

2018 Fall AGRICULTURE Plain & Valley



Rocanville Threshing Day

Rocanville Museum hosted its annual Threshing Demonstration and Museum Day on Saturday, Sept. 15. Clockwise from top left, Laura Miskiman and her daughter check out the grain coming out of the threshing machine, volunteers feeding sheaves into the threshing machine, visitors crowd onto the haywagon for a hayride, and a large old Case wood-fired steam engine tractor is driven out from the museum to power the threshing machine.



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Rooting out secrets to creating better crops

BY SARATH PEIRIS

Internationally recognized plant scientist Leon Kochian, Canada Excellence Research Chair (CERC) in Food Systems and Security at the University of Saskatchewan, has been granted \$800,000 by Innovation Saskatchewan to equip a new research laboratory that will improve crop productivity and resiliency.

Using the Canadian Light Source synchrotron, the cyclotron at the Saskatchewan Centre for Cyclotron Sciences, and other advanced imaging equipment, Kochian aims to increase crop yields to feed a hungry world, whose population is expected to reach 9.7 billion by 2050.

The aim is to breed better cultivars of plants such as wheat, lentils and canola with improved root traits that help them cope with a range of soil-based stresses, including drought, low levels of essential mineral nutrients, and pathogens.

"We are using the funding from the province to take advantage of novel cutting-edge tech-

nologies associated with the U of S and Saskatchewan to look at root form and function in ways not possible until now," said Kochian, a professor in plant sciences and soil science in the College of Agriculture and Bio-resources, and associate director of the U of S Global Institute for Food Security (GIFS).

Along with provincial funding through the Innovation and Science Fund (ISF), the Roots of Food Security laboratory received \$800,000 from the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI), \$9,000 from the U of S, and \$391,000 from in-kind vendor contributions to provide cutting-edge technology.

"The advances in fundamental research made at this laboratory by these talented researchers will position Canada strategically to address global food security challenges by driving change in agricultural and food security technologies, practice and policy," said Karen Chad, vice-president Research at the U of S.

A significant part of research

will focus on plant root systems, root architecture and root function in acquiring the mineral nutrients, nitrogen, phosphate and potassium, and water under drought conditions.

"To do this, we have been developing more sophisticated tools for imaging root architecture and function of roots grown both hydroponically and in soil," said Kochian.

"It turns out that plants have a significant genetic control over how they distribute their different root types in three dimensions in the soil. That's turning out to be a very important trait for improved nutrient and water acquisition efficiency of plants."

With CERC money, Kochian has hired two faculty members, a computational biologist from Cornell University and a plant molecular and cell biologist from University of California Davis. He is in the process of hiring two more researchers for the highly multidisciplinary work being done at the facility.

The program will provide unique training opportuni-

ties for the next generation of agriculture scientists. Kochian foresees up to 15 post-doctoral fellows and up to 15 graduate students training in the laboratory.

"We are hiring world-class faculty, and attracting top scientists," he said. Post-doctoral fellows so far have come from the United States and Mexico, and as far away as China, Japan and India.

Ultimately, the research will dramatically accelerate the pace of plant breeding to improve crops globally, and ensure that Canada maintains its position as a leading agricultural producer. Prairie agriculture will benefit from advances in crop resiliency and improved crop performance, he said.

As well, Kochian is working to solve problems in African crops such as maize and sorghum since GIFS also focuses on agriculture in developing countries.

The ISF funding mostly will be used to purchase more lab equipment from large companies, but some money is being invested in

building unique tools for sophisticated imaging of roots.

For instance, the lab group is building a three-dimensional root imaging system that enables the images to be translated into 3D reconstructions. Researchers will then be to quantify different root architecture traits from hundreds of varieties of specific crop species.

Genetic mapping of these traits can identify the genes (and associated molecular markers) leading to differences in root architecture that enable the plant to more efficiently capture water and nutrients.

"One of the biggest advances in biology in recent years has been technological," Kochian said. "We are often studying similar questions to what I studied earlier in my career, but now we are able to look more deeply into the underlying processes controlling these complex traits."

Sarath Peiris is Assistant Director of Research Profile and Impact at the U of S.

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Moisture deficits hit Prairie crops, pasture and hay

BY RICHARD KAMCHEN

A dry growing season has left Prairie farmers with variable crop yields and scrambling to make up for feed supply shortfalls.

YIELDS AND QUALITY

Saskatchewan yields are highly variable, from above average to well below, according to Allie Noble of the province's agriculture department.

With spotty rainfall this season, growers' yields depended on whether or not their fields received adequate rain, she says.

Anecdotal, quality has been good so far, Noble adds.

Similarly in Alberta, yields are the worst in the province's driest region, reports Alberta Agriculture. Southern Alberta yield

estimates are only about three-quarters of five- and 10-year averages. Alberta Agriculture's Mark Cutts predicts yields there will remain near those levels.

But yields in the much wetter Peace Region are at least a quarter above five- and 10-year averages.

The department also estimated quality for all crops so far harvested to be above their short- and long-term averages.

Meanwhile, in Manitoba, spring cereal yields have been better than expected and quality good.

"Disease incidents and severity were reduced because of reduced rainfall," says Manitoba Agriculture's Anastasia Kubinec.

Continued on page 24

Dr. Robert Kitchen, MP

Souris-Moose Mountain

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Moisture deficits hit Prairie crops, pasture and hay

Continued from page 23

FEED
Some crops in Alberta that may have been intended for combining have been harvested for silage or greenfeed, says Cutts.

"So that would pull some barley in and most likely some oats out of the grain end and switch them over to feed for cattle," he says.

Inadequate rain affected pastures and hay production in all three Prairie provinces.

Inadequate rain affected pastures and hay production in all three Prairie provinces. Crop quality is scoring higher than crop yields.

"There are some areas in the southwest and southeast that are worried about hay and feed shortages, and this is due to a lack of moisture we've seen this year," Noble says.

Manitoba farmers have been baling straw from cereals, canola and peas to produce more feed for animals, Kubinec says.

FROST
Frost damage was confirmed by Saskatchewan's and Manitoba's agricul-

ture departments. The effects of subzero temperatures are variable and dependent on crop type, as well as the level and duration of cold, says Kubinec.

For canola, the extent of damage is soon evident, but it takes longer to discern in soybeans, and even longer for corn, she adds.

"We're going to get to

a point here sooner than later when crops will be developed past the point where there should be any impact from frost," Cutts says.

BOTTOM LINE
Crop quality is scoring higher than yields, while farmers compensating for feed deficits are turning to crops for silage and greenfeed and straw for bales.

A salute to Agriculture Producers

I would like to express my appreciation to our agriculture community for the enormous contribution you make to our province's economy.



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Moosomin Airport

St. Onge, Van de Merwe, lay out case for paved runway

BY KARA KINNA

Jeff St. Onge and Dr. Schalk Van Der Merwe with the Moosomin Flying Club made a presentation to the Moosomin Chamber of Commerce on Sept. 11 about why Moosomin's airport needs a paved runway.

In a thorough power point presentation, St. Onge laid out the research he has done, showing that not only is Moosomin the only community in Saskatchewan of its size and type without a paved runway, but that having a paved runway is imperative if the town is to provide proper health care services to people in the region.

St. Onge said that he and Van Der Merwe are adamant that paving the runway has to happen.

"We're pushing this through, we're not giving up until it's done, and for the right reasons," said St. Onge.

Following are some of the major points made in their presentation.

Moosomin gets a failing grade

St. Onge laid out a number of research items that show that, when considering Moosomin's size and the services it has, Moosomin gets not only gets a failing grade for its airport but is at a level of service well below what it should have.

"I tried to determine what a normal airport for a community like Moosomin should be," he said. "I went to Stats Can and I pulled out the population census, then I went to the cross reference book to find out what is the airport for that community, and then I went plus or minus a thousand for the population of Moosomin to find out what is out there.

"Moosomin is literally the only community on there with a gravel strip. Nobody has a gravel strip, you either pave it or you land on grass."

St. Onge pointed out that some larger communities don't have paved strips, but that's because they are close to large centres, like Regina, that already have paved runways.

He says when comparing Moosomin's size the other communities in the area, including smaller communities, Moosomin's airport is an anomaly.

"There are reasons some of these communities don't have paved strips, but there's no reason for Moosomin to have a gravel strip when we look at other communities," he said. "Carlyle has an asphalt strip just south of us, and Kipling also has a 3,000-by-75-foot asphalt strip—those tend to be the closest airports that we can land at that have an asphalt strip and they are sitting at 1,500 people, and we're at 3,000 people.

"I think clearly we're subpar in what a community of our size should have."

The other thing St. Onge evaluated is how much communities spend on their airports. He said the provincial government provides matching funds to airports through its Community Airport Partnership (CAP) Program, and Moosomin's spending is far, far lower than other communities in Saskatchewan.

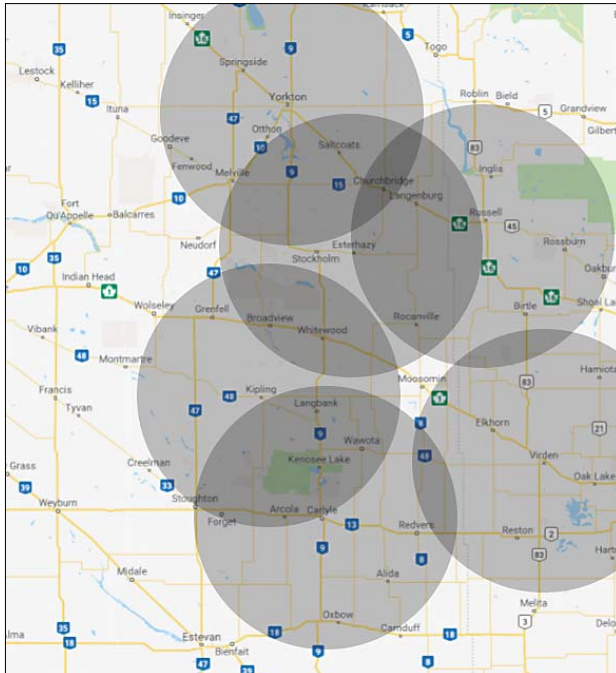
For example, Carlyle received \$360,868 in CAP funding since 2007. Estherhazy received \$273,356. Kipling received \$106,299. And Moosomin has received \$9,631, making it the third lowest community in the province that has received CAP funding since 2007.

"Moosomin is third from the bottom," said St. Onge. "We put \$9,000 in and the government matched it a decade ago and we haven't put any money into our airport since. That is not the Saskatchewan norm. We have less airport than the normal Saskatchewan town would have and we put way less money into it than the normal Saskatchewan town would have."

He also looked at a study done by the provincial department of highways, which is the department in charge of airports in Saskatchewan, and found that, according to them, Moosomin should have a much higher level of airport.

"They went and looked at every community and their airport and tried to rate what airport they should have. And there are four levels of airports in Saskatchewan," said St. Onge.

Those four levels are regional airports



An illustration showing the impact zones of the paved runways in this area. Moosomin sits right in the middle, outside of every impact zone, and with no impact zone of its own due to a lack of paved runway.

Town	Population		Runway Type	Runway Length	Economic Benefit
	Town	Rural			
Shaunavon	1857	416	Asphalt	3000' x 75'	\$1.51 M
			Earth/Asphalt	2430' x 40'	5 Jobs \$664/capita
Carlyle	1252	565	Asphalt	3200' x 75'	\$1.11 M
					6 Jobs \$610/capita
Yorkton	15,154	1810	Asphalt	4800' x 150'	\$7.55 M
			Asphalt	3000' x 100'	52 Jobs \$445/capita
Moosomin	2420	530	Gravel/Clay	2700' x 80'	
			Turf/Gravel	1525' x 40'	

Regional Airports in Saskatchewan: A Review Report

A study from 2002 showing the annual economic benefit of having a paved runway.

(larger centres with 5,000 or more people, 50 or more hospital beds), primary airports (2,000 to 5,000 people, 15-49 hospital beds), secondary airports (1,000-2,000 people, 1-15 hospital beds) and local airports (under 1,000 people, typically grass runway).

"A primary airport, this should be Moosomin," said St. Onge. "We hit the population range. We're between 2,000 and 5,000 people, we're between 15 and 49 beds and they are saying a community like this, the minimum should be a 3,000 foot runway, hard surface, we should have lights on there—this should be us."

"Then they went through and looked and said who is making the grade? And what did you fail on? Where are your deficits?"

"They attempted to put Moosomin into a secondary airport, even though we should be primary, and we failed. We are literally a local airport. They said your deficiencies are literally your runway. We have the population and we have a long enough runway, we have the hospital beds but we are failing right here."

"Kipling is a secondary airport and we should be primary. So a smaller community is a secondary airport. We are a local airport."

He said, according to the Department of Highways study, Moosomin is also losing a significant amount of dollars com-

ing into the community because of a lack of paved runway.

"They tried to put a dollar value on an airport, and the three airports that they studied were Yorkton, Carlyle and Shaunavon, and they determined that those airports economically to those communities were worth \$7.5 million and 55 jobs."

St. Onge says if he looks at the dollar coming in per capita, Shaunavon's airport brings in \$664 per person a year, and Carlyle's airport brings in \$610 per person per year. He said Moosomin's airport would bring in approximately \$500 per person per year, or around \$2 million to the community.

Health care services affected by lack of paved runway

Both St. Onge and Van Der Merwe talked about how the lack of a paved runway has not only caused an issue with health care services in the past, but is a growing concern when it comes to providing certain health care services in the future in the Moosomin area. The primary problem is that the Saskatchewan Air Ambulance plane can not land in Moosomin and transport patients to Saskatoon.

"There is a huge argument to be made that a paved strip is actually an extension

of the hospital," said St. Onge.

"There have been a couple of huge health care changes. One of the things coming up is that the children's hospital in Saskatoon is going to be the primary hospital for kids with major trauma."

"Once the Children's Hospital is built there will be no more children's intensive care in Regina," adds Van Der Merwe. "Basically if your child gets hurt or is injured or very sick and they are between birth and 17 years old, they are going to Saskatoon because that's where all the experts are going to be."

"The problem for us at the moment is we can't get them there unless we go to Virden. Any time we transport them to Saskatoon, we load them in the ambulance here, take them to Virden because Virden has a paved strip, unload them from an ambulance, load them into a plane and then they fly out. Right now it's a logistical nightmare."

"The other thing with children is we always want to send a parent or guardian or caregiver with. The only people who can take them with is a fixed wing—the air ambulance. STARS can take the child but they can't take anyone for else for weight."

"The other thing that changed is in January of 2017 is the stroke protocol in Saskatchewan changed," added St. Onge. "If you couldn't make it to Saskatoon in three and a half hours then they didn't really deal with you, and now it's get there as fast as you can, minutes matter."

"All of the skillset is up there in Saskatoon, and the only way to Saskatoon in a timely manner is a fixed wing. STARS does not have the range to get their. Their helicopters are amazing, they do wonderful things. But I liken them to a quad or ATV. They are the ones that get off the road and go into the backwoods to do what we want. But right now to get to Saskatoon we don't need a quad, we need a half ton. We need to jump in that half ton and that half ton needs roadways."

"It's not that we need one or the other, we need both."

Van Der Merwe said stroke patients in Moosomin area are currently driven by ambulance to Yorkton, then driven by ambulance to Saskatoon.

"If you have a stroke, you go to Yorkton from here, not Regina. You get loaded into the back of an ambulance, they CT scan you in Yorkton, once they decide you are going to get the drugs you need if it's a stroke, then they will then move you onto Saskatoon. You can think of the logistical nightmare and the time it takes to drive you to Yorkton. And they don't fly you to Saskatoon, they drive you from Yorkton to Saskatoon. The whole stroke centre is in Saskatoon."

"Right now what we have is STARS air ambulance that flies in here. And they do their job and do it wonderfully but they're huge restrictions are about weight," says St. Onge.

"We are just on the edge of the radius that they can fly to, so they fly in, shut down and fuel up, and away they go. We are beyond what should be the reasonable expectation that a helicopter can cover. There are built in restrictions inherent to the size of vehicle they have."

"Right now we are making them do everything that they can."

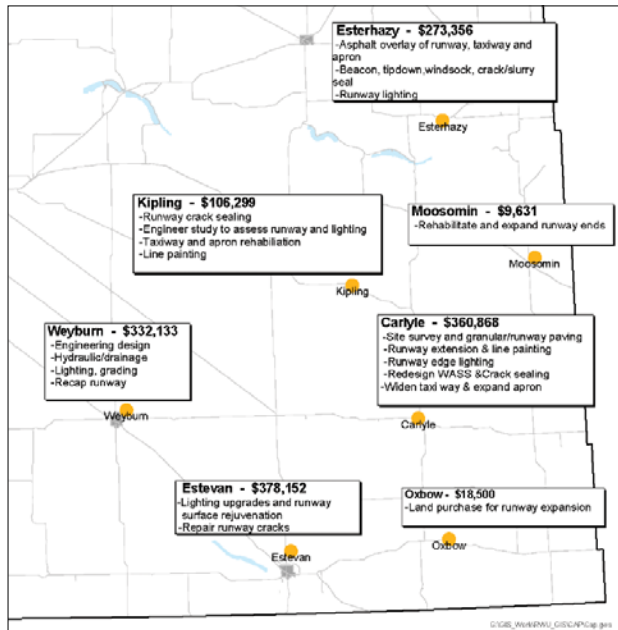
It was also pointed out that STARS can only fly to Regina, and not to Saskatoon.

"The fixed wing are flying planes in and they have a very short time from Saskatoon to Moosomin," said St. Onge. "They can actually get a plane from Saskatoon to Moosomin quicker than we can get a helicopter from Regina. It's not about distance, it's about speed and time."

St. Onge pointed out that the air ambulance can also come into Moosomin with some emergency equipment that can only be carried on a fixed wing, that they are less impacted by weather than a helicopter.

He said in calm winds it takes STARS an hour and five minutes to fly into Moosomin, and an hour and six minutes to go back to Regina. The Saskatchewan Air Ambulance takes 50 minutes to get from Saskatoon to Moosomin, and 51 minutes to get back to Saskatoon.

Continued on page 26



A map showing the provincial CAP funding that has been given to different airports in the area since 2007. Moosomin falls far short of other airports in the area.

Jeff St. Onge and Schalk Van Der Merwe giving their presentation at the Moosomin Chamber of Commerce meeting.

Moosomin Airport

St. Onge, Van de Merwe, lay out case for paved runway

Continued from page 25

"If we have an airport with a paved runway we can drop you in Saskatoon where you need to be faster than we can put you into Regina," he says.

"It is literally part of a multi tiered health care approach. We need to have the fixed wings and we need to have the helicopters here.

"When I was talking to Jim Thompson (with Saskatchewan Air Ambulance), he told me that an airport in Moosomin will have operational significance to anyone within an hour of Moosomin. So this is something that will help Redvers out, this

will help Whitehead out, this is not just a Moosomin thing."

St. Onge concluded by saying that every airport with a paved runway has an impact zone around it.

"These are the paved runways around here," he said, showing an illustration with the runways in Carlyle, Kipling, Virden, Yorkton, Russell, and Esterhazy, and the impact zone around each runway. The illustration shows Moosomin outside of every impact zone.

"And when you start looking at where we are and you draw the circle, we are literally in the middle of no mans land," he

said. "So when you look at how far we have to go and where we are located in terms of where the paved runways are, and you look at the money we spend on our airport and you look at what a normal airport should be for a town this size, the facts in my mind jump out and say this is an area we have to move forward on.

St. Onge said when they look at the cost of putting in power, landscaping and paving the runway, it would be about a \$2 million project. However he noted that the CAP grant can be applied for to a maximum of \$275,000 a year. He also said the

Moosomin Flying Club has been in discussion with Nutrien.

"Nutrien is in a place where they have to decommission their runway or either partner up with us, so we have all those irons in the fire," he said.

"The one thing we have to start thinking of is that airports are transportation infrastructure. They are like highways, roads, parking lots and sidewalks.

"It's just a piece of equipment that we need to make the hospital more efficient, make the town more efficient, bring in that two million a year, and bring in the businesses."

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Elevator at Indian Head demolished

The old Parrish and Heimbecker elevator in Indian Head, owned by Paterson Grain, was demolished recently. Russell Construction Demolition and Recycling from Sperling Manitoba was the company hired to do the demolition. All the metal will be recycled and the huge beams were saved. Dan Loran of Indian Head submitted this collage of the elevator being torn down.

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The Harvest of Hope crop was taken off recently just north of Moosomin on Highway 8. Proceeds from the crop go to the Canadian Foodgrains Bank to feed hungry people around the world, with the federal government matching the donation 4:1. At the harvest event, volunteers with Conexus Credit Union served chilli and a bun and people enjoyed a field lunch before the combines got rolling to take off the canola crop. From inputs to labour to equipment, the project relies on donations and volunteers each year.



Above: Combines roll out into the field and start the harvest.

Right: Bennett Doka enjoys a chocolate chip cookie during lunch.



Above: A large crowd came out for the lunch and to watch the crop be taken off.

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Three generations of the Wilson family with their unique tractor that doubles as a barbecue. From left are Kevin, Colton and Ken.

Third year for old-time harvest at Wilson farm

BY ED JAMES

For three years now the Ken Wilson farm south of Wawota has been like a page out of a farming history book at harvest time, with lots of antique and vintage farming equipment, people in overalls and engineer hats, and a crop to take off with no shortage of volunteers of all ages who want to help and experience what some of the various aspects of a Western Canadian farm were like back in the day.

The Wilsons hold their old-time harvest event on the September long weekend each year.

One of the special things about the two-day-long event is that there are three generations working together. You will find Ken, his son Kevin and grandson Colton all over the place, helping, fixing, driving, explaining, and doing it all with a smile!

The antique and vintage farm machinery belongs to the Wilson family, and other equipment is from friends and neighbours who want to showcase the vehicles to help, or to run some of the vintage machinery with long pulley belts or PTO units.

Near the display area is a rest area with the hard-working members of the Wawota United Church Raise the Roof group selling light lunches and homemade pies.

In a field of swathed oats on the west side of the event sit four vintage combine harvesters, the bright red paint covered with a fine rust patina from years of hard work in the field. The engines come to a roar and they drive around the field of golden crops on an equally golden sunny afternoon. After awhile a few of them stop with,

as one old timer said, "a stomach ache," which means a clog in the workings. Ken Wilson was heard to say there were only 32 acres to harvest, and he was sure that all four of the combines would be clogged by noon. And he was right! However with pry bars, the workers tuned the internal drums by hand and cleared out the clogs.

On another part of the field stood the huge antique threshing machines, waiting for the hay racks of sheaves to come in from an antique binder that slowly makes its way around another part of the grain field. In fact, in the field is a farmer showing how it takes up to seven to ten sheaves to make a proper field stook.

Back at the threshing machines, the long pulley belts are hooked up and the threshing machine begins to shake and rattle while there is never a shortage of volunteers wanting to climb on top of the hay rack to throw sheaves of grain into noisy machine. From its two long spouts, out come the grain kernels into the high walled green grain wagon. Out the other spout comes the yellow wheat straw in a huge pile, inviting the young or the young at heart to jump in!

There was another very special threshing machine on hand that day that was in full operation, given the fact that it was at least 100 years old and made of wood! The machine is owned by Dean and Eileen Godon who farm south of Moosomin. Dean recently picked up the rare wooden machine at a private museum auction sale in the Alida area. He said other than cleaning out the racoon scat, replacing some belts, pulleys and some oil and grease, it runs just fine. When the machine started to pour

grain kernels into the wagon, he had a big smile on his face. He plans to keep the rig stored at the Wilson farm for future use.

One of the more unusual machines that was demonstrated that day was a square hay baler that could make bales of any size. They were bonded together by thin metal binding wires that a two-man crew had to thread through the bale as it passed by, and the other person would twist tie the ends together. However, an old timer who was watching the operation said you had to be very careful of the wires when moving the bales, as you could be easily cut by the thin, often rusty, wire!

It was a long day for those who came out to help and who had come a long way, even as early as the night before with their camper trailers.

After the crowds were gone the Wilson family held an evening barbecue that I was lucky enough to be invited to. It was there I was able to catch up to Ken Wilson for a brief interview. My question was "Why all this effort and work?"

"I do this with my son and grandson, because it makes people happy!" he said. "It brings back memories to the old farmers and workers, and it shows the younger people how the old equipment was used on the farms back in the day." His wife, Anne joined in and said, "Ken finds it lots of fun, since it does make people happy and it brings together antique farming machinery and techniques that are no longer with us. It's Bill's hobby that he loves, and it has three generations of our family working together on the land."

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U of S researchers uncover insect-resistant genes in wheat

BY FEDERICA GIANNELLI

A recent PhD graduate at the University of Saskatchewan is among the first researchers worldwide to apply the groundbreaking sequencing of the bread wheat genome to develop more pest-resistant crops.

Kirby Nilsen has used the new sequence to identify genes in wheat that can help the plants resist wheat stem sawfly—a pest that may cause yield losses of up to 30 per cent annually to the \$11-billion Canadian wheat industry.

His work was a key component in breakthrough research published Thursday in Science, in which a U of S research team led by Curtis Pozniak, a researcher and wheat breeder at the Crop Development Centre (CDC) in the U of S College of Agriculture and Bioresources, played a key role.

Nilsen worked as a PhD student on the project with Pozniak.

“Without using the complete wheat genome sequence, it would have taken years to find the genes associated with stem solidness,” said Nilsen, now an assistant plant breeder at the CDC.

Nilsen has found solid stems in wheat are key to resisting the damage sawflies cause to stems. Unlike hollow stems, solid stems hinder the survival of sawflies by acting as a barrier. With hollow stems, the insects reach the base of the plant, causing the stem to break and leading to harvest losses.

Solid stems are also thought to improve the ability of wheat to endure heat stress.

“We have completed the wheat genome jigsaw puzzle with all the pieces put together in their correct positions and order, providing an enormous advantage for breeders when searching for genes that control important traits in the crop,” said Pozniak.

The solid stem wheat varieties Nilsen has analyzed show multiple identical copies of the solid stem gene—information that will be useful for developing new insect-resistant varieties.

“Now we can select desirable genes for breeding in just days, and it will be easier for scientists to discard plant lines that



Researcher Kirby Nilsen in a wheat field.

Photo: Dave Stobbe for the University of Saskatchewan

carry unwanted traits,” he said.

Nilsen said the wheat genome sequence is helping breeders select the solid stem trait by using a molecular marker-assisted selection technique which identifies at the DNA level the genes in plant lines that carry the hollow or solid stem traits.

The mapping of the bread wheat genome has been previously thought an impossible task because it is five times larger than the human genome and more complex.

By using cutting-edge sequencing technology from U of S industrial partner NRGene, Pozniak and more than 200

scientists from 73 institutions in 20 countries have been working over the past 13 years on finalizing the genome sequence. The project was part of the International Wheat Genome Sequencing Consortium (IWGSC).

Pozniak and Nilsen are currently working to remove the solid stem genes from plant lines and adding them back to further validate the role these genes play in controlling stem solidness.

“I have been learning a lot from Dr. Pozniak, a world research leader in wheat genomics who is involved in projects that will have implications on a global scale,”

said Nilsen.

The research was conducted via the Canadian Triticum Applied Genomics project, and jointly funded by Genome Canada, Genome Prairie, Western Grains Research Foundation, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture, SeCan, Saskatchewan Wheat Development Commission, Alberta Wheat Commission, the Manitoba government, Viterra, and DuPont Pioneer.

This article first ran as part of the 2018 Young Innovators series, an initiative of the U of S Research Profile and Impact office in partnership with the Saskatoon StarPhoenix.



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How to show consumers the benefits of GM foods

BY DAVID DI ZHANG AND GRANT ALEXANDER WILSON

USask researchers have found that changing the value proposition from industry-centric to consumer-centric may help to mitigate the negatives associated with GM food.

Genetically modified (GM) foods for human consumption have long been a subject of intense public debate, as well as academic research.

Despite the lack of scientific evidence to suggest GM foods are less safe than conventional foods, previous studies have shown that consumers are reluctant to fully embrace them and are wary about the technology that produces them.

In our upcoming article in the Journal of Commercial Biotechnology, we show that consumers' attitudes toward GM foods, their willingness to purchase them and the price they are willing to pay could be significantly improved if GM products had a direct benefit to them personally.

Our findings at the University of Saskatchewan's Edwards School of Business have the potential to change how agriculture biotechnology companies promote their products—while also creating significant value.

Particularly, we found that consumers are willing to accept and pay premiums for GM foods that have value that's personally relevant to them.

In other words, changing the value proposition from industry-centric to consumer-centric may help to mitigate the negatives associated with GM food.

FOOD INSECURITY IS CRITICAL

In 2009, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations identified global food security as an increasingly critical issue as the world population grows, and said that meeting the growing demand for food will require agricultural biotechnology. Therefore it's necessary to build widespread consumer support for GM foods.

Creating GM food with direct consumer benefits could play a pivotal role in gaining such support. Not only does promoting direct consumer benefits have the potential to change perceptions, as shown by our study's data, it may also be a profitable endeavour.

We surveyed 750 Canadian consumers on different ways of presenting GM foods.

The first group of consumers saw ads for GM foods that promoted several industry-oriented benefits that might indirectly appeal to consumers, such as higher yield, less pesticide usage and enhanced global food supply. These messages were similar to those typically promoted by GM food proponents.

The second group of consumers saw ads focusing on direct consumer benefits, such as better taste and enhanced nutrition.

The third group of consumers saw ads for GM foods that promoted both direct and indirect consumer benefits.

The result of the survey showed that, not surpris-

ingly, the participants in the first group were less inclined to buy GM foods even at a price that was significantly lower than comparable non-GM foods.

The consumers who were accepting of GM foods appreciated that GM technology had positive benefits and was creating value. However, they believed that the technology has only benefited the industry, and demanded that a portion of the value is passed onto the consumers.

In contrast, the participants who were presented a value proposition that directly benefited both the industry and consumers reported better attitudes toward GM foods, expressed higher purchase intentions—and they were willing to pay a premium for such products.

WHY CONSUMERS DO, OR DON'T, ACCEPT GM FOODS

These findings suggest that how consumers assess the value of GM foods to themselves personally, as opposed to solely how or why the food is made, is fundamental to consumers' attitudes, purchase intentions and willingness to pay.

Many previous studies have examined consumer perceptions of GM foods and explored why or why not consumers were reluctant to accept them.



Genetically modified foods could be made more attractive to consumers by underscoring how they personally benefit from them.

A 2016 study conducted meta-analyses that reviewed hundreds of prior studies and how consumers' personal characteristics could influence their acceptance of GM food. Those factors included gender (men might be more likely to accept genetically modified foods than women), education, income (consumers with higher income might be less likely to accept GM foods), prior knowledge and family situations, etc. Genetically modified

foods could be made more attractive to consumers by underscoring how they personally benefit from them.

In other words, the emphasis has been on figuring out how to change consumers so that they would accept GM foods.

But our research points to the need for the GM industry to change how it's promoting the products, and to begin producing foods that directly benefit consumers. The agricultural biotechnology industry

needs to place consumer interests at the centre of their focus, not only at the time of selling their products, but also during the research and development processes.

Indeed, in a previous University of Saskatchewan study, we found that in Canada, consumer-oriented biotechnology companies generally outperform those that aren't consumer-oriented.

HEALTHIER RICE
The idea of a second

generation of GM products—the kind that could hold real appeal to consumers—is now gaining momentum.

Earlier this year, the Canadian government approved the sale of a vitamin-fortified golden rice that contains higher levels of Vitamin A. It's potentially beneficial to those consumers who may suffer from Vitamin A deficiencies.

Nonetheless, promoting direct consumer benefits is not a total panacea.

Even while successfully showing consumers how GM foods can benefit them personally, there were still a substantial portion of the participants in our study (35 per cent to 50 per cent, depending on the products presented) who refuse to purchase GM foods no matter the price.

This indicates that consumer acceptance of GM foods is a complicated matter. There's still a long road ahead to convince shoppers at the grocery stores to consider genetically modified foods as personally beneficial.

David Di Zhang is an Associate Professor in Management & Marketing, University of Saskatchewan, and Grant Alexander Wilson is a Faculty Member, Department of Management & Marketing, University of Saskatchewan.

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The line of combines ready to start the harvest.



Volunteers and community members line up for lunch before the harvest.

Kola harvests a crop for the hungry

BY KEVIN WEEDMARK

Under bright blue skies, the community of Kola came together August 23 to harvest a crop to help the hungry. The Cross-Borders Growing Project has been going for decades, with proceeds every year going to the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

Volunteers seed, grow, and harvest the crop, with the help of a long list of sponsors, from Rocky Mountain Equipment, Mazer Implements and Pattison Ag providing equipment, to Lincoln Farm Supply providing agronomy services, Nacho's Flying Service, and many more.

The value of the grain is matched 4:1 by the Canadian government, and helps people in a long list of developing countries.

Gord Janzen, Canadian Foodgrains Bank regional representative for Manitoba, spoke at the harvest lunch.

"For me it's wonderful to be here at this harvest gathering," he said. "I want to thank all of you who make this project happen, not just today, but throughout the year. There are about 40 growing projects in Manitoba and this is one of the longest running."

"Thank you for having a perspective on the world that looks beyond ourselves. Our vision is of a world without hunger. The proceeds from this project and other projects are so much appreciated by the member agencies of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. They are matched by the Canadian government four to one and are used in hunger alleviation projects overseas. In February, I was able to visit some of those projects in Ethiopia and can tell you the help really does make a difference in the lives of people, and especially farmers in other places that just don't have as much, and don't have the resources that we have."

Janzen said he has been working for the Foodgrains Bank for just a year, but has been involved for many years.

"I was involved many years ago when I was in university," he said. "I was sent by the Mennonite Central Committee and Foodgrains Bank to report on food for work projects in India."

"I grew up in India as a missionary kid, so that was my

first introduction to the program end of things, and I saw how that was working. After I finished studying agriculture I went into church work for a bunch of years and now I'm coming back into this.

"This opportunity came up and I'm thrilled to be able to interact with Foodgrains Bank supporters in Manitoba." He said he has learned a lot in his year with the Foodgrains Bank.

"I've been impressed with the generosity of people," he said. "People are incredibly generous and I just appreciate that people have a larger perspective on the world, that they

remember that there are many hungry people in our world and this is a great way to respond to those needs.

"Within the communities that have growing projects, I think there is a general understanding that there are hungry people in our world. There are 815 million hungry people—that is one out of nine people in the world's population that are hungry. That's a lot of people and we have the ability to respond to those needs."

He said growing projects like Kola—and Moosomin, which also has a growing project—are vital to the Foodgrains Bank.

Continued on page 35

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FALL 2018 SALE SCHEDULE

— SEPTEMBER 2018 —

24 Monday	Butcher Sale	9 a.m.
26 Wednesday	Presort Angus Feeder Sale	10 a.m.

— NOVEMBER 2018 —

2 Friday	Bred Cow Sale	11:30 a.m. (pending)
5 Monday	Butcher Sale	9 a.m.
7 Wednesday	Presort Charolais Feeder Sale	10 a.m.
12 Monday	Butcher Sale	9 a.m.
14 Wednesday	Presort Angus Feeder Sale	10 a.m.
16 Friday	Bred Cow Sale	11:30 a.m.
19 Monday	Butcher Sale	9 a.m.
21 Wednesday	Presort Feeder Sale	10 a.m.
26 Monday	Butcher Sale	9 a.m.
28 Wednesday	Presort Feeder Sale	10 a.m.
30 Friday	Bred Cow Sale	11:30 a.m.

— OCTOBER 2018 —

1 Monday	Butcher Sale	9 a.m.
3 Wednesday	Presort Feeder Sale	10 a.m.
8 Monday	No Butcher Sale	
	Receiving Feeders: 10 - 5, Presort	
10 Wednesday	Presort Angus Feeder Sale	10 a.m.
11 Thursday	Sheep & Goat Sale	12 Noon
15 Monday	Butcher Sale	9 a.m.
17 Wednesday	Presort Feeder Sale	10 a.m.
22 Monday	Butcher Sale	9 a.m.
24 Wednesday	Presort Charolais Feeder Sale	10 a.m.
29 Monday	Butcher Sale	9 a.m.
31 Wednesday	Presort Angus Feeder Sale	10 a.m.

— DECEMBER 2018 —

3 Monday	Butcher Sale	9 a.m.
4 Tuesday	No Borders Charolais Sale	
5 Wednesday	Regular Feeder Sale	9 a.m.
7 Friday	Bred Cow Sale	11:30 a.m.
9 Sunday	Bonchuk Farms Female Production Sale	
10 Monday	Butcher Sale	9 a.m.
12 Wednesday	Regular Feeder Sale	9 a.m.
14 Friday	Bred Cow Sale	11:30 a.m.
17 Monday	Butcher Sale	9 a.m.
19 Wednesday	Regular Feeder Sale	9 a.m.
20 Thursday	Schweitzer Simmental Dispersal Sale	
21 Friday	Bred Cow Sale	11:30 a.m.

BUTCHER SALE DELIVERY:
 Sundays: 12 p.m. - 8 p.m.

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Music in the Field held at Lund farm



Shown here are Milton and Elsie Henry of McAuley and Elkhorn area farmer Gerry Lund on right accompanying them.

BY ED JAMES

For several years now, Elkhorn farmer Gerry Lund and his partner Angela Tourond have been holding a unique music event at Gerry's farm southwest of Elkhorn.

Far off the road along a winding narrow dirt path you will find a stage, picnic site and a man-made beach area. There is a seating area made up of a couple rows of old movie theater seats, swings and even a small wooden dance floor.

As I drove along the path, most of the fields had been swathed or were dotted with large round bales. At the stage area cars begin to arrive as old musical friends and new one meet and open up their instrument cases. The guitars and fiddles in some cases are as old as them but still have lots of music left in them.

Once on stage each will take their turn at leading a few songs as the bass and drummer provide the background beat. You will hear the likes of old time

waltzes, polkas, reels, country and western love songs and a little early rock and roll that Gerry is partial to.

The music goes on for the whole afternoon as the audience listens and the younger children play in the grass and beach area. The musicians are of all skill levels, but no one is there to judge. If it's the wrong key or tune, they stop, have a laugh and try it again.

At around 5 pm there is a field lunch for everyone, and the food tastes great in the warm afternoon sun, with a slight breeze blowing from the west. After supper, some head out, but a few stay to play a bit more of just sit around and visit.

Gerry provides all this without charge because he sees it as a chance for people in the area and from away to share music, meet old and new friends and to celebrate the magic of old-time music. It was a perfect late summer day. That the music will keep our spirits up in the coming cold of winter.

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U of S studies effects of playtime for piglets

BY NICOLA SCHAEFER

It's playtime for piglets at the Prairie Swine Centre (PSC), where Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVM) researcher Dr. Yolande Seddon hopes to find out whether piglets that play are better able to cope with life's stresses.

Animals play only in the absence of stress, pain and fear, says Seddon, an assistant professor in swine behaviour and welfare at the WCVM. Additionally, play has a critical role in the behavioural development, influencing learning, development of social skills and motor skills. It is also hypothesised that play could be a source of pleasure, reinforcing performance of this behaviour.

"If we can find out that [play] benefits the behavioural development, physiology and the mental state of the pigs, then there is a strong basis to try and offer opportunities for play in modern production systems to promote good pig welfare," says Seddon, who also holds the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada's Industrial Research Chair in swine welfare.

Seddon believes that enriching piglets' environment will do far more for them than relieve boredom. It may set them up with beneficial skills and help them through the most stressful period of their lives. At weaning for example, piglets are separated from their mother, changed from a liquid to a solid diet, moved to a new location, and then required to live with piglets that are from other litters.

All of this change can lead to health issues for pigs such as digestive problems and/or a drop in body weight. Seddon hopes her play research may help piglets better adjust, reducing stress for piglets and the medications used to support them.

"The pig's immune system is also developing at that point," says Seddon. "And it's the period of time when antibiotics are frequently required in pig production to control health disease outbreaks."

If Seddon's team finds evidence that playing improves pig welfare, using methods that producers could easily adopt could lead to real opportunities for enhancing pig welfare in existing production systems. Science has already shown that more space and interesting environments are good for pigs, but to help improve health and hygiene, pigs are still largely raised in barren environments.

Seddon explains the challenge of simply providing extra space in an industry with fluctuating hog prices.

"Space is very expensive. If you're going to provide more space within an existing barn footprint, you're going to put less pigs through, and can you make the finances work?" she asks.

That's why the preliminary play studies by Seddon are identifying how important extra space is to promote play, or whether play can be promoted through modifying use of existing pen space.

Additionally, Seddon is investigating how providing opportunities for play periodically could enhance any beneficial effects.

"It's the fact that [the pigs] are getting it periodically that makes it a more exciting event ... and that is something that can likely work in a production unit," she says.

Funded by an undergraduate student research award from the University of Saskatchewan, a research team worked last summer to answer the initial question: what simple adjustments are needed for piglets to play more in a standard production environment?

The team made simple modifications to the environment of a group of piglets at the Prairie Swine Centre, giving them periodic access to a few square feet of extra space or to a tunnel inside their pen for 30 minutes a day (modifying the use of existing pen space). Then they compared how much these piglets played to piglets raised without these treatments.

"We're comparing the treatments ... one where [the piglets] are having space outside the pen, and one where we're trying to get [them] to use the existing pen space differently," says Seddon. "They're all probably going to stimulate different types of play ... provision of extra space we know is going to stimulate more locomotive play, but how does it alter social play?"

Seddon suspects the piglets will use the tunnel to hide and chase each other through, which may improve their social development—an idea she developed having observed piglets using a pop-hole in a farrowing pen to play through.

When pigs have experience with extra space or a tunnel, they have had greater exposure to new life experiences, and this can drastically alter their development.

If the research can show that play will benefit the welfare of pigs and their productivity, Seddon says this will have big implications for the barns of the future, which may have opportunities for play built right in.

"We need to develop production systems that meet economic, environmental and animal welfare sustainably ... I personally think the impact play could have is huge," she says.

Nicola Schaefer is a second-year veterinary student at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine. She is originally from Winnipeg, Man. Her story is part of a series of articles written by WCVM summer research students.

Piglets enjoy some play time at the U of S Prairie Swine Centre.



Photo by Christina Weese

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Kola harvests a crop for the hungry

Continued from page 32
 "For the Foodgrains bank, it's huge," he said. "The growing projects are a significant portion of the donations that we receive."

He said his trip overseas with the Foodgrains Bank was an eye-opening experience.

"In February I was on a learning tour with the Foodgrains Bank in Ethiopia," he says. "We saw mostly agriculture and livelihood projects. They are mostly small landholders who are farming in incredibly challenging situations where it's dry. Those farmers can really benefit with just a little bit of help. Just getting some extra assistance is really transformative."

Kola farmer Don Neufeld has been involved with the Cross Borders Project for decades.

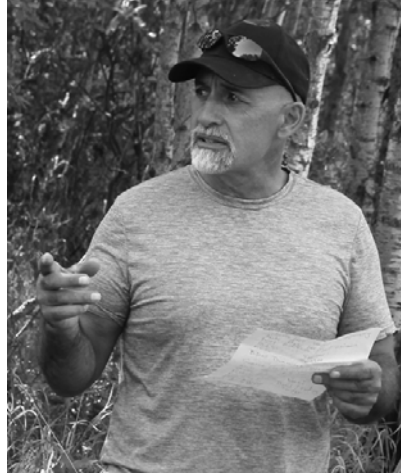
"I don't know if it's 32 or 33 years, but it's been a long time," he said.

"I thought maybe the project would die after my dad passed away, but then I realized the importance of actually trying to alleviate hunger in the world."

"I wanted to do my part and I've had the opportunity to travel globally to see the different countries. Once you realize that we live as the top three percentile in the planet I think that changes your perspective in life and you understand what's important and what isn't."

"Everybody should be able to eat, especially children."

Neufeld said the Kola project has changed over



Organizer Don Neufeld speaks to the crowd.

the years.

"The number of farmers has significantly changed because there are less farmers farming more acres, so there aren't very many of us around. So we do more acres with less farmers and less machinery because it's more efficient. I wish there was still a farm family on every quarter section of land but that isn't going to happen."

"We have four main farmers that are involved with the project, and a lot of sponsors. We've had some of the same sponsors for over 20 years. Our sponsors have been very good to us, really good. The equipment companies have been really,

really good to us."

Neufeld said things were looking good as the harvest got under way Thursday.

"We seeded 280 acres and I think we'll probably have gross revenues of maybe \$150,000, so when the government matches us four to one, that should be \$750,000."

"I came a couple days earlier and just cleaned this corner out, and I think it is going to be between 70 to 80 bushel an acre. It's actually pretty nice wheat."

"It's very patchy this year, so this one is probably going to be better than a lot around."

The annual contribution from Kola has added up over the years.

"For sure we've raised over \$10 million dollars already, easily," Neufeld says.

"It used to be \$50,000 a year back 25 years ago, so if you take that with a matching contribution from the federal government it would have been a quarter of a million dollars a year, and now it's almost three quarters of a million dollars a year, so that doesn't take many years to add up. Over 30 years it would be a substantial amount of money."

"For a little community like this that's pretty exceptional. It is amazing. We've got many good people we are very thankful for. I feel very privileged and very blessed."

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From Your Legislature

**Honourable Warren Kaeding PAg
 MLA for Melville-Saltcoats
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Public understanding of agriculture as measured by the percentage of Saskatchewan residents with a positive perception of agriculture.

One of the goals of the Sask Ag Ministry is to ensure that 85% of Saskatchewan residents have a positive perception of agriculture. Agriculture plays a critical role in Saskatchewan's growth and identity. Agriculture is a progressive, modern and market-driven Saskatchewan industry, yet the average citizen is removed from direct food production. Therefore, it is often sensational media stories that influence the public's opinion of the agriculture industry and, as a result, the public may be exposed to inaccurate or biased information.

The Sask Ag Ministry will continue to provide factual information about the importance, relevance and sustainability of the province's agricultural industry in order to earn and maintain social license. Efforts directed at youth will provide education on the science of agriculture, as well as the multitude of diverse career and entrepreneurial opportunities the sector offers.

Agri-food exports are down from our record high in 2015 of \$15.3 billion to an estimated \$13.5 billion in 2017 due to market access issues, however this is still above the five-year average of \$13.2 billion. With the forecast growth in world populations and income levels, global demand for food and agricultural-related goods is anticipated to increase. The Ministry will continue to support the sector to take advantage of these emerging opportunities by expanding market presence, influencing federal trade negotiations and collaborating with industry.

It cannot be stated enough, just how much the entire Ag sector means to this province. Thank you to all our Farmers, Ranchers and Ag Businesses that support our Ag sector.

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Depressed on the farm

BY AMANDA STEVENSON
This article was written by former World-Spectator reporter Amanda Stevenson, who now writes for the Calgary Herald.

While it deals specifically with depression and stress resulting from the drought in southern Alberta this year, we thought it has lessons for agriculture producers in our area, who have not experienced the catastrophic drought of southern Alberta, but still face stress because of the number of variables they must deal with.

It's a bleak harvest season on Sean Stanford's farm south of Lethbridge, where just three inches of rain has fallen since the first of May.

Like many farmers in southern Alberta, the 34-year-old Stanford had high hopes for his crop at the start of the year. But by mid-June the rains had stopped coming and his spring wheat, canola, flax and yellow peas baked in the dried-out fields. Now, it's time to get the crop off, but Stanford already knows there will be no great payoff once it's in the bin.

"The yields are not looking good," said Stanford. "Basically we've just seen a whole year's worth of work erode away because of something we can't control."

The near round-the-clock workload combined with the prospect of negative returns can make harvest a challenging time for any farmer. But for Stanford, who was diagnosed with anxiety almost two years ago, the mental health risks are real. When the negative feelings start to take hold, he makes a conscious choice to get off the combine and seek human contact.

"Taking breaks—something as simple as taking a grain sample to town and talking to the people at the grain elevator—can be enough to reset my mind and take me out of the monotony of combining a horrible crop," he said. "And I make sure that I make phone calls throughout the day and talk to different people. It's a distraction from what's going on."

Stanford is an outlier among his peers, in that he has chosen to be open about his struggles with mental health.

A University of Guelph study in 2016 found farmers are among the most vulnerable groups when it comes to mental health, reporting higher levels of stress, depression, emotional exhaustion and burnout than the general population.

The same study found 40 per cent of agricultural producers would feel uneasy getting professional help due to the stigma that exists around the issue.

"I was afraid to talk about it, when I first got my diagnosis, but as time went on I started to realize, 'hey, I'm not alone,'" said Stanford, who tried three different medications before finding one that helped to control his symptoms, which he describes as a physical feeling, like

"having a heart attack or a stroke or an aneurysm."

"Farmers are supposed to be strong, independent, salt of the earth people who don't need help from anybody," he said, adding he has also found seeing a therapist helpful. "But the more I started to talk about it, the better I felt about it and the easier it was to start healing."

The stresses 'are huge, and so variable'

There are not a lot of statistics available about the mental well-being of farmers. A widely-cited study from the U.S. Centre for Disease Control reported the "farming, forestry and fishing" industry had the highest rate of suicide of any occupation, but that study has recently been withdrawn due to errors in the data. In Canada, suicides aren't tracked by occupation.

However, Andria Jones-Bitton, the University of Guelph professor behind the 2016 survey that polled more than 1,100 Canadian farmers nationwide, said the results of her work point to a definite problem. According to the survey, 45 per cent of Canadian farmers polled had high stress, another 58 per cent were classified with varying levels of anxiety, and 35 per cent experienced depression. An additional 38 per cent had high levels of "emotional exhaustion."

Jones-Bitton said there are a number of mental health risk factors associated with agriculture. Farmers work long hours, often in isolation. They are under significant financial pressure, often required to take on millions of dollars' worth of debt just to purchase the land and equipment required to operate. And in most cases, a farmer's place of business is also his or her home, meaning there is no easy way to separate from the workload.

Sean Stanford says he needs distractions to take his mind off "the monotony of combining a horrible crop."

In addition, farmers are consistently vulnerable to unusual events and circumstances that can impact their bottom line—from weather and natural disasters to international trade disputes.

Some producers in the University of Guelph survey even reported increased stress due to the heightened public scrutiny around agricultural practices. Anti-meat and anti-GMO consumers often attack mainstream agricultural practices on social media, leading some farmers to feel their industry and way of life is under attack, Jones-Bitton said.

"If you look at some of the stresses that farmers face, they're just huge, and so variable," Jones-Bitton said. "So many of the stresses they're experiencing in their jobs are outside of their control, and that leads to a sense of helplessness and helplessness—which increases their risk for negative mental



Sean Stanford farms near Magrath in southern Alberta

health outcomes."

'Us cowboys, we like to think we're pretty tough'

Brad Osadzuk knows only too well how a farmer can be knocked off his feet by an unexpected event.

In 2016, Osadzuk's ranch near Jenner, Alta., was "ground zero" for a bovine tuberculosis scare, after a case of the disease was found in a cow traced back to his herd. The resulting months-long investigation by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency saw more than 50 ranches in southeast Alberta and southwest Saskatchewan placed under quarantine. As a precaution to keep the disease from spreading, nearly 12,000 animals were ordered destroyed—including Osadzuk's entire herd.

"That TB thing was just a nightmare. It was by far the worst thing I've been through in my life, emotionally," Osadzuk said. "I was relying on sleeping pills. I wasn't sleeping and I knew I had to get sleep, so I doped myself up."

Osadzuk said because the TB episode affected his entire community, he tried at the time to keep a brave face for his friends and neighbours. He acknowledges part of the reason for that may have been the ingrained culture of farming, where stoicism is valued and where producers have traditionally kept their problems to themselves.

"Especially us cowboys, we like to think we're pretty tough," he said. "My dad's generation, you didn't show weakness. It would literally eat you up inside, and then one day you'd find out you had a neighbour who shot himself or hung himself, and nobody even knew there'd been a problem."

Producers affected by the bovine TB outbreak of 2016 ultimately received \$39 million in government compensation payouts, but Osadzuk said he knows of at least one producer in the Jenner area who had to check himself into the hospital for stress-related health complications during the height of the crisis.

"You think you're going broke, you're stressed and depressed. You literally think you're going to lose your livelihood," he said.

"It was an awful time."

'The stress level is quite high'

The mental health risks to farmers are amplified in a year like this one, where producers across the Prairies are dealing with the aftermath of prolonged hot and dry conditions. According to a federal government assessment, as of the end of August, large portions of southern Alberta are now considered to be in "severe drought" (defined as abnormally dry conditions occurring on average every 10 to 20 years) while a small area south and west of Medicine Hat is categorized as in "extreme drought" (occurring once every 20 to 25 years).

The Alberta government estimates that across the province, crop yields are six per cent below the five-year average, but 27 per cent below average in the hard-hit southern region. While some regions received rain and even snow this week, moisture during the height of harvest is a hindrance, not a help.

The poor weather conditions have meant financial stress and mental worry not just for grain, cereal and oilseed farmers, but for cattle producers as well. According to the Alberta government's Aug. 28 crop report, 36 per cent of the province's pasture land is rated in "poor" condition and in some regions that figure climbs to nearly 60 per cent. Cattle are getting thin and producers whose grazing land has dried up are struggling to source feed from elsewhere.

In some areas, according to Alberta Beef Producers chair Charlie Christie, the price of hay has nearly doubled from a year earlier. Many ranchers are being forced to make tough decisions—including selling off cows to feedlots prematurely because they know they won't be able to feed them over the winter months.

"In the areas that are hurt the most, the stress level is quite high ... Some guys are liquidating 20, 30 per cent of their herd," Christie said.

At a recent Alberta Beef Producers board meeting, members discussed the toll that a drought like this can take on ranchers' well-

being. While—in general—agricultural producers are becoming more open about talking about mental health, Christie said his organization is well aware that some ranchers may be suffering in silence right now.

"Depending on what kind of genetics you're using, it can take 10 to 20 years to build a cow herd and feel really comfortable and good about it," Christie said. "If you have to liquidate it, it's part of your life ... so we're definitely looking at that (the mental health aspect) and moving forward to see what more we can do there."

New foundation offers mental health training

For farmers experiencing any form of mental distress, there are a number of factors standing in the way of getting help. Even those who are able to get past the stiff upper lip mentality that is prevalent in the industry may have difficulty finding counsellors or therapists in rural areas. And the demands of harvest or caring for livestock may make it impossible to take time off to travel into the city for appointments.

That's part of the reason behind the 2017 launch of Do More Agriculture, a not-for-profit foundation that aims to create awareness about mental health on the farm and build a community of support and resources for those affected.

Co-founder Lesley Kelly, who lives and farms with her family east of Saskatoon, said the foundation has launched a pilot project that will provide 10 to 12 rural Canadian communities with mental health first aid training at no cost. Similar to traditional first aid in that it is meant to be used in emergencies until appropriate support is found, mental health first aid refers to in-the-moment help for individuals dealing with an urgent mental

health problem or crisis.

"I like to explain it as, if I were to sprain my ankle, most people would know in that instant what to do," Kelly said. "But if I were to have a panic attack, chances are people would not know what to do."

Last July, Kelly and her husband, Mathieu, did an internet live-stream sharing their own mental health struggles—hers with the "baby blues" following the birth of the couple's second child, and his with anxiety related to farm and financial stress. She said the response to that video showed her just how hungry the agriculture community is to have a real conversation about mental health.

"Our phones just lit up with people saying, 'This is me. This is what I've been going through,'" she said. "It was a huge eye-opener to me."

Do More Agriculture is also trying to keep the conversation going on social media, since many farmers work in isolation day-to-day but are able to connect with peers on Twitter.

"You really do think you're alone, that everyone else is perfect and lives normal lives, and that's totally not the case," Kelly said.

Back on his Lethbridge-area farm, Sean Stanford knows he will need to keep an eye on his own mental health not just for this harvest season, but likely for the rest of his life.

"I know how to manage it (the anxiety) a lot better now, but it's still there," he said. "It's not really anything that will ever go away."

However, Stanford said he has drawn strength from sharing his story, and the hope that other farmers will see his happy-go-lucky exterior doesn't always reflect what is going on inside.

"Maybe other people can look at me and say, 'hey, he looked like he had his sh't together, but he actually doesn't,'" Stanford said. "And maybe that's ok."

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MB provides livestock producers with funding to combat dry conditions

The Manitoba government is taking another step to help livestock producers who have been affected by dry conditions across the province, Agriculture Minister Ralph Eichler announced.

Ag Action Manitoba – Assurance: Beneficial Management Practices provides targeted incentive programming to agricultural producers and select industry service providers to advance the adoption of beneficial management practices (BMPs) that reduce identified environmental risks, improve agro-ecosystem resilience, build public trust and improve environmental sustainability of farm options in Manitoba.


The Managing Livestock Access to Riparian Areas BMP provides funding for livestock producers to protect surface water. Recognizing that limiting livestock access to surface water may require alternate wa-

ter sources, clarifications have been made to the BMP to enable funding for water source development.

To be eligible for funding under Ag Action Manitoba – Assurance: Beneficial Management Practices, applicants are required to complete an Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) to assist them to manage risk on their farm operations with respect to water quality and supply, soil health, air quality and biodiversity. Producers have until Feb. 15, 2019, to submit their EFP Statement of Completion.

Applications for several BMPs will be accepted on a continual basis throughout the fall, the minister said.

Producers can contact their local Manitoba Agriculture office or call the department (toll-free) at 1-84-GROW-MB-AG (1-844-769-6224) or go to www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture under Quick Links.



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At the Twin Valley Riding Club Rodeo & Bull-O-Rama

The Twin Valley Riding Club Rodeo and Bull-O-Rama was held in Esterhazy on August 25 and 26. The rodeo included bareback, saddle-bronc, bull riding, tie down roping, wild cow riding, junior steer riding, steer wrestling, team roping, barrel racing, breakaway roping, goat tying, wild cow milking, a wild horse race, a calf scramble, wild pony race, goat tipping and mutton busting. Shown here are some photos from the weekend.



Thank You

Twin Valley Riding Club Rodeo & Bull-O-Rama

The Twin Valley Riding Club would like to thank the sponsors and volunteers for helping to put on our annual Jackpot Rodeo and Bull-O-Rama. Without all of you this event would not be possible.

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- All of the Twin Valley Riding Club Members for your help before, during, and after the rodeo.

We apologize for anyone we have missed!



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