be aware of it until it's too late

BY SHANNON VANRAES
Co-operator staff writer

Switching from forages to soybeans is one way to see if you’ve got saline soil, but it’s not the method Marla Riekman recommends.

The provincial land management specialist told producers attending Manitoba Ag Days that testing is the only surefire way to learn what kind of salinity you have on your farm, although there are provincial maps and surveys that can help point you in the right direction.

“When I hear people in the valley say, ‘I’ve never seen salinity before…’ I think it’s really that they’ve never grown so many soybeans before,” said Riekman.

While most forage crops are salt tolerant, pulses and soybeans are not.

“Soybeans are tolerant for a very, very short period of time then that tolerance plummets; corn isn’t far behind,” she said, adding that if farmers are thinking about expanding corn or soybean acres, they should test to see if their land is well suited to those crops before making any big changes.

In cases where crusty white salt appears on soil surface, salinity is obvious, said the specialist. But in most cases the signs of salinity are much more subtle.

“It might be little patches of foxtail barley along the edges and around potholes,” she said, adding that kochia is another indicator of salinity.

However, there is an upside to salinity risk in Manitoba. It might be little patches of foxtail barley along the edges and around potholes, she said, adding that kochia is another indicator of salinity.

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Soybean white mould control options limited

BY ANGELA LOVELL
Co-operator contributor

While many Manitoba growers are familiar with the extensive number of fungicides available for dealing with white mould (sclerotinia) in canola, they may not realize that there are a lot fewer options to treat this disease in soybeans.

Only four foliar fungicides are registered for control or suppression of white mould on soybeans: Acapela (DuPont), Priaxor (BASF), Allegro 500F (Syngenta) and Delaro (Bayer CropScience).

If you choose to spray, good coverage is important, said Michael Wunsch of North Dakota State University at the recent Manitoba Agronomists Conference in Winnipeg.

For good coverage, timing is critical. Wunsch said available data suggests there is most white mould suppression and increased yield in soybeans when growers apply these fungicides at the R1 growth stage.

“That is when growers are getting the coverage they need for the product to provide activity against the target disease,” he said.

Research in the U.S. and Canada has shown that there is an average reduction in white mould of 44 to 45 per cent with a fungicide application at the R1 stage, and yield loss can vary anywhere from 1.3 to 5.5 bu./acre for every 10 per cent increase in white mould severity. Assuming disease control of 45 per cent and yield impacts of 1.6 to 4.6 bu./acre on average, soybeans valued at $8/bu. would have an economic threshold of 16 per cent to 46 per cent white mould levels before a fungicide application would pay for itself. If soybeans are $10/bu., the threshold is 11 per cent to 38 per cent and at $12/bu., the threshold range is 11 per cent to 31 per cent.

Wunsch said shorter-maturing soybeans are less susceptible to white mould than longer-maturing varieties.

“We have seen that white mould impact drops with maturity, so growers are likely to lose the most yield for every percentage increase in disease when they have a longer-maturity soybean,” said Wunsch.

Engaging natural enemies to fight soybean aphids

BY ANGELA LOVELL
Co-operator contributor

Don’t only count the bad bugs before deciding to spray — count the good ones as well, says Jordan Banermer of the department of entomology at the University of Manitoba.

Banenmer is developing a new decision-making tool that will provide growers with a way to predict whether there are enough natural insect enemies present in the crop to reduce aphid numbers to the point where spraying becomes unnecessary.

“The current economic threshold for soybean aphid tends to over-recommend treatment in some cases because it is slightly conservative based on current scouting methods,” Banenmer told the recent Manitoba Agronomists Conference in Winnipeg.

“There is good evidence that natural enemies are important and can potentially improve decision-making and ultimately save growers money.”

A severe aphid infestation in soybeans (when levels reach around 657 aphids per plant) can cause significant yield loss and once the economic threshold of 250 aphids/plant is reached, growers will have about a seven-day window in which to decide whether or not spraying makes economic sense for them.

If growers count natural enemies (NE) such as ladybird beetles, predatory bugs and flies, lacewings and parasitoid wasps at the same time they scout their fields and record aphid numbers, they can use these counts to calculate a dynamic action threshold (DAT).

“Using the DAT, growers can adjust the economic threshold for aphids based on how many NE units they have in the field. For example, if no NE are present the economic threshold will be 250 aphids/plant, but if there is one NE unit per plant the economic threshold will be almost 500 aphids/plant because you are factoring in all the control those NE will offer,” Banenmer said.

When four soybean growers in Ontario used the DAT system in a small-scale trial, none decided to spray and none of the fields reached the injury level threshold of 567 aphids per plant.

Canola exports on pace for new record

BY PHIL FRANZ-WARKENTIN
CNW Canada

Canadian canola exports are on pace to set a new record in 2015-16, according to the latest Canadian Grain Commission data.

Favourable ocean freight rates and the weaker Canadian dollar are keeping offshore movement running very strong.

Canada has exported 4.543 million tonnes of canola as of Jan. 17, up from the 3.766 million exported during the same period the previous year, according to CGC weekly data.

If that pace is maintained, total exports would top 9.8 million tonnes for the crop year, well above the previous record of 9.15 million set in 2014-15.

The Canadian dollar fell to its weakest levels in 13 years relative to its U.S. counterpart over the past week.

While the currency has since shown some improvement, it is still relatively weak overall, which makes exports more attractive to international buyers pricing in U.S. dollars.

Canadian exporters are also seeing some benefit from the downturn in ocean freight rates. The Baltic Dry Index has fallen to its lowest levels ever, which helps improve the competitiveness of Canadian canola into many markets as freight becomes a smaller factor in the price.
Heading off Group 2-resistant weeds

It’s complicated, but picking the right rotation of crops and chemicals is key to avoiding multiple resistance

BY ANGELA LOVELL
Co-operator contributor

Many common crop rotations in Manitoba are selected for Group 2 herbicide resistance, as well as pushing resistance to other herbicide groups, says a U.S. weed specialist.

Jeff Stachler of Ohio State University’s Auglaize County Extension Office told the recent Manitoba Agronomists Conference that a good rotation, not just of crops, but also of herbicides with different modes of action, is the first defence against herbicide resistance.

The list of weeds resistant to Group 2 herbicides is growing across Western Canada and there are now at least 12 weed species in Manitoba resistant to Group 2 herbicides. (See sidebar for list.) Of those Group 2-resistant weeds in Manitoba, kochia, wild oats and green foxtail have multiple resistance to at least two other herbicide groups.

“Once you have resistance to more than one site of action, life becomes a whole lot more difficult,” Stachler said. “In wild oats, for example, there is one biotype that is resistant to three different sites of action – Groups 1, 2 and 8.”

Across the Prairies, kochia is resistant to Group 2 and Group 9 (glyphosate-resistant) herbicides, and in North Dakota and Montana it’s also resistant to Groups 4 and 5.

Mixing modes of action

Stachler said that as an example, a rotation of wheat using a product like Simplicity, followed by a dry bean using something like Solo, and then Express Sunflowers using a product like Pro, is a good crop rotation, but an ineffective herbicide rotation for controlling Group 2 resistance.

“All of these (Group 2) herbicides are using ALS chemistry, and certainly wild oats and green foxtail are not being controlled,” said Stachler.

A more common rotation is canola, and wheat, but if growers use a Clearfield canola with Odyssey Ultra (Group 2) and wheat using something like Harmony 5G (combining a Group 1 and 2 product) they are still pushing hard for resistance.

“A better solution would be to rotate different canola varieties in addition to the Clearfield with Liberty (Group 10) and Roundup (Group 9) which will be more positive for the rotation,” Stachler said. “The Harmony 5G isn’t going to get all your broadleaf weeds either, so throwing in some Group 4 herbicide will give more broad-spectrum control.”

A better rotation from a Group 2 resistance standpoint is wheat using a Group 4 product such as Prestige, then Liberty Link canola (Group 19), followed by a soybean and another Group 4 such as Pinoxar, and finally something such as Solo (Group 2) on Clearfield Sunflowers.

“But you are then pushing for Group 4 resistance in some of the broadleaf weeds,” said Stachler. “Although throwing Liberty into that system is reducing that problem and then you are using only ALS chemistry with the sunflower.”

Resistant kochia in soybeans

Stachler said growers must be vigilant when using ALS chemistry products (pre-mixes) will give different modes of action. But many of our premixes do not have overlapping weed control. They create a specific ratio of ingredients and sometimes these ratios might be switched so one product is a little less than what you might need based on some of the weed species that are in the population.”

Get rid of survivors

Stachler said growers must be vigilant and control any weeds that survive a herbicide that’s supposed to kill them. “We still see situations where producers who have just a few weeds in the field don’t do anything to control them,” he said. “It’s the survivors that are going to cause the problem and so producers need to react quickly to a changing weed population.”

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NEW FOR 2016: CDCTitanium 5S05SHR CL CDCFortitude
Manitoba farmers will be doing their part to live up to the United Nations’ Year of the Pulse, with more peas and even lentils possibly going in the ground in the province.

Pulse acres in Manitoba have consisted primarily of soybeans and edible beans in recent years, with soybean acreage expanding into neighbouring Saskatchewan where peas and lentils typically dominate the pulse discussion.

While soybeans and edible beans will still account for most of the pulse acres in Manitoba, high prices for peas and lentils are causing farmers in the province to look into trying something different.

“We won’t see the acres we had in the ’70s and ’80s, but we’ll definitely see more peas this year,” said Francois Labelle, executive director of Manitoba Pulse and Soybean Growers.

While the western part of the province may be the most likely area for expanded pea acres, Labelle said the prime edible bean areas of the Red River Valley should also see more peas this year.

Manitoba farmers planted 70,000 acres of peas in 2015-16, along with nearly 1.4 million acres of soybeans and 90,000 acres of edible beans.

Climbing prices and good yields for those few Manitoba producers who grew peas in 2015 were behind the extra interest — though Labelle noted the challenge is finding seed.

“Seed dealers are getting three to five calls a day, but they have nothing to sell,” he said.

Manitoba farmers growing peas will concentrate on yellow varieties, as green peas have had trouble with bleaching in the past.

Lentils are even less common than peas in Manitoba, with only about 1,000 acres seeded in 2015. Labelle said that number could rise as well, depending on whether or not it’s a dry year.

While pea and lentil plantings may be on the rise, Labelle didn’t expect those increases to cut into soybeans or edible bean plantings.

“In a lot of areas, it’s not that these crops compete — it’s that they complement each other,” said Labelle.

Early expectations are that edible bean acres in Manitoba will be close to last year, according to Labelle. There are also still opportunities to increase soybean acres in the province’s west, which is not a prime edible bean-growing area, he said.
Hurdles still ahead for food-approved canary seed

Both Health Canada and the U.S. FDA now allow canary seed for human food use

BY JADE MARKUS

Canary seed has been ruled fit for human consumption by Health Canada — a victory for an industry working toward that goal for years — but it's just one step of many to get canary seed onto plates.

Canary seed, until now used almost exclusively as birdseed, has received novel food approval from Health Canada and GRAS (generally recognized as safe) status from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the Canariesed Development Commission of Saskatchewan said Jan. 11.

However, producers shouldn't yet look at the food approval as a short-term market signal.

"It's going to take some time to get canary seed in the human food market in a significant way," CDCS executive director Kevin Hursh said. "We're hoping that it'll gradually ramp up and become significant.

Small quantities of canary seed have been dehulled for testing purposes, he said, but the industry doesn't yet have the capacity to dehull on a commercial scale.

"We're not sure whether the dehulling used for things like dehulling barley will work or not yet."

There also need to be more cleaning plants able to segregate "itchy" seeds from the hairless (glabrous) type.

Another step is to garner interest from food manufacturers and ingredient suppliers. How quickly canary seed becomes broadly available in stores depends on food processors — and how quickly the product is adopted will depend on end-use consumers.

Canary seed flour can be used to make bread, cookies, cereals and pastas, the commission said. Whole seeds can be used in nutrition bars, or in place of sesame seeds on hamburger buns.

Allergenic risk

The seed, while in the same subfamily as wheat, rye, barley and oats, can also be marketed as gluten free, which could be a boon for consumers with celiac disease.

But it's still uncertain whether canary seed poses an allergic risk for wheat-allergic individuals. A protein found in canary seed is similar to another type of protein found in wheat — though it's not similar to wheat gluten.

Thus, until the seed is proven safe for people with wheat allergies, Health Canada's approval will require canary seed, and foods containing it as an ingredient, to have a label statement such as "May not be suitable for people with wheat allergy."

"We hope that further work will lead to the removal of this labelling requirement at some future date," Dr. Carol Ann Patterson, the food scientist who piloted the compositional, nutritional and toxicological work needed for canary seed food approval, said in the CDCS release.

Canary seed's approval still makes it the first novel cereal crop to be approved in Canada, she noted.

With respect to consumer and processor response, "we're in uncharted territory here," Hursh said. "We're hoping that there becomes commercial interest, and we're talking with a number of players. Certainly with the announcement of the approval we've had requests from different companies.

However, the CDCS doesn't get involved in commercial ventures. Hursh said, its position is to lay the groundwork for others to become involved in those roles.

Another area of ongoing CDCS activity involves the approval of crop protection products, the commission said in a release, as the herbicides and other crop protection products registered for use on canary seed for birdseed don't immediately have their registrations extended to canary seed for food use.

"You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink, so how long all of this takes depends on some of those players."

Delivered canary seed is currently trading at 24 to 28 cents per pound, according to Prairie Ag Hotwire on Jan. 18.

"Certainly with the announcement of the approval we've had requests from different companies."

KEVIN HURSH
Canariesed Development Commission of Saskatchewan

The company also said its port storage and loading facilities at Saint John, N.B., with capacity of handling 2.5 million tonnes annually, could now be used by Canpotex.

Canpotex exports potash that PotashCorp, Mosaic and Agrium produce in Saskatchewan.

The decision allows Canpotex to "indefinitely defer" a decision on the $500-million Prince Rupert terminal, Canpotex's Tilk said at a CIBC investor conference in Whistler, B.C.

"We certainly don't anticipate making that decision in the next 10 years, so we're very good with our port facilities on the West Coast and in the East coast," he said.

PotashCorp spokeswoman Denisa Stann said after Tilk's comments that he was speaking about options available to Canpotex and that it had not concluded any decision.

In a news release, Canpotex said Canpotex, Mosaic and Agrium have signed a revised agreement to authorize Canpotex to "undertake the necessary planning and engineering work" on the Prince Rupert terminal.

The agreement eliminates Canpotex's requirement to make a decision on the terminal by Dec. 31.

"There are many large decisions that need to be made and we need to be making sure that we get it right," said Canpotex chief executive officer dessert s. "We have no intention of proceeding with the terminal construction until we are confident we are making the best investment decision for all shareholders."

"It is an important piece of infrastructure for all of our companies," he said of the terminal.

The terminal, if constructed, would service Agrium and Mosaic customers in Canada, and the United States.

"It is early days for this project and we encourage all parties to continue to work together to bring the project to a conclusion," said PotashCorp's Tilk.

"This is definitely a step forward for all our companies," he said.
We see the potential for better ways of doing things. This includes the way we build and operate our new elevators. We’ve now opened two new high-efficiency elevators to help you quickly unload your grain and get on with your day.

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We also have two more set to begin taking deliveries in early 2016. The offices are open and signing up contracts now.

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Egypt moves to clarify ergot rules on wheat imports

Traders say confusion reigns as two ministries collide

BY MAHA EL DAHAN AND ERIC KNECHT

Reuters

Egypt’s Supply Ministry moved to clarify rules on wheat imports on Jan. 14, saying it would allow shipments with traces of the grain fungus ergot to enter the country. Wheat traders have been concerned that uncertainty over payment and inspection terms in Egypt, the world’s biggest wheat importer, would dampen export demand.

The problem surfaced when a cargo of French wheat was rejected last month due to traces of the infection. The Supply Ministry said Jan. 14 it would allow shipments of imported wheat with up to 0.05 per cent level of ergot, although this was not enough to quell concern amongst suppliers previously told any level of infection was not acceptable.

“It has been decided to keep the percentage as is, without change, after discussions with the Agriculture Ministry,” the Supply Ministry’s spokesman said.

The agriculture quarantine authority had previously told Reuters that wheat shipments containing any level of ergot would be barred from entry.

There have since been a series of meetings between officials from both ministries to try to resolve the matter.

Wheat traders said they were waiting to hear the Agriculture Ministry’s response to be sure the problem had been resolved.

“The quarantine authority declined to comment on the Supply Ministry’s statement on Jan. 14 and Agriculture Ministry officials could not immediately be reached.”

Egypt’s Supply Ministry has come under pressure from international wheat traders to clarify its stance on the fungus in shipments from Egypt’s biggest buyer.

The General Authority for Supply Commodities (GASC), which falls under the authority of the Supply Ministry, allowed for a 0.05 per cent ergot level under its specifications, but the agricultural quarantine authority had said according to its rules all incoming shipments above zero would be barred.

“We want to wait and hear from the Agriculture Ministry as that was what was causing the change in the first place,” another trader told Reuters.

Traders said the rejected shipment was currently being retested for ergot at an Egyptian port.
Health Canada to scrap ‘conditional’ pesticide approvals

The process, which delays public consultations, is now only rarely used anyway

**STAFF**

Federal crop chemical regulators this summer will stop granting “conditional” registrations for new pesticides—a practice already largely on the way out, they note.

Health Canada, which oversees the federal Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA), said Jan. 19 it plans to stop granting new conditional registrations effective June 1, describing the move as an “important step in improving the openness and transparency of Canada’s pesticide regulatory system.”

Conditional registrations have previously been granted “on occasion,” Health Canada said, when a scientific review of a new product finds its risks are acceptable but also that “additional confirmatory information” is needed.

Conditional registrations, unlike full registrations, don’t undergo public consultations until either amended, renewed or converted to a full registration, after that “additional information” goes through PMRA review.

Additional information, for example, could include environmental monitoring data to confirm whether assumptions made at the time of registration were correct.

“Moving away from conditional registrations will provide reassurance that all pesticide registration decisions are made with the same high level of scientific and public scrutiny.”

**HEALTH CANADA**

Conditional registrations, unlike full registrations, don’t undergo public consultations until either amended, renewed or converted to a full registration, after that “additional information” goes through PMRA review.

Additional information, for example, could include environmental monitoring data to confirm whether assumptions made at the time of registration were correct.

“Moving away from conditional registrations will provide reassurance that all pesticide registration decisions are made with the same high level of scientific and public scrutiny.”

Health Canada said Jan. 19.

Pierre Petelle, vice-president of chemistry for CropLife Canada, the trade association for Canada’s pesticide and plant biotech sectors, said Jan. 20 the group hopes Health Canada “will continue to deliver on its commitment to a predictable, science-based regulatory system.”

**No impact**

A notice of intent on conditional registrations has been posted on Health Canada’s website for public comment until March 19.

The change in approach is expected to have “minimal” effect, the agency said. Conditional registrations have “decreased substantially” to the point where they represent about one per cent of all registered products.

**U.S. forecaster sees El Niño weakening**

REUTERS / The El Niño phenomenon currently affecting weather is expected to weaken during the Northern Hemisphere spring and transition to normal conditions by late spring or early summer, a U.S. government weather forecaster said Jan. 14.

The Climate Prediction Center (CPC), an agency of the National Weather Service, was in line in its monthly forecast with a growing consensus that the much-watched phenomenon, which can rock commodities markets, will dissipate in the coming months.

Most models indicate the El Niño will weaken and shift to neutral, though it is difficult to predict the exact timing, the CPC said. Its forecast was broadly in line with similar ones in recent days that have said El Niño has reached its height and looks to be weakening.

El Niño is a warming of ocean surface temperatures in the eastern and central Pacific that occurs every two to seven years, triggering heavy rains and floods in South America and scorching weather in Asia and as far away as east Africa.

In Western and Central Canada, an El Niño event is most often associated with above-normal temperatures and drier conditions during winter.

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“Moving away from conditional registrations will provide reassurance that all pesticide registration decisions are made with the same high level of scientific and public scrutiny.”

**It’s important to note that conditional registrations are not a matter of health and safety.”** he said, as conditionally registered products pass “thorough health and safety assessments.”

Conditional registrations, he said, have “long been misunderstood” and the group hopes Health Canada “will continue to deliver on its commitment to a predictable, science-based regulatory system.”
BY NICK CAREY

A legal protest by Canadian Pacific Railway (CP) over a meeting among big U.S. railroads about mergers in their industry has highlighted maneuvering in the sector to cope with a rapid downturn and possible consolidation.

CALGARY-based CP on Jan. 19 asked the U.S. Justice Department to look into statements by U.S. railroads, in the wake of the meeting, about "working closely with each other to block" its bid for U.S. railway Norfolk Southern.

The U.S. railroads met last year in the presence of lawyers, saying they merely discussed a merger's impact on the industry. Interviews with U.S. railroad executives show some oppose mergers; others tout possible benefits.

The latest flap, in which CP accused U.S. railroads of adopting an "anticompetitive" strategy, shed light on chances for further consolidation, with eyes on No. 3 U.S. railroad CSX Corp. as a future target.

"If Canadian Pacific's bid for Norfolk Southern goes ahead, then CSX will be the next domino to fall," said Scott Rostan, who worked on the Merrill Lynch team advising Norfolk Southern during its battle with CSX in the 1990s for control of Conrail, which was ultimately carved up between them.

CP in mid-November disclosed its US$28-billion offer to buy Norfolk Southern.


"You're going to see more consolidation," said Matthew Rose, CEO of No. 1 U.S. railroad CSX Corp. "It makes a lot of sense for them to work together to keep the industry healthy."

"I don't think it could afford a dilemma if CP gets its way. ... CSX would be at a competitive disadvantage and so would CP," Anthony Hatch, a landmarks of America's seven North American manufacturers. CSX, like the broader Canadian economy, is fairly reliant on commodity exports.

Some analysts see its Norfolk offer as an opportunistic bid for a growth story while rail stocks are down.

"The No. 4 U.S. railroad has rejected CP's advances, setting the stage for a potential proxy battle," said Jared Seitz of grain brokerage Agfinity at Stone's Paper, Aha.

The steady tone in the face of increased sales was a supportive price signal, which was being borne out in the improving prices for spring delivery, he said, adding he expects to see prices start to increase for March/April/May delivery.

Freight rates are more competitive this year, which is making for better pricing across a larger region of Alberta, he added.

Many larger feedlots in Southern Alberta had been using 100 per cent feed wheat rations, but many are now switching to barley or making plans to do so.

"That will help with barley demand over the next few months," Seitz said.

However, that doesn't necessarily mean that feed wheat prices are going down. Seitz said there was still consistent demand for feed wheat from domestic feeders, while a good export program for Canada Prairie Spring (CPS) wheat was also underpinning the feed side as well. The weak Canadian dollar is keeping U.S. corn and DDGS from moving into the country, which is supportive for barley and feed wheat demand.

However, even if the currency was on par, Seitz didn't think there would be much corn coming up due to ample domestic supplies.

"If Canadian Pacific's bid for Norfolk Southern goes ahead, then CSX will be the next domino to fall."

"There's nothing evil at all in having a transcontinental railroad," Rose said on Jan. 21. "You've got lots of national networks in lots of industries."

"There has been a fair bit of activity but there would be another step towards consolidation," he said.

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India's Modi woos farm vote with new insurance scheme

Recent droughts have damaged the governing party at the polls

NEW DELHI/REUTERS

India's cabinet has cleared the launch of the country's first major crop damage insurance scheme from the next fiscal year, a move that would further strain government finances but help Prime Minister Narendra Modi to woo rural voters ahead of key elections.

Stung by criticism of ignoring the concerns of rural India where over two-thirds of the country's 1.25 billion people live, the government on Jan. 13 fielded as many as three cabinet ministers to underline the importance of the scheme whose budget will more than double in three years.

Modi is trying to placate rural voters after the impact of unseasonal rains and two straight years of drought on agriculture dented his popularity and contributed to a humiliating loss for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party in elections late last year in the largely rural state of Bihar.

Further elections are due in the states of West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Assam this year.

"It is a historic day," Modi tweeted after the scheme was announced by the ministers of agriculture, home and parliamentary affairs. "I believe the prime minister's crop insurance scheme, inspired by the well-being of farmers, will bring about a huge change in the lives of farmers."

Several debt-laden farmers committed suicide last year, and Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh has said that delays in clearing payouts for crop losses were the "biggest reason for destroying farm families."

The government would now ensure faster settlements by increasing the use of technology, including smartphones to capture crop data. It would also reduce premiums to be paid by farmers to two per cent for summer-sown crops and 1.5 per cent for winter crops.

The current premium share for farmers can go as high as 49 per cent, which is one of the main reasons that only about a 10th of India's estimated 263 million cultivators opt for crop insurance.

New Delhi will more than double the budget for the crop insurance scheme to 77.50 billion rupees (C$1.66 billion) in the fiscal year beginning April 2018.

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Once wedded to EU, some British farmers think of cutting ties

Critics of the EU subsidy system complain of ‘Kafkaesque’ red tape

BY NIGEL HUNT
London/Reuters

A
dee decades of generous subsidies from Brussels, some British farmers are starting to think the unthinkable — they might have to jump ship to get away from the European Union.

Farmers were strong sup-
porters of EU membership when Britain last voted on it in 1975, and for years they flou-
rished as funds flowed into the sector to encourage ever-rising production.

The three billion pounds (C$26.2 billion) a year that they receive in support payments from the EU makes up about 55 per cent of total income from farming, according to government figures.

But now, with Prime Minister David Cameron preparing to call an “in or out” referendum on Britain’s EU membership possibly as early as June, some farmers feel the benefits of belonging to the Brussels club are far less compelling than a generation ago.

They wonder if a “Brexit” would enable farmers to innovate in areas like genetically modified crops, and rid themselves of some of the most oppressive regulation.

“We are being hammered as a source of subsidies to support other farmers seen as more essential, which gives us a considerable advantage in terms of competitiveness, which will play a key role in the development of the European market,” said Plant and Food Research Institute economist, said it was likely the UK would be able to negotiate a prefer-
tential trade agreement. But agricultural economists said it was unlikely the UK would get the same benefits as being a member of the EU.

“The obstinate refusal to adopt advanced technology means Europe has become the museum of world farming. The EU’s reluctance to embrace genetically modified crops will only add to the frustra-
tion of some farmers. Britain’s government has been more supportive of GMO crops than many other EU nations in recent years. Critics argue that the EU sti-
fles innovation through what they see as an overly cautious and lengthy approval pro-
cess for new crop protection

Economists said Britain would still have to comply with EU standards if it wanted to export to the bloc, but would no longer have a voice in shaping the rules. ‘If you are going to leave because you want to make your own rules on pesticides, or have nutrition traffic lights on your food labels and so on, that is going to increase costs for those of your industries that are export oriented because they are going to have to con-
tinue to meet EU standards,” said Alan Matthews, profes-
sor emeritus for European policy at Trinity College, Dublin.

“Once we were married to the EU, there were all sorts of people who have to jump through to get our subsidies last year up year after year. And most of us went into this job to get away from paperwork.

Flint, who has an arable farm in Hampshire along with a few sheep and cattle, said he couldn’t believe a British-based system, outside the EU, would be “as Kafkaesque as it is at the moment.”

Influential lobby

While full-time farmers are rel-
atively few in number — only 140,000 in 2014, according to government figures — they wield considerable influence in rural communities which, come election time, vote over-
whelmingly for Cameron’s govern-
ing Conservatives.

Not all are swayed by the argument that leaving the EU would make life easier. Some worry that subsidies could be cut and that they might lose access to important European mar-

kets if Britain breaks with Brussels and its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

France was thelargest ben-
eficiary of EU farm payments in 2014 with 8.5 billion euros (C$13.3 billion), with Britain in sixth place after Spain, Germany, Italy and Poland.

“In the past, all the main political parties believe we want to phase out subsidies by 2020. I think it is more likely if a system of subsidy is going to be maintained, it will be less than we get now with the CAP,” said U.K. National Farmers Union economist Lucia Zitti.

She told Reuters the union’s members are “quite split. They want to understand more about the implications of a possible Brexit and also hear how the EU can work better for farmers.”

Matt Naylor, who grows flow-
ers such as daffodils to sell to supermarkets in Britain and mainland Europe, said he would vote in favour of stay-
ning in the EU because he relies heavily on foreign labour.

Naylor said workers from countries such as Poland, Lithuania or Latvia had often grown up on farms and had a different work ethic and set of expectations from their British counterparts, who were often three or four generations removed from the land.

“There are a lot of people who are prepared to sit on a tractor. But when it comes to shearing a sheep, attaching things like that, it is harder to get [local] people,” he said from his farm in Lincolnshire, eastern England.

‘Museum of world farming”

The in-or-out debate featured prominently at the recent Oxford Farming Conference, where a former govern-
ment minister argued that the EU was shackling British innovation.

“British agriculture, brim-
ming with potential, is held back by prejudice against advanced technology and sci-
cence,” said former farming envi-
ronment minister Owen Paterson.

“The obstinate refusal to adopt advanced technology means Europe has become the museum of world farming.”

The EU’s reluctance to embrace genetically modified crops will only add to the frustra-
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cess for new crop protection

Economists said Britain would still have to comply with EU standards if it wanted to export to the bloc, but would no longer have a voice in shaping

fallow under rules designed to provide environmental benefits.

“Peas and beans have always been a source of income for British arable farming. Nobody really likes them. Beans are not really profitable and peas really

mess the combine up.”

Agnew

Market access

The outlook for U.K. farming outside the EU could hinge on what access is granted to key export markets and the extent to which Britain is pre-
pared to maintain support payments.

Britain’s exports of wheat, for example, are dominated by EU destinations, with Spain and the Netherlands the most important customers in recent years.

“Trade is the key issue and no one can say what the arrangements would be follow-
ing a Brexit,” said Sean Rickard, a former chief economist with the U.K. NFU.

The Obelisk claimed the U.K. will be able to negotiate a pref-
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New seed varieties bypass Africa’s small farmers

BY CHRIS ARSENAULT
Toronto/Thomson Reuters Foundation

Africa’s small farmers, more than half of whom buy their seeds from local informal markets, need access to improved seeds that can yield more food and cope with climate change, according to research published Jan. 20.

Innovations in food science, including seeds that produce vitamin-rich food and crops that can withstand hotter, drier conditions, are not reaching many of Africa’s small farmers as they are not available in local markets, researchers said.

The study, published in the journal Food Security, examined 10,000 seed transactions across five African countries and Haiti, and researchers said it shed light on how food production can be expanded.

“Science is making improvements to crops, but they are not getting to farmers,” Louise Sperling, senior technical adviser to Catholic Relief Services who worked on the study, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

Products farmers might want to choose, (including) varieties that are better resistant to climate change, aren’t accessible.”

Previously, many researchers assumed that small farmers relied on saving seeds from previous harvests, rather than purchasing them.

But the study showed that about 55 per cent of small farmers in Kenya, Malawi, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Haiti bought their seeds from local markets, family or friends.

“The good news here is that (small) farmers are active customers,” Sperling said.

Open to change

This means many growers would be open to buying better, climate-smart seeds, if they were readily available in small, rural markets and appropriately marketed, she said.

Large seed dealers generally focus on selling large volumes to institutional clients, such as big aid agencies or the United Nations, rather than small farmers, she said.

Companies should offer smaller seed packages to farmers, and should inform them of new kinds of seeds which might benefit them, she said.

Social enterprises could play a role in improving rural distribution networks if traditional dealers are unwilling to serve poor customers in remote areas, Sperling said.

Small farmers, working on less than two hectares of land, produce up to 80 per cent of sub-Saharan Africa’s food, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Nearly 800 million people worldwide do not have enough to eat, and sub-Saharan Africa is particularly hard hit, the FAO has said.

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Tractor turned robot maximizes farm labour, says inventor

First prize at Ag Days 2016 Inventors’ Showcase goes to a Killarney-area farmer for his robotics invention that eliminates need for a grain cart driver

BY LORRAINE STEVENSON
Co-operator staff/Brandon

At first glance, it looks like one of Matthew Reimer’s farm crew is well, kind of short. Actually, there is no one driving that grain cart tractor as it navigates the field and pulls up to unload the combine on his Killarney-area farm. Reimer has programmed it to be driverless.

Reimer was awarded first place by judges with the Inventors’ Showcase at Ag Days last week for turning his tractor into a robot, wiring its electronics to the autopilot out of a drone. It can unload a combine on the go and navigate autonomously within the field, communicating with the combine. It’s controlled by the touch of a screen that signals its GPS locations.

“A driverless tractor was just an idea rolling around in his mind a year ago. ‘I’ve thought it was a good idea for a long time. I just didn’t know how to do it.’” he said.

“Then I stumbled across an autopilot that’s out of a drone, and the lightbulb went on in my head. It has the algorithm for navigating a vehicle. I thought if I can put it in my tractor, it’ll take care of that.”

Reimer, who is president of his new company Reimer Robotics, was in Brandon last week to share the idea with other farmers. The software and hardware deployed are open source.

“Anyone can pick up this technology and work on it,” he said, adding he hopes other producers will build on the concept and advance the innovation.

“Reimer deployed the tractor-turned-robot on his family’s farm this past fall. ‘They’ve never had a harvest go more smoothly,’ he said. ‘It’s meant to be labour saving, but in their case it was labour maximizing, he said. It meant the person otherwise sitting with the grain cart all day was able to do many more jobs instead of just sitting idle.’

“ ‘I had him swathing and harvesting and running for fuel and doing all these other jobs that keep our operation running smoothly,’ he said.

Remote-controlled livestock gate featured at Inventors’ Showcase

The livestock gate pivots upwards and can be remotely opened and shut without leaving the tractor

BY LORRAINE STEVENSON
Co-operator staff/Brandon

Mike Annett’s doesn’t spend his days opening and shutting farm gates, but farmers he knows do.

When they told the industrial arts teacher at McCreary High School that all that repetitive mounting and dismounting from a tractor or any other vehicle just to open gates was basically “a pain in the butt,” Annett set to work.

His invention, the Lift and Go, a 18-foot livestock gate that opens remotely — and pivots upward instead of swinging — was awarded second prize by judges in the Inventors’ Showcase at Ag Days last week.

The product needs just a small level area for the base, while the receiver is mounted to the gate’s panel or post.

Several farmers around McCreary area now use the Lift and Go, and feedback received from Annetts is that it is a time saver. Over a period of months, that time spent manually opening and closing gates really adds up, Annetts said, adding that eliminating the need to disembark can also help reduce the potential for slips and falls too.

First-place winner at Ag Days Inventors’ Showcase was Killarney-area farmer and president of Reimer Robotics, Matthew Reimer, for an invention that essentially turns a tractor into a robot.

Honourable Mention went to Harvest Sweep (Corn Header Technology) for a redesigned kit that replaces stock components of deck plates and gathering chains on a corn head to save at least 80 to 85 per cent of corn shatter loss.

Thirteen companies in all entered the 2016 exhibition, which is sponsored annually by the Manitoba Co-operator at Ag Days.

Other inventions ranged from new kinds of applications for treating seed and software for field management and tracing, to grain-bin lid openers and new products for more safely handling newborn calves.

“He had him swathing and harvesting and running for fuel and doing all these other jobs that keep our operation running smoothly,” he said.

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Co-operator staff/Brandon

Mike Annett’s doesn’t spend his days opening and shutting farm gates, but farmers he knows do.

When they told the industrial arts teacher at McCreary High School that all that repetitive mounting and dismounting from a tractor or any other vehicle just to open gates was basically “a pain in the butt,” Annett set to work.

His invention, the Lift and Go, a 18-foot livestock gate that opens remotely — and pivots upward instead of swinging — was awarded second prize by judges in the Inventors’ Showcase at Ag Days last week.

The product needs just a small level area for the base, while the receiver is mounted to the gate’s panel or post.

Several farmers around McCreary area now use the Lift and Go, and feedback received from Annetts is that it is a time saver. Over a period of months, that time spent manually opening and closing gates really adds up, Annetts said, adding that eliminating the need to disembark can also help reduce the potential for slips and falls too.

First-place winner at Ag Days Inventors’ Showcase was Killarney-area farmer and president of Reimer Robotics, Matthew Reimer, for an invention that essentially turns a tractor into a robot.

Honourable Mention went to Harvest Sweep (Corn Header Technology) for a redesigned kit that replaces stock components of deck plates and gathering chains on a corn head to save at least 80 to 85 per cent of corn shatter loss.

Thirteen companies in all entered the 2016 exhibition, which is sponsored annually by the Manitoba Co-operator at Ag Days.

Other inventions ranged from new kinds of applications for treating seed and software for field management and tracing, to grain-bin lid openers and new products for more safely handling newborn calves.

“ ’We’ve actually never had a harvest and a fall season go this smooth.’”

Matthew Reimer, president of Reimer Robotics

“We got all our fertilizer on. Everything just worked really good and part of the reason was we were able to get so many more things done while we were combining.”

“Reimer was adamant that robots like this won’t replace working on the farm. The notion that farmers one day will sit in offices controlling farm equipment remotely is “still science fiction stuff,” he said.

“ ‘It’s just going to change how we work,’ he said. ‘Up to this point, farms have been growing and what’s allowed farms to grow is that equipment has got bigger and more efficient so you can get more done with one tractor than you used to be able to, but it is reaching the limits of what we can fit on our roads. ’

‘I think we’re going to start to see more tractors, but smaller. So instead of having one tractor, maybe you’d drive one but the other one will be unmanned.’”
Big data — a big topic among farmers
Assessing more information has and will lead farmers to better agronomic decisions

BY ALLAN DAWSON
Co-operator staff

Big data is big business. Two years ago Monsanto paid $1 billion for Climate Corp., a firm that specializes in digitizing and aggregating a long list of data collected from farmers’ fields. The numbers are crunched and sold to farmers so they can make better agronomic decisions and more money.

It all started with yield monitoring. That information is then used to adjust seeding rates, inputs and fertilizer and pesticide applications to vary seeding rates and applications on the fly. Instead of treating a field all the same, inputs can be adjusted to suit conditions, in effect creating many fields within a field.

The technology behind precision agriculture and micro-agronomy, produces the information, which when aggregated across many fields, is big data. Other large companies, including DuPont Pioneer and John Deere, are offering big data services.

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The focus has been on the value of capturing data from individual fields focused on the value of capturing data from individual fields. The technology behind precision agriculture and micro-agronomy, produces the information.

David Fischhoff told Forbes in 2014 big data will change the face of agriculture. “We can see things we’ve never seen and know things we’ve never known so we can tap more of the potential in every seed, every acre and every dollar we invest and use a new level of decision-making in the pursuit of higher yields,” a company video says.

Farmers’ view
Do farmers see it the same way? A farmer-panel on big data at the annual Manitoba Agronomists’ Conference Dec. 16 was cautious.

“It is worth something,” Roland Frieberg of Premier Crop Systems in West Des Moines, Iowa also stressed that data from his own farm is what’s most important to him.

“Once we can do that then I think we’re into something really special,” he said. “It’s the stuff I collect for my own farm that’s more valuable to me than the amalgamation of a pile of data.”

Earlier in the conference Dan Friesz of Premier Crop Systems in West Des Moines, Iowa also stressed that data from his own farm is what’s most important to him.

Farmers are skeptical about yield data, Bergen added. “I think big data can… take away some of those reasons not to believe,” if the variables are reduced.

Although farmers are skeptical about yield data, Bergen added, “I think big data can… take away some of those reasons not to believe,” if the variables are reduced.

What would interest Bergen? Being able to access 2015 soybean yields grown on similar soil to his, planted before the spring snow to see what impact, if any, seeding into cooler soils had.

“Once we can do that then I think we’re into something really good,” he said.

Adam Gurr, who farms at Rapid City and also does independent research through his company Agritruth Research, said he will likely buy big data services in the future, but mainly to access data management and analytical tools.

Dan Hacault of Swan River stressed that data from his own farm is what’s most important to him.

“For my farm it’s the small data I want,” he said. “It’s the stuff I collect for my own farm that’s more value to me than the amalgamation of a pile of data.”

Continued on next page>

Steel-wheeled skid steer
Steel wheels are a lower cost alternative to tracks

T he new all-steel wheels for skid steer loaders at Evolution Wheel’s display at Manitoba Ag Days last week in Brandon might evoke memories of old steel-wheel tractors, but they have been developed to meet a very modern purpose, says Derek Hird, owner of Evolution Wheel.

With rubber-tracked machines becoming pretty popular in the skid steer world to overcome the kind of traction and flotation problems common to wheeled machines, Hird says his steel wheels are an excellent — and lower cost — alternative to solve many of those problems. They could be a big help to producers when doing a variety of jobs around the farm.

“Manure cleaning is a big one,” Hird says. “In the snow they do pretty well, also working in the mud.”

“A lot of guys in the market have trended toward a track machine to solve the 20 per cent of jobs they couldn’t do with tires. Now they have this option that’s a third less cost for an upgrade and virtually no maintenance costs versus high maintenance costs down the road for a track machine.”

A set retails for $6,000. Anyone looking for a dealer should check the company’s website www.evolutionwheel.com.
Big data is crude, but it’s better than nothing, he said. “We have to do better than averaging the responses from tiny plots and pretending that those results fit across huge spatial variability that exists within fields,” Finberg said.

“Every agronomist and every farmer knows there are differences across their fields. “The real key is let’s not pretend to do that all the land is the same agroecologically. Because it’s not, and we can use the equipment that growers have already invested in and help them with their data to do a better job of managing what they do in agronomy.”

Local data is important, said Dan Wright, Monsanto Canada’s trait launch lead, who is working on Climate Corp’s Canadian expansion, but aggregated data can reveal important information too, he said. For example, based on data from 3,800 fields Climate Corp. found 10 per cent didn’t get enough nitrogen, costing the farmer an average of $54 an acre in reduced yield. It also found in 40 per cent of the fields too much nitrogen was applied costing producers an average of $13 an acre. So besides boosting yields, collecting and analyzing data can help the environment. Nutrient run-off is attracting more government attention and regulation.

Show me

Only an estimated 10 per cent of Manitoba farmers are collecting data now from their entire farms, said Mitch Rezansoff, integrated solutions manager for John Deere dealer Enns Brothers. “Why aren’t more farmers doing it? It goes back to ‘show me the benefit’,” he said.

And that’s just what Rezansoff has been doing. On one farm he discovered operation overlaps totaling 200 acres, resulting in $24,000 worth of extra inputs being applied. Modifying the anhydrous ammonia application with sectional control saved $6,400, paying for itself in a year, he said. Paying for sectional control on an air seeder, either factory installed or added later, was recoverable after three and four years. In another case using yield maps Rezansoff found a 4,200-acre farm had zero yield on 731 or 17 per cent of his acres over several years due to excess water. Topographical maps were used to see how to remove the water. If buying a used scraper to improve drainage could cut the lost acres to 200, it would pay for the scraper in one year, not including the time to do the work.

Better decisions

Speakers agreed more data will help farmers make better decisions and make them more efficient, more productive, sustainable and profitable.

“Like it or not big data is the new reality in farming. It’s here to stay.”

Finance

“The No Speculation with Food” initiative is subject to a binding referendum on Feb. 28 under Switzerland’s system of direct democracy. Proponents argue that speculative transactions create volatility and lead to hunger and poverty. They point to a study by the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich that speculation can account for 30 to 70 per cent of price movements, making it harder for poor countries to afford food.

The measure would amend the constitution to ban banks, trading houses, insurers and other investors and wealth managers in Switzerland from dealing for themselves or for clients in financial instruments based on agricultural commodities or food.

The government noted that no trading platforms for such products exist in Switzerland and that companies could easily circumvent a ban limited only to this country. Banning such trades would harm the economy, it added, noting the costs it would impose on the many Swiss-based trading companies, insurers, banks and pension funds that deal in farm product derivatives.

It would also impinge on economic liberties and raise questions about Swiss policies at a time the country is already struggling under the impact of a strong currency, it added.

BRIEFS

Save farm derivatives trade, Switzerland urges voters

ZURICH/REUTERS/ Switzerland’s government on Jan. 12 urged voters to reject a campaign to ban trading in agricultural derivatives, saying the well-meaning attempt to alleviate world hunger would not succeed and only jeopardize Swiss jobs and tax revenue.

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It would also impinge on economic liberties and raise questions about Swiss policies at a time the country is already struggling under the impact of a strong currency, it added.
The old rule of thumb about seeding 1.5 bushels of wheat per acre just doesn’t apply anymore, says a researcher with North Dakota State University.

Variety, seeding date and even latitude make a difference, Grant Mehring told the Manitoba Agronomists Conference in Winnipeg last December. He described his extensive, three-year research trials on seeding rates for several HRSW varieties planted in 23 different environments.

“Seeding rate can be far off with bushels per acre because that’s just a volume. You can have a lot of different seeds per volume or per bushel when the kernel weights are different,” Mehring said.

His research showed that using a common North Dakota seeding rate of 1.5 bu./acre of two varieties with very different kernel weights — 15 grams per 500 kernels for one and 20 grams per 500 kernels for the other — could result in a difference of up to 400,000 seeds per acre.

“People ask, ‘is it really that critical in spring wheat because it tillers nicely and will likely catch up,’” said Mehring. “That’s probably true but if your intention was to plant a seeding rate without using seeds per kilogram — the kernel weight — you are far from that. It’s important to take into account kernel weight and also germination.”

In Mehring’s trials he also counted how many seeds on average across 10,000 wheat plots over three years didn’t germinate, and saw an average of 10 per cent to 15 per cent stand loss.

“If it would be good to take a 10 per cent to 20 per cent expected stand loss into consideration when you are planting spring wheat,” Mehring said. “That is what agronomists recommend in North Dakota and it is what helps growers get the plant population they want.”

Tillering is important

Environment is also going to take away some of the seeds a producer plants, added Mehring, which is why planting as early as possible in the spring is crucial to get plants established.

“As you delay planting date you need to increase seeding rates,” said Mehring, whose research showed significantly less tillering in plants that were planted a month to five weeks later than the optimum early planting date.

“Environment is a major factor in tiller production and yield, so it’s also important to choose the HRSW cultivars that are most broadly adapted to your growing region.”

Mehring’s research has clearly shown that varieties have very different tillering capacities.

“Tillering is what impacts your spikes per acre, and your spikes per acre is what gives you yield at the end,” he said. “It’s important to get the stems-per-acre numbers up to the level you need to get the yield you want but it doesn’t do any good necessarily to increase seeding rate because in our trials, while we averaged over many different environments and years, overall that didn’t increase stems per acre or yield.”

Know your varieties

Increasing seeding rates can also increase the risk of lodging especially in high-lodging potential cultivars, along with other factors such as environmental conditions, taller variety height, and N fertilization.

“If you are planting a high-lodging cultivar — a cultivar that yields great and has lower straw strength — you are probably not going to want to determin the best seeding rate for hard red spring wheat

An NDSU researcher finds that different varieties also have different tillering capacities

Typically about 10 to 20 percent of a field under-performs. The savings that result from cutting inputs across these high-risk zones generally accounts for 87 of the $53/acre average net return attributed to variable rate fertilizer. The rest comes from using the field data to boost yields on high-producing zones. It’s an important return on investment that savvy growers are taking steps to implement for the 2016 crop year.

However, without a dear understanding of what’s happening on your farm — and the easily accessible data to back it up — effective precision management becomes very challenging.

This past spring, Clayton and Melissa Osnisky from Eastern, Saskatchewan went mobile with the Agri-Data Solution app. The move paid off.

“It has been invaluable for our record keeping,” says Melissa. “I put in the data according to what we’ve done on the farm — for chemicals, spraying, the rate we seeded — and when we harvest, all the data is entered. It figures out our cost per acre and cost per unit production. The bookkeeping is so much easier.”

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The Manitoba Co-operator  |  January 28, 2016

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Push the seeding rate at all, because if the environment is right it’s going to lodge and there will be a harvest and yield impact,” Mehring said.

“Some varieties will tiller so well that the seeding rate doesn’t necessarily make a difference and that’s something you need to know,” he said. “If you have some agronomic information that says a variety has a higher tillering capacity, that may be one you consider scaling back a bit on the seeding rate.”

Mehring’s biggest message to producers and agronomists was to gather as much information as possible about different HRSW varieties to be able to make the best seeding rate choices for each situation.

“You should use all of the information that you know about a variety,” he said. “It’s not just the yield and the protein of the variety that matters. It’s the height of the variety, the lodging potential, the tillering capacity, relative maturity, whether you’re planting earlier or later — all of these intricate factors will be important to take into consideration when you choose a seeding rate.”

Mehring is working on using predictive tools such as known genetics, as well as phenological characteristics including tillering, plant height and photoperiod sensitivity to predict optimum seeding rates for different HRSW cultivars.

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WE’RE WITH YOU

On-farm strip trials can help determine which varieties perform best on your farm.  PHOTO: GORD MModing

Environment is a major factor in tiller production and yield, so it’s also important to choose the HRSW cultivars that are most broadly adapted to your growing region.”

GRANT MEHRING

NDSU

Continued from previous page

Tillering is one of three components that ultimately determines yield but it’s a complex process involving many different factors. It isn’t easy to predict, which is why producers can’t simply look up tillering capacity in their provincial seed guide.

“There is no actual genetic predictor of tillering capacity that we know of,” Grant Mehring of North Dakota State University told the Manitoba Agronomists Conference in December. “The only way I know to predict tillering capacity is to do plant counts. If you take pictures at different growth stages you can get a sense of the tillering capacity of different varieties based on which one is filling the canopy faster.”

Mehring suggests producers may want to do some on-farm strip trials to get a sense of which varieties tiller well under their conditions. There is also a free app available from the Oklahoma State University called Canopeo — available for iPhone or Android — which measures the percentage canopy of green live vegetation based on photos taken with a smartphone.

Assessing tillering capacity of HRSW

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App will identify bugs and outbreaks in real time

Farmers and agronomists sought for testing app that will allow reporting and tracking of insect outbreaks

**BY ANGELA LOVELL**
Co-operator contributor

Researchers at the University of Manitoba and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada are developing a new app that will make it easier for farmers to practise integrated pest management (IPM).

The free, user-friendly app, which should be available in 2018, incorporates three separate tools for pest identification, forecasting and crop management. The pest ID tool is currently in the most advanced phase of development and contains ID keys for 69 insect pests of canola. It will eventually have additional insect pests of other crops, 160 to 200 weeds, and several diseases in its database as well.

The farmer will be able to bring up the app on an iPhone or Android device in the field, choose the type of pest — i.e. “canola bugs” — and scroll through multiple, high-definition images of different characteristics — such as wing shape, or type of crop damage — to help identify the bug. Once the farmer confirms its identity, the app has a guide to more information about how to manage the pest, or offers the option to email extension staff or an agronomist.

**Information in real time**

The forecasting tool provides real-time data that’s generated and updated fields are scouted by growers, agronomists and extension staff who can upload the information into the database. Risk maps reflect the current situation and the algorithm can incorporate climate and other data to help guide management decisions.

The crop management tool allows farmers to keep a history of pests, weeds and diseases they have had in their fields, how they dealt with them, and the outcomes, so they can make better management decisions in the future based on what worked for them.

The app will also have a notifications feature so that any new risk map, warning, research finding or relevant information is available to the farmer as it’s produced.

“We’re trying to make the app work for specialists and non-specialists,” says Dr. Ana Dal Molin, who is working on the project together with Dr. Barb Sharanowski at the University of Manitoba, and gave a demonstration of the app at the recent Manitoba Agronomists Conference in Winnipeg.

“We are trying to open the lines of communication between growers, researchers, agronomists and agencies, and make them faster and more efficient, so they should be able to track down all the issues and provide all the information required to make informed management decisions.”

The developers hope to have the app fully developed by 2018, but in the meantime are looking for agronomists or farmers willing to assist with testing the ID app in the upcoming field season. Those interested should visit http://mobile-ipm.com/ or email barb.sharanowski@gmail.com.

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BY NICOLE MORDANT AND SWETHA GOPINATH  

Weak conditions in the potash market will not improve any time soon, PotashCorp's CEO said Jan. 19 as the fertilizer company announced it would suspend operations “indefinitely” at its New Brunswick mine.

PotashCorp said it was putting its Picadilly mine near Sussex, about 75 km northeast of St. John, in “care and maintenance” mode, resulting in the loss of 420 to 430 jobs.

PotashCorp said it was putting its Picadilly mine near Sussex, about 75 km northeast of St. John, in “care and maintenance” mode, resulting in the loss of 420 to 430 jobs.

Potash prices have fallen sharply over the past year, under pressure from bloated capacity, soft grain prices and weak currencies in major consumers such as India and Brazil, two of PotashCorp's largest customers.

“We don't see in the short term how things will turn around quickly that would change the environment," CEO Jochen Tilk said in an interview.

“We are repositioning the company in light of that but we are still optimistic on the long term prospects for our business,” he said.

As demand for potash has fallen worldwide, PotashCorp, the world’s biggest fertilizer company by capacity, has in recent months closed its nearby Penobosquis potash mine at Sussex and suspended production at three mines in Saskatchewan. PotashCorp’s other New Brunswick mine, at nearby Cassidy Lake, was shut down in the late 1990s.

Saskatoon-based PotashCorp, which had more than 5,000 employees worldwide at the end of 2014, said it would retain 35 employees at Picadilly to keep the operation in “care and maintenance,” while another 100 are to stay on through a four-month "transitional period."

The Picadilly mine, built between 2008 and 2014, would take about a year to restart if PotashCorp decides to resume its operations, the company said.

About 100 affected New Brunswick employees could be relocated to the company's Saskatchewan sites, PotashCorp added.

PotashCorp said it expected to recognize severance and transition costs of about $35 million in the first quarter as a result of suspending operations at Picadilly.

PotashCorp said its customers "historically served" via New Brunswick will now be served from Saskatchewan through Canpotex, the joint potash export arm it operates with Agrium and Mosaic Co. PotashCorp's port terminal at St. John will also be made available to Canpotex.

The suspension would help PotashCorp to reduce its full-year cost of goods sold by $40 million to $50 million and would eliminate capital expenditures of about $50 million in 2016 and $135 million in 2017-18, the company said.

PotashCorp to shut New Brunswick potash mine

Mining at three Saskatchewan sites was also recently suspended due to the down market conditions. Citing soft markets for potash and grains, Saskatoon-based PotashCorp is set to suspend production at its newly new Picadilly potash mine in New Brunswick within the next four months.  

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Brazil soy traders to renegotiate Monsanto royalty deals
Soybean trading firms in Brazil will have to renegotiate agreements to collect royalties for seed giant Monsanto on genetically modified soybeans bought from farmers, the president of industry association Abiove said on Nov. 2.

Monsanto's demands that soy buyers police farmers’ royalty payments on its Intacta RR2 Pro technology, and trading houses’ belief they should be compensated for the service, had caused fears that traders would refuse to buy soybeans last year.

“They are going to have to go back to the table... The agreements in 2014 did not generate profits for the soy industry,” Abiove's Carlo Lovatelli told journalists.

Soy trading houses negotiated with Monsanto for months last year. Abiove’s efforts to broker a deal for all its member firms broke down and individual companies worked out their own compensation for the service.

Abiove represents Bunge, ADM, Louis Dreyfus and Cargill as well as smaller Brazilian firms.

In Brazil, where GM seeds have only been legal for a decade, reusing seeds is more common than in the U.S. and it’s easier for farmers to avoid paying Monsanto’s fees after buying the seeds the first season.

A Monsanto representative did not confirm the renegotiation of the agreements, but said the system of compensating companies would continue. The representative said most farmers in Brazil pay Monsanto’s royalty fee when they buy the seeds, not when they sell soy to trading houses.

Monsanto didn’t say what percentage of Brazil’s 2015-16 soy crop, now in its final stages of planting, would be sowed with pest-resistant Intacta RR2 Pro this season. About a fifth of the harvest was planted with the technology last year, consultancy Celeres said.

Frozen in time
A butterfly frozen to a log was able to move its wings after a little heat from the fire.

photo: jim lundgren

Sao Paulo/Reuters

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In Brazil, where GM seeds have only been legal for a decade, reusing seeds is more common than in the U.S. and it’s easier for farmers to avoid paying Monsanto’s fees after buying the seeds the first season.

A Monsanto representative did not confirm the renegotiation of the agreements, but said the system of compensating companies would continue. The representative said most farmers in Brazil pay Monsanto’s royalty fee when they buy the seeds, not when they sell soy to trading houses.

Monsanto didn’t say what percentage of Brazil’s 2015-16 soy crop, now in its final stages of planting, would be sowed with pest-resistant Intacta RR2 Pro this season. About a fifth of the harvest was planted with the technology last year, consultancy Celeres said.

Frozen in time
A butterfly frozen to a log was able to move its wings after a little heat from the fire.

photo: jim lundgren

Sao Paulo/Reuters

Soybean trading firms in Brazil will have to renegotiate agreements to collect royalties for seed giant Monsanto on genetically modified soybeans bought from farmers, the president of industry association Abiove said on Nov. 2.

Monsanto's demands that soy buyers police farmers’ royalty payments on its Intacta RR2 Pro technology, and trading houses’ belief they should be compensated for the service, had caused fears that traders would refuse to buy soybeans last year.

“They are going to have to go back to the table... The agreements in 2014 did not generate profits for the soy industry,” Abiove’s Carlo Lovatelli told journalists.

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Sao Paulo/Reuters
U.S. ranchers seek checks on volatile cattle futures

The U.S. NCBA blames high-frequency traders for the wild rides in livestock futures

BY TOM POLANSEK
Chicago/Reuters

U.S. cattle producers have called on CME Group and federal legislators to rein in price volatility they say has rendered the world’s largest livestock futures market ineffective.

Two groups of cattle producers agree volatility last year was extreme and a problem, but clash on the cause. The National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA) blames price swings on high-frequency traders, and R-CALF USA says the nation’s largest meat packers fuelled price swings.

CME executive chairman Terrence Duffy was expected to face complaints about the sharp moves at the annual meeting of the NCBA, a trade association representing more than 175,000 producers and feeders in California.

In a letter, the NCBA told Duffy CME needs to do more to police high-frequency traders, including introducing a one-second delay between trading actions and cracking down on traders who cancel orders too often.

“The effectiveness of cattle futures contracts as a viable risk management tool is being called into question due to concerns over high frequency trading,” the letter said.

Meat producers and feeders use CME’s futures contracts to offset the risk of owning cattle. High-frequency traders are speculators who can move trades in a fraction of a second.

CME constantly reviews its agricultural products to ensure they meet customers’ risk management needs, a spokesman said.

“We continue to work directly with our customers and industry groups to address their concerns about recent cattle market volatility,” he said.

“Unprecedented volatility in the cattle futures market rendered it useless for price discovery purposes.”

BILL BULLARD
R-CALF USA

Markets gyrated repeatedly in the second half of 2015. Live cattle futures dropped nine per cent to a two-year low in one week at the end of September and early October, only to gain back almost all the losses the following week.

‘Omnipresent liquidity’

Changes are already on the way. On Feb. 1, CME will implement new rules on order messaging to rein in price volatility they were just upset that prices have declined.

High-frequency traders soothe volatile markets by providing “omnipresent liquidity,” said Bill Harts, CEO for Modern Markets Initiative, a trade group that represents high-speed and algorithmic traders.

Tyson, the biggest U.S. meat processor, fell victim to volatility, losing US$70 million in the fourth quarter of 2015 due to an “unprecedented decline” in live cattle futures last week, according to U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission data.

Some traders said the producers were just upset that prices have declined.

“Unprecedented volatility in the cattle futures market rendered it useless for price discovery purposes,” said Bill Bullard, chief executive of R-CALF, in a letter to committee leaders.

Republican Senator Charles Grassley of Iowa, who chairs the committee, and other members are looking into the allegations, their spokespeople said.

The cattlemen’s association said R-CALF’s accusations were wrong.

UN seeks help for Ethiopia

Food supplies for about 10 million are under threat

ROME/REUTERS

Ethiopia faces its worst drought in decades, leading the United Nations’ food agency to call on Friday for an emergency cash injection of US$50 million to help the country overcome the crisis.

Crop production has fallen up to 90 per cent in some regions and failed completely in the country’s east, a consequence of an El Niño weather pattern that has caused significant declines in rain in some parts of the world and floods in others.

The Rome-based UN Food and Agriculture Organization said the drought had decimated Ethiopian livestock and threatened food supplies for 10.2 million people. Access to pasture and water will worsen until the rainy season begins in March, FAO said.

“The outlook for 2016 is very grim,” said FAO’s representative for Ethiopia, Amadou Alliboury.

“Food overall will become harder for Ethiopia, Amadou Alliboury. ‘Food overall will become harder for Ethiopia, Amadou Alliboury.’

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Gene editing produces virus-resistant pigs

By Ben-Hirschler

British animal genetics firm, working with U.S. scientists, has bred the world’s first pigs resistant to a common viral disease, using the hot new technology of gene editing.

Genus, which supplies pig and bull semen to farmers worldwide, said Dec. 8 it had worked with the University of Missouri to develop pigs resistant to porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome virus (PRRSV).

The condition, also known as blue-ear disease, can be fatal as it affects the animals’ immune system and costs farmers hundreds of millions of dollars a year. There is no cure.

By using precise gene editing, the team from the University of Missouri was able to breed pigs that do not produce a specific protein necessary for the virus to spread in the animals. Their research was published in the journal Nature Biotechnology.

Early-stage studies showed the new PRRSv-resistant pigs, when exposed to the virus, did not get sick and continued to gain weight normally.

The development of these resistant pigs is further proof of the power of gene editing, which is taking the biotech industry by storm. Genus chief scientific officer Jonathan Lightner said it was “a potential game changer for the pork industry.”

Editing the genes of living organisms holds out great promise for treating diseases and improving crops and animal species. But it could also be used to create “designer” human babies, prompting critics to call for a global ban on genetic modification of human embryos.

The technology allows scientists to edit genes by using biological “scissors” that operate a bit like a word-processing program that can find and replace selected stretches of DNA. It has been put to work in laboratories around the world, even as the ethical and safety issues it raises are fiercely debated.

An international summit on human gene editing in Washington last week urged caution on human gene editing but said editing genes in human embryos was permissible for research purposes.

Lightner said there were several critical challenges ahead to fully develop and commercialize the technology.

Libreum analyst Sophie Jourder said commercialization would likely take five years or more but the new resistant pig line would add to Genus’s long-term growth prospects.

PRRSV affects millions of pigs and costs the swine industry over $1 billion a year in the U.S. and 1.5 billion euros (C$2.2 billion) in Europe, according to a 2011 Iowa State University study cited by Genus.

Cheap feed reduces ractopamine use in U.S.

Hog producers are taking advantage of corn prices near five-year lows

By Theopolis Waters

Cheap grain has encouraged some U.S. hog farmers to switch away from using the controversial drug to bulk up their animals, giving them the added benefit of being able to sell to big customers such as China, which have banned the drug.

Ractopamine, known by the brand name Paylean, cuts the weight normally. PRRSv affects millions of pigs and costs the swine industry $1 billion a year in the U.S. and 1.5 billion euros (C$2.2 billion) in Europe, according to a 2011 Iowa State University study cited by Genus.
In an outbreak, he said, as having millions of piglets killed. “It is not as inhumane that he understands why farmers are doing it,” he said. Feeding baby pigs to other hogs is “a natural vaccine.”

Across the Farm Belt, U.S. pork producers are doing whatever they can to shore up their herd defenses against the virus that killed up to eight million pigs, a tenth of the nation’s herd, two years ago, and that farmers fear could return this winter.

The virus, which causes severe diarrhea and vomiting, thrives in cold weather, and declining immunity in the U.S. herd has raised the risk of another outbreak to the highest level since 2013, when pork prices soared to record highs, veterinarians say. A resurgence could drive up hog prices again and hurt profits for processors including Tyson and JBS, which have benefited from low hog prices.

Farmers are better prepared to fight the disease than they were two years ago after implementing precautions to prevent the spread of the virus. Veterinarians said attempts to deliberately expose hogs to the virus also help reduce the risk of another outbreak as big as the one that began in 2013, although it is not clear how many farmers are taking such precautions.

Michael Blackwell, chief veterinarian officer for the Humane Society of the United States, said feeding baby pigs to other hogs “seems to be pretty barbaric,” but that he understands why farmers are doing it. “It is one of the few tools we have had, as having millions of piglets killed in an outbreak,” he said.

Veterinarians said commercial vaccines available from Zoetis and from Merck-owned Harrisvaccines offer limited help preventing outbreaks. They do not specifically target the gut area, which is mainly effective on hogs that have already been exposed to the virus. Harrisvaccines said vaccines are not a “silver bullet,” and Zoetis said there was not enough data proving vaccines effectively protect herds that have not previously been infected.

Such limitations, along with concerns that immunity levels have waned, make farmers turn to methods such as “feedback,” where intestines of piglets killed by the virus are fed to female pigs used for breeding. Immunity has declined because a growing number of hogs have never been infected, meaning they lack natural immunity.

For farmers seeking to deliberately expose their herds to the virus, one step is to identify infected hogs, so they can serve as “vaccine” donors. At Prestage Farms in Oklahoma, which sells hogs to Seaboard Corp., workers place pieces of rope into pigpens for hogs to bite. The rope is then tested for the virus, says Ron Prestage, who runs a division of the family-owned company. “They get a little bit of a bellyache and have diarrhea and then get over it,” he said.
It’s been a century since women gained the right to vote

Petitioning government took persistence, patience — and years

BY LORRAINE STEVENSON
Co-operator staff

It’s been a century since women in Canada gain the right to vote.

“Cheers on the floor of the house...” So declared the headlines of the January 28, 1916 Manitoba Free Press. Jan. 28 marks exactly 100 years since the Manitoba’s legislature gave unanimous approval to the bill that made Manitoba first in Canada to grant women the provincial vote.

It was a long time coming. By 1916, Conservative Premier Sir Rodmond Roblin, with whom prominent suffragist Nellie McClung had verbally tussled, was gone from office over a scandal related to construction of the legislature building. Liberal Premier Tobias Norris, who was newly elected on an ambitious platform promising reforms including a ban on alcohol and compulsory education.

The women’s vote was a watershed moment for a province, where a burgeoning social movement had taken root.

This was the early era of the agrarian movement, and formation of numerous voluntary associations for women such as the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, Ladies Aid Societies and the Women’s Institute (WI). One of the causes was the establishment of public “rest rooms,” which were meeting places for rural women.

WI members, who cannot find written records linking their organization directly to the suffrage movement, feel confident in asserting their rest rooms played an important role, providing a place for women to talk and raise women’s issues, says Donna Young, present-day serving president of the WI in Manitoba.

Women were talking about the state of public education in those days too.

Manitoba has declared 2016 the Year of the School Trustee to honour contributions made by women as school trustees and their service in these roles. Women were permitted to serve on school boards in Manitoba as trustees in 1890 in Manitoba.

Women's auxilliary developed a degree of co-operation among neighbours, the Grain Growers' Association made an early appearance, and with the encouragement of the men, the women’s auxiliary developed a lively identity of its own...

“Politics held as much fascination for rural people as for city dwellers, and current issues such as temperance and woman suffrage were hotly debated.”

But it was also a long process.

Manitoba’s suffrage movement, in an era when roads were scarcely more than trails and phones non-existent, wasn’t characterized by militancy and protests.

It took shape from lectures in town halls, opinion formed reading circulated postcards, debate at dinner tables and conversations in WI’s rest rooms. It ultimately led to circulating petitions. The final petitions were presented by members of the Political Equality League to government on December 23, 1915.

On them were names signed, not days, week, or months, but years earlier.

Historian Harry Gurkin says the root of Manitoba's more progressive attitudes towards women is tied to its rural culture in the early 19th century. In Give Us Our Due — How Manitoba Women Won The Vote, he writes about influential women such as agricultural journalist Corna Hend, Nellie McClung and other prominent suffragists, and of the formation of Political Equality League, which was backed by other burgeoning organizations — including the Grain Growers Association.

A degree of co-operation among neighbours, the Grain Growers’ Association made an early appearance, and with the encouragement of the men, the women’s auxiliary developed a lively identity of its own...

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Oatmeal Jam Squares

We’re using a Canadian substitute for the “Queen of Rice Pudding” recipe accompanying Julie’s column this week. Canadians had to tighten their belts, ration ingredients and cook simple meals and desserts during this time in our history as well. Here’s one from Ration Recipes published by Robin Hood Flour Mills Ltd. The little recipe book featured several recipes to help householders reduce the amount of butter, sugar and meat in their meals. They were thoroughly home tested, “good to eat and easy on both your budget and ration coupons,” the booklets said. These “srumptious” squares for a special occasion, said Ration Recipes.

One can’t help but think the sustained love of oatmeal squares is a preserved memory from wartime years in Canada.

Eating a variety of foods can be a victory for your health

BY JULIE GARDEN-Robinson
Food and Nutrition Specialist
NDSU Extension Service

W

When I was young, my mom used to save all of the leftover bread, rice and other grains from our meals. We would make bread pudding and poulet with the rice, save the water from cooked vegetables, and put it in soup. She also saved water from boiled potatoes if she was making mashed potatoes the next day. The potatoes and other starches fed the yeast, so the bread turned out better with potato water, she said. We rarely threw any food away. Leftover meat became the basis of soup or stew, and stale bread became bread pudding. When I learned to bake, my mother could scrape enough dough from the bowl to make one more cookie. I couldn’t even see any dough left in the bowl.

Sometimes I wondered what prompted this thriftiness and careful avoidance of wasting food.

The other day, I was doing some sorting and cleaning when I came upon some interesting cookbooks from the 1940s, which a friend had given me. These meal-planning guides were titled “Health for Victory,” and were written during the Second World War. My mother was a young, single woman at the time, working in a defence plant.

If you, your mother or grandmother came of age in the 1940s, chances are these types of books were the go-to guides to stretch food during the war effort.

Maybe some men read these, too, but gender roles were a little different 75 years ago.

During this time period, homemakers were advised to feed themselves and their families from the “Basic 7 Food Groups.” This was the 1940s version of “MyPlate,” which is our present-day icon illustrating our five food groups.

Similar to today’s guide, the food groups were designed to be sure that people had adequate vitamins and minerals from their foods.

Can you guess what the “Basic 7 Food Groups” included? Group One included green and yellow vegetables, and Group Two included oranges, tomatoes, grapefruit and salad greens. Group Three included potatoes and all other vegetables. Group Four included milk and milk products, and Group Five included meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dry edible beans, nuts and peanut butter. Group Six included bread, flour and cereal.

We have one “food group” left in this older generation nutrition guidance. Can you guess the remaining food group? If you are thinking butter and fortified margarine, you are correct. (Yes, butter was a food group back then. Sorry, I do not see it returning as a food group any time soon.) In the 1940s, people were encouraged to produce their own food in “victory gardens.” They also were encouraged to preserve food through canning, freezing and drying, and conserve food by avoiding waste. The 1940s guides reminded the readers to “use every crumb, every drop.”

Food was considered a “vital war material.” Food was being sent to support the troops to maintain their stamina and strength, and ration stamps for meat were to be used carefully. People were advised to stretch their meat budget by using more beans, lentils and other pulse foods.

Now let’s flash forward to today’s guidelines. Every five years, new national “Dietary Guidelines for Americans” are released. The 2015 Dietary Guidelines were released in January 2016 because nutrition often is a controversial topic.

Enough said.

Today we have vast amounts of information at our fingertips. I paged through the fragile pages of old cookbooks and perused today’s guidelines on a website on my tablet computer. I was pleasantly reminded that even though times have changed and our knowledge about nutrition has grown tremendously, overall food guidance really is quite similar.

Our ancestors were taught to eat a variety of foods to get the nutrients their body needed. We still need variety. However, we may need to remember moderation more than our food-rationing ancestors, who had a much lower incidence of overweight than today’s generation.

Despite all of our technical advancements and wide availability of all sorts of foods, we can learn some vital lessons from a previous generation. Why not try our best to waste less food, grow more of our own food or buy food grown close to home, eat a variety of foods and prepare it in our own kitchens?

The following are the key recommendations from the 2015 to 2020 Dietary Guidelines. A healthy eating pattern includes:

• A variety of vegetables from all of the subgroups — dark green, red and orange, legumes (beans and peas), starchy and other;
• Fruits, especially whole fruits;
• Grains, at least half of which are whole grains;
• Fat-free or low-fat dairy, including milk, yogurt, cheese, and/or fortified soy beverages;
• A variety of protein foods, including seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, legumes (beans and peas), and nuts, seeds and soy products;
• Oils.

COUNTRY CROSSROADS

Prairie fare

Oatmeal Jam Squares

Makes 30 squares.

3/4 c. shortening
1/2 c. brown sugar, firmly packed
2 1/2 c. Robin Hood Rolled Oats
1 t. Robin Hood Flour (measuring after sifting)
1 tsp. baking soda
1/2 tsp. salt

Thick jam

Cream shortening, which has been left to soften at room temperature, add sugar and blend until very smooth. Add Robin Hood Rolled Oats and mix thoroughly. Sift flour, soda and salt and blend with first mixture until crumbly. Put one-half the mixture on a well-greased 9x12-in. baking pan, and press firmly into a smooth layer. Spread with jam (plum or strawberry gives an excellent flavour). Sprinkle remaining crumb mixture over the top of the jam and pat until smooth. The whole mixture should be no more than 3/4 inch thick. Bake in a “moderate” oven (350°F) for 30 minutes. While warm cut into squares.

Makes 30 squares.

Photo: Thinkstock
Family, friends and neighbours of Frank Crew, along with representatives of the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation (MHHC), came together last fall to recognize and thank the Birtle citizens who retired from farming for his contribution and donation of land that had been part of his family’s farm for half a century.

A permanent cairn was unveiled dedicated to the Crew family that reads:

The donation is very special to high-light in the Prairie View Municipality as along with the land promoting nature’s beauty, and wildlife to half a kilometre of the actual Birdtail River is part of the donation, said Roy Bullion, conservation specialist with MHHC.

John Whitaker, MHHC board chair, who farms in the Erickson area talked about how agricultural and natural habitat weave into one corridor. He said it seems that bits of natural habitat are in the way in this day and age, not- ing the size of farming machinery.

The donation, said Roy Bullion, conservation specialist with MHHC.

“Standing high over the Birdtail Valley, the cairn, which is brown and was clearly leav- ing room to be formed,” said Whitaker. “While the MHHC buys parcels of land, in this situation Frank kindly chose to donate the land in remembrance of his forefathers and future generations.”

Councillor Roger Wilson knows full well the important work that MHHC puts forth.

“Having sat on the MHHC board at one time, these folks do great work across Manitoba,” said Wilson. “Managing property with grace and style, it’s nice to see things like this hap- pen.”

Thanks Frank for removing mus- kels of land — home to an abundance of wildlife — into perpetual motion.

“It is nice to share the land, farmed by three generations of the Crew fam- ily,” said Frank. “The land has been a well-maintained no-hunting area, which will be kept in the same manner by the MHHC.”

The land will be managed for the next three to four years the same way that it is currently managed — portions that are cultivated will continue to be cropped. Similar to all lands donated to the MHHC, it is available to the general public for walking, hiking, birdwatch- ing and for the enjoyment of the great outdoors.

The MHHC is a non-profit Crown cor- poration established in 1986. Its direc- tive is to work in partnership with pub- lic and private organizations and indi- vidual landowners to conserve, restore, and enhance fish and wildlife habitat in Manitoba.

Darrell Nesbitt writes from Shoal Lake, Manitoba.
Welcome to Country Crossroads

If you have any stories, ideas, photos or a comment on what you’d like to see on these pages, send it to Country Crossroads, 1666 Dublin Ave., Winnipeg, Man. R3H 0H1, phone 1-800-782-0794, fax 204-944-5562, email susan@fbcpublishing.com. I’d love to hear from you. Please remember we can no longer return material, articles, poems or pictures.

— Sue

Info update on microwave food safety

Many cases of food poisoning could be prevented with proper food handling and cooking

Defrosting:
• Read all instructions on food packaging to see if the food is suitable for microwave cooking. Only cook frozen food (without first defrosting) if the label says to “cook from frozen.” Otherwise, defrost food completely before cooking.
• Before defrosting food in the microwave, remove it from Styrofoam trays, freezer cartons or non-microwave-safe containers and wrappings and put it on a plate or in a microwave-safe container.
• Keep food in the refrigerator before and after defrosting it. Do not leave food at room temperature for more than two hours because bacteria can grow quickly at these temperatures.
• Never re-freeze food that is defrosted in the microwave.

Cooking:
• Never cook frozen raw breaded poultry products, including chicken nuggets, strips or burgers, in the microwave because uneven cooking may not kill all harmful bacteria.
• Cook food right after defrosting. Do not cook frozen and thawed food together. Stir food occasionally to avoid cold spots.
• Cut food into small pieces and arrange it to minimize overlapping. Remove meat from bones.
• Use microwave-safe containers and wrappings.
• When cooking meat, use a digital food thermometer to check the temperature in several of the thickest pieces. Wash your thermometer with warm, soapy water before and after defrosting food in the microwave.

Reheating leftovers:
• Reheat leftovers until they are steaming hot. Use a digital food thermometer to ensure the centre of the food reaches 74°C (165°F).
• Only reheat food that you will eat immediately. Avoid putting reheated leftovers back in the refrigerator.

There are approximately four million cases of food poisoning in Canada every year.

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