



An aerial view of crops in the Moosomin region during a past growing season.

Kevin Weedmark photo

Soil conditions good leading into seeding

Area producers gearing up for a busy season

BY RYAN KIEDROWSKI
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

While an overall mild winter, recent late-season snowstorms have been a big boost for soil conditions in the southeast. One thing everyone agreed on is that the Moosomin region is well-positioned for moisture, with producers anticipating the busy seeding season beginning somewhere in mid-to late April.

"I would say, out of all the areas in the province, we're actually sitting pretty good for soil moisture," said Wendy Schatz Leeds, Lead Agronomist at Sharpe's Crop Services in Moosomin. "Our crops utilized a good amount of the soil profile last summer, but we did have a bit of recharge in the fall, and March is typically our high moisture month for snow."

With some areas of Saskatchewan still poised for drought conditions, the southeast may be the envy of those closer to the Alberta border.

"We're sitting good enough with our soil moisture to start our crop," Schatz Leeds said. "Obviously, we're going to need rain for the season—crops can't live without water—but if you compare us to the western side of the province, we actually look pretty decent."

Right now, she foresees a decent growing season and

perhaps a wetter year ahead.

"I think we're going to have a good growing season. We've had above-normal temperatures for the winter, and I'm a believer in averages. So we might have to recoup that somewhere along the way, but March is looking pretty normal," Schatz Leeds remarked. "To me, this feels like a regular March, so that might be a good sign that we're going to continue with more normal weather. There are some predictions that we're going to have a wet in-season, a wet summer, which is always a positive, too. As long as the farmers don't have drowned-out areas, that usually means there's really good crop potential, and maybe we'll see some fungicide usage needed."

A drier than average fall and mild winter certainly raised concerns of what is being retained under that topsoil, but the experts are confident in a good start to seeding.

"From what I've read and seen, you guys are a little bit above normal for some of the snowfall over the winter. Probably a little bit of a better start going into the growing season than some other areas of the province, but definitely still needing a little bit more moisture throughout the majority of the province and still into that southeast part of the province a little bit as well," said Meghan Rosso, Crops Extension Specialist with the provincial Ministry

of Agriculture. "We started with a drier fall. We haven't got quite as much snowfall throughout the majority of the winter. I think this last little bit of moisture that we got over the last couple of weeks of snowfall set some good moisture into that top soil surface layer, so hopefully we will get some good germination conditions for the spring. Hopefully, we can get some more moisture to replenish some of that subsoil moisture in the soil."

Rosso also pointed to snowpack surveys conducted by the Water Security Agency, which collected data up to March 1. Even without taking into account snow that hit the ground past that point, the southeast corner remained well-positioned.

"They estimated that the snowpack ranged from well below normal in some areas of the southwest to above normal in areas that were west of Saskatoon," Rosso explained. "As you move into the eastern part of the province, they surveyed and anticipated that the snowpack was near normal, and then as you move to the northern part of the province, the snowpack still remained well below normal for what they're used to in that area. There is still lots of time going into the growing season to increase some moisture in that soil."

Continued on page B7 ^{ESP}

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Lethbridge-based CAAIN project pushing food traceability boundaries

Plant protein extractor partnering with advanced Saskatchewan farm operation and Calgary Tech Company

The Canadian Agri-Food Automation and Intelligence Network (CAAIN) recently unveiled the fourth story of an eight-part series highlighting results of the AgTech research and innovation projects it has funded through its 2022 Open Competition and its Beef and Pork Primary Processing Automation and Robotics Program.

CAAIN's mandate from Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED) is to fund technological responses to the most significant opportunities and challenges facing the nation's agri-food producers and primary processors. That means supporting promising efforts with the potential to provide economic or environmental value. The featured stories demonstrate that CAAIN is doing just that, as does investing in 35 projects with a combined total value of approximately \$100 million.

"Today's consumer is savvy," explained Darrell Petras, CAAIN's CEO. "Quickly passing are the days when we grabbed anything off the grocery store shelf without checking the label. Agri-food production is increasingly sophisticated, boasting advanced tracking systems that allow us to know in great detail the content and provenance of our consumables. That's why this traceability project drew our attention. It's all about accountability and consistency."

The project whose story is being unveiled is yet another example of the extraordinary value CAAIN brings to the Canadian taxpayer by investing in R&D that will revolutionise the agriculture and food sectors, in Canada and around the world. *F3: Farm to Factory to Farm: Pea Protein Quality and Traceability* is a \$10M innovation that will receive \$3 million in CAAIN funding over the next three years. The brainchild of Lethbridge's PIP Inter-



national, a start-up that is rapidly assuming a leadership role in the vegetable protein market, this research initiative boasts a team that includes Calgary-based food-sector technology developer Provision Analytics, and Monette Farms, a crop and cattle enterprise that is headquartered in Swift Current, Saskatchewan, and operates tens of thousands of acres in Western Canada and the United States.

"This project is testament to the entrepreneurial spirit and vision of PIP founder and CEO, Christine Lewington. Her background in engineering and her extensive experience in agri-food project management provide her with unique expertise that helped convince us this major investment is one we had to support. The progress to date has been impressive, and we feel the eventual finished product will provide real value to farmers and processors, regardless of their crop. PIP's success

over its first three years will form a base on which to build the traceability work," says Petras. "What's extraordinary is that until four years ago Christine had never worked in protein extraction or traceability. Now, here she is leading the charge in both areas, spearheading technological advancements that will benefit us significantly in numerous ways. She personifies the kind of innovation and business acumen CAAIN seeks to support."

The Canadian Agri-Food Automation and Intelligence Network (CAAIN) is a not-for-profit company launched in July 2019 with funding of \$49.5-million from the Government of Canada's Strategic Innovation Fund, and assistance from Alberta Innovates in the form of significant in-kind contributions. CAAIN drives collaborative agri-food technology research and innovation from coast to coast.

See Page B24 for the project story ^{ENR}

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Budget delivers record investment in agriculture

Saskatchewan's 2024-25 Budget released Wednesday supports Saskatchewan's agriculture industry through investments in programming for producers and agribusinesses, funding for agricultural research and enhancements to crop insurance. The Ministry of Agriculture budget is \$570.6 million, a \$22.4 million increase from the previous year.

"Our province's agriculture sector is the backbone of our economy while helping to feed the world through sustainable crop and livestock production," Agriculture Minister David Marit said. "Our investments in this year's budget support the continued competitiveness and strength of the sector."

This year's Agriculture budget includes \$431.7 million, an increase of \$23.7 million over last year, to fund a suite of federal-provincial risk management programs, including Crop Insurance and AgriStability, through the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership.

Crop Insurance premiums and coverage levels



are both down from 2023, largely due to an average decrease in insured commodity prices. The average multi-peril coverage level is \$389 per acre and average premium is \$12.71 per acres. Producers' coverage and premium are individualized to their operation, reflecting each producer's production records and claim history.

Introduced for the 2024

Crop Insurance Program, Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation's (SCIC) weather-based programs now provide options to insure intercrops and additional mixed feed crops. All weather-based programs are enhanced through an added 38 weather stations to SCIC's existing network, bringing the total to 224 stations across the province.

The budget invests \$89.4 million for a second year of strategic initiatives under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, including the Irrigation Development and Irrigation Efficiency programs, to help develop new irrigated acres and support improved energy and water efficiency of existing systems. Saskatchewan has developed

more than 55,000 new irrigated acres in the last four years, well on the way to the Growth Plan target of 85,000 acres.

The funding for strategic initiatives contains an investment of more than \$38.0 million for agricultural research, including support for institutions that do state-of-the-art research in Saskatchewan, project funding and programs that promote the implementation of new technologies.

As producers continue to deal with the effects of

consecutive years of dry conditions, this year's budget also includes a freeze on the Crown land grazing rate at 2022 levels. Additionally, producers who must reduce their stocking rates on Crown grazing land due to drought will be eligible for a lease discount.

Despite challenging weather conditions, Saskatchewan producers harvested more than 31.0 million acres in 2023 and exported a record \$20.2 billion in agri-food products.

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School and community engage youth in farming

BY EMILY LEESON
FCC

If principal Kevin Van Lagen (or Mr. VL, as the students at Altario School call him) misses a day, he's liable to miss a lot.

"I wasn't there one day, but the student leaders had a meeting and apparently ended up trading four lambs for six pigs—I came back the next day and they said, 'Hey Mr. VL., we're getting pigs!'"

And indeed, that's how decisions for the school farm typically go. "The students make a lot of the choices," Van Lagen says.

Learning that reflects agricultural heritage

Altario School in Altario, Alta., three hours north of Medicine Hat, isn't your run-of-the-mill K-12 rural school and Van Lagen isn't a typical principal. By embracing the agricultural heritage of the area and strengthening the school's connection to its community, Van Lagen is reworking what rural education can look like and introducing students to a world of possibilities within agriculture.

Today, the school is significantly different from how it was when Van Lagen arrived in 2014. "It's a strong community and the school historically had high academics, but I'd say it had fallen on some tough times," he explains. "There was a lot of turnover. I was actually the sixth principal in six years."

That year, the school had nine students graduate, most of whom were heading towards further studies in agriculture. But when he asked them what path



Van Lagen is reworking what rural education can look like and introducing students to a world of possibilities within agriculture.

within agriculture they were specifically interested in, many were unaware of the variety of different routes they could pursue.

"I started realizing in conversations with them that they really didn't know how many possibilities there were," explains Van Lagen. "That's ultimately where the idea started to formulate: How can we show more career pathways in agriculture to our students and celebrate the fact that we are a very agricultural community? That's our heritage, let's embrace it."

A simple idea leads to business investment

Without a background in agriculture himself, Van Lagen was nonetheless up for the challenge. "I've definitely learned a lot in the last few years," he says

with a laugh.

Van Lagen started by coordinating a few agricultural theme days for the school and invited local speakers and demonstrations. That spring, he thought it would be an interesting idea to raise a steer as a fundraiser for the school. "A few parents suggested, 'Why not raise it at the school?'" The local agricultural society helped out with funds for a shelter, and the school put together a little pen.

"In February of 2019, I saw an advertisement for a 36' by 36' barn, so I went to our school board and said, 'Do you think you could

buy us a barn?'"

The answer was yes. "In June, we had an open house and a barn dance in our new barn and we auctioned off one of our steers," says Van Lagen. "We got over \$50,000 in donations that night."

Today, the school farm is flourishing—in many directions. "We usually raise turkeys and chickens, and we have laying hens, sheep, pigs, cow-calf pairs, and we raise steers," says Van Lagen.

Inside a hydroponic food modular, the students grow fresh produce year-round. "We harvest 500 plants a

week—we have a subscription model where people get boxes of produce every week," he explains.

Mentors and leaders optimize and inspire

Mentors from the community assist with different aspects of the farm and Van Lagen says there's a real sense of ownership being built. The community

is re-invested in the school and the students are taking the reins of their own education.

Students in grades seven through 12 can apply to be farm leaders—responsible for certain strands of the farm business—and younger students take part on a week-by-week basis doing chores.

Continued on page B17

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Q1 2024 Macroeconomic snapshot: Comparing Canadian and U.S. economic performance

BY KRISHEN RANGASAMY, FCC

While interest rates have gone up at about the same pace in the U.S. and Canada, the associated drag on the economy has clearly been more pronounced this side of the border. Just look at what happened last year as Canada's GDP growth was restricted to 1.1%, well below the 2.5% growth print stateside. The performance gap was entirely due to domestic demand, particularly interest-rate-sensitive components of GDP, namely housing, consumption spending and business investment. And with rates likely to stay elevated for a while, it's difficult to see Canada making up lost ground on the U.S. in 2024. On the plus side, continued U.S. economic expansion should translate into decent exports for Canadian Ag producers and food and beverage manufacturers.

Heavier debt service burden in Canada

Nobody should be surprised that high interest rates bite harder this side of the border. Canadians not only have higher debt loads than Americans but that debt also renews more regularly e.g., mortgage terms in Canada generally do not exceed 5 years while in the U.S. it's not uncommon to find 30-year mortgages. All of that means that the household debt burden is heavier in Canada.

Note that more than 15% of disposable income goes towards servicing debt in Canada, while in the U.S. the debt service ratio is less than 10% (Figure 1). The debt service burden was similar in both countries back in 2005, but since then there's been a sharp divergence as the Financial Crisis of 2007/08 (and resulting collapse of the U.S. housing market) prompted massive household deleveraging in America, while Canadians went the other way, piling on debt in synch with a soaring housing market.

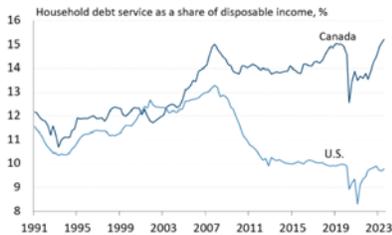
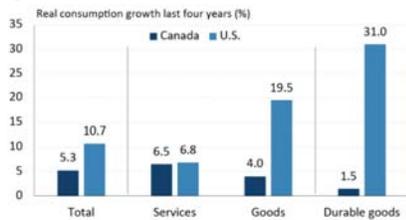


Figure 1. Americans bear a much smaller debt service burden than Canadians

This higher sensitivity to interest rates (compared to Americans) wasn't immediately apparent, but it became clearer as rates jumped to multi-decade highs in the post-pandemic era. The surge in rates prompted Canadians to save more (the household savings rate doubled from about 3% prior to the pandemic to 6.2% at the end of 2023), contrasting sharply with the observed drop in the savings rate stateside. And that clearly impacted spending.

While consumption of services has grown at roughly similar pace in both countries over the last four years, outlays on goods have grown five times slower in Canada compared to the U.S. over that period, restrained by the highly rate sensitive durable goods i.e., long lasting goods such as automobiles, electronics or appliances (Figure 2). This is all the more remarkable considering Canada's population growth outpaced that of the U.S. over the period. It should also not come as a surprise that per capita spending on food in Canada declined in 2023 while food and beverage manufacturers recorded minimal growth in sales (mostly from strength in a few export markets).



Source: Statistics Canada, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

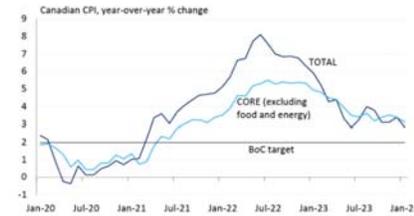
Figure 2. Canadian consumption has underperformed relative to the U.S. over the last four years

Below-potential growth will take steam out of inflation

Looking ahead, Canadian consumption is likely to continue underperforming relative to the U.S. (although we're expecting spending growth to moderate stateside as well due to a low savings rate) as the debt service ratio remains elevated amid upcoming mortgage renewals. High housing costs and a weakening labour market

are also expected to challenge the consumer this year. Another challenge is the expected deceleration in population growth. So don't be surprised if consumer spending (i.e., 60% of the economy) and, therefore, real GDP growth tread water again this year.

A second consecutive year of below potential growth should take care of the inflation problem, although not as fast as some are expecting. Core inflation, which excludes volatile items (and is a better gauge of underlying price pressures), is heading down, but very slowly (Figure 3). This persistence in core inflation should not be surprising though given that wages (a major cost that some businesses have been passing on to the consumer) continue to grow well above the pre-pandemic pace. But the expected loosening of the labour market and accompanying rise in the jobless rate should take steam out of wages later this year and give encouragement to the central bank that the downtrend in core inflation is sustainable. That will have important implications for interest rates.



Source: Statistics Canada

Figure 3. Inflation slowly coming down towards Bank of Canada's 2% target.

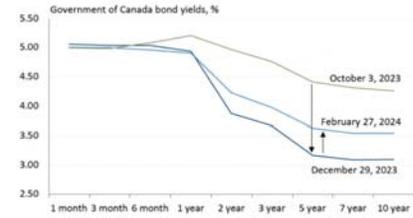
Implications for interest rates and the dollar

After falling to multi-month lows at the end of 2023, Government of Canada bond yields are now creeping up again across the yield curve (Figure 4). That, of course, came courtesy of a string of economic reports that pointed to inflation persistence. This persistence prompted the Bank of Canada (BoC) to adopt a more hawkish stance than what markets had expected, forcing the latter to push back expectations of interest rate cuts.

As mentioned above, wage growth, and therefore inflation, will moderate later this year as the labour market loses steam in synch with a weakening economy, but it's a process that will take time to fully unfold. So, while bond yields may rise a bit more over the near term, the longer-term downtrend will resume as inflation falls in a more substantial way later in the year.

Near term yields, which are tied to the BoC's overnight rate, are likely to remain unchanged for now. The central bank reiterated its message at its March meeting that it was not considering interest rate cuts in light of inflation persistence. In other words, the already-inverted yield curve could get even more inverted over the near term i.e., near term rates stay unchanged while long rates fall. But once the central bank is convinced that the downward trend in inflation is sustainable and starts cutting rates in the second half of 2024 - we currently anticipate a total of 3 rate cuts of 25 bps by end of the year -, look for the yield curve to become less inverted, en route to returning to its normal positive slope. (See Figure 4).

Given this outlook on interest rates, as well as forecasts of soft commodity prices amid weak world GDP growth, one might think that 2024 will be another difficult year for the Canadian dollar. There's, however, one factor that could allow the loonie to defy the odds.



Source: Bank of Canada

Figure 4. Canadian yield curve still inverted, but shifting.

US dollar strength, which has been a feature in global financial markets since the Federal Reserve started to raise interest rates back in March 2022, will eventually fade. And that may happen this year as declining U.S. inflation allows the Fed to start cutting its funds rate. In other words, it's possible for the Canadian dollar to find some support, even in an environment of sluggish but positive economic growth.

Summary of forecasts of key economic variables

The table below summarizes FCC Economics' outlook of select economic variables.

	2023				2024				ANNUAL AVERAGE						
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	2022	2023	2024F
GDP growth, quarter-over-quarter % change, annualized															
Canada	3.9	2.8	1.8	-0.9	2.8	2.6	2.6	2.6	-0.8	1.0	0.9	1.8	0.7	1.2	2.6
U.S.	4.9	4.6	3.7	2.9	3.2	3.3	4.9	3.2	1.2	1.0	0.8	0.8	1.9	2.8	1.8
Inflation, year-over-year % change															
Canada	5.8	7.8	7.2	6.7	5.2	3.9	3.7	3.2	2.9	2.7	2.3	2.3	6.8	3.9	2.8
U.S.	6.9	6.8	6.3	7.1	5.6	4.9	3.6	3.2	3.6	3.9	2.6	2.5	8.0	4.1	2.9
Key policy rate, % end of period															
Bank of Canada overnight rate	0.50	0.50	0.25	0.25	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	1.88	4.75	4.75
US Fed federal funds rate	0.50	1.75	2.25	4.50	5.25	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	1.87	5.25	5.25
Government of Canada key bond rates, % end of period															
1 year	2.27	3.10	3.79	4.00	3.76	4.00	4.07	3.80	3.97	3.85	3.59	3.26	3.82	4.39	3.76
5 year	2.39	3.10	3.41	3.02	3.88	4.26	3.17	3.30	3.20	3.09	2.98	2.79	3.96	3.07	2.79
10 year	2.60	3.23	3.16	3.20	3.90	3.36	4.00	3.10	3.20	3.16	3.06	2.88	2.79	3.36	3.11
Exchange rate, quarterly averages															
USD per CAD	0.79	0.76	0.77	0.74	0.76	0.76	0.73	0.73	0.76	0.76	0.76	0.76	0.77	0.76	0.76
EUR per CAD	0.70	0.74	0.76	0.72	0.69	0.68	0.68	0.68	0.70	0.71	0.71	0.71	0.73	0.69	0.70

Source: FCC Economics, Bloomberg

Table 1: Forecasts of key economic variables.

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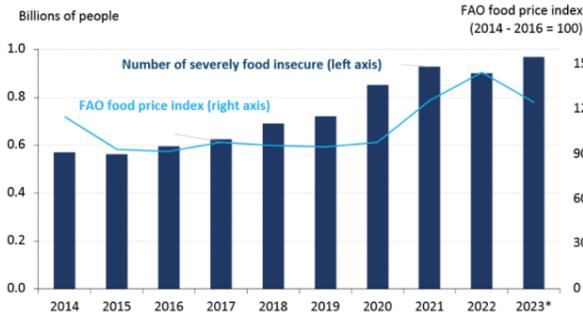


Figure 1: FAO food price index and food insecure world population

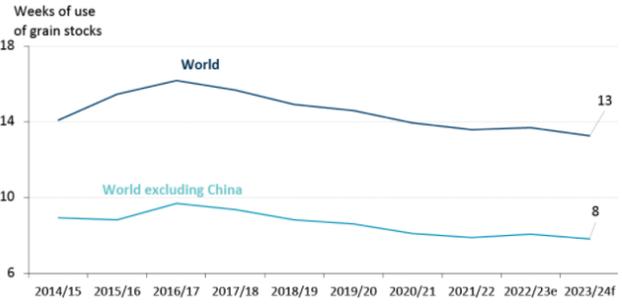


Figure 2: Global grain stocks tighten

Canada's role in global food security

BY ISAAC KWARTENG,
SENIOR ECONOMIST AT FCC

Global food security has been a crucial issue in recent years amid world conflicts, climate change, supply chain disruptions and economic shocks which have all contributed to high food inflation. The latter, while coming down in recent months, remains elevated due to very low global food stocks relative to usage. Canada has the capabilities to further enhance global food security via technical assistance to food insecure countries and more directly by increasing its own food production available to world markets. We estimate that returning the currently depressed global grains stock-to-use ratio to the 2016-17 peak is consistent with a 6% increase in global production, which Canada could be a major contributor towards by rekindling productivity growth in agriculture.

How do we define food security?

Food security refers to adequate physical and economic access to quality, safe and nutritious food. Food security has been declining since 2018 due to multiple factors: growing economic inequalities, extreme weather conditions, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Russia's war against Ukraine has turned a problem into a crisis as it has escalated food, fertilizer, and energy prices. The FAO food price index

(FPI) was stable between 2015 and 2020, spiking to record levels in 2022, before moderating in 2023, albeit at a higher level than was observed historically (Figure 1). The inflation led to unprecedented levels of severely food insecure people in the world: it is estimated that nearly one billion people are severely food insecure, corresponding to about 11% of the world population.

Grain stocks-to-use ratios continue to decline

Rising global food insecurity has coincided with declining stocks-to-use ratios of major agricultural staples. A stocks-to-use ratio illustrates the balance between supply and demand of a given commodity. Stocks remain a very important buffer in global markets, cushioning the impacts on market prices caused by production shocks. In the event of production shortfalls, available stocks can help mitigate price hikes and moderate adverse impacts on food security.

Despite a 2% projected increase in annual production of total grains (wheat and coarse grains) to 2.3 billion tonnes in 2023/24 (a record level), the global stock-to-use ratio is expected to decline to about 13 weeks of food supply, the lowest in a decade (Figure 2).

Continued on Page B8

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Soil conditions good leading into seeding

Area producers gearing up for a busy season

Continued from front

"We're still trending a little bit into the drier conditions, but hopefully, with some good moisture in the spring, we can start to replenish some of those moisture losses that we've seen over the last couple years," she concluded.

In Rocanville, they're pleased to see the recent snow and confident the added moisture will soak in nicely.

"With the last two snow storms we had, I believe we're sitting pretty good for moisture conditions—better than other areas I've heard of," commented Rylar Hutchinson. "That last dump of snow we had was more than we had all winter. Even driving down the roads, looking into the fields, you can see water laying around just from the nice days we've had after those snow storms."

It would be great to custom-order weather conditions, but therein lies the big gamble with farming: nine inches of topsoil and the fact that it rains sometimes.

"In a perfect world, if Mother Nature would keep giving us warm temperatures, the snow we have wouldn't take long to melt away," Hutchinson said. "A good week or two would be nice, then come April instead of a surprise snow storm, keep those warmer days, but bring us some nice rain. A nice rain would help bring the frost out of the ground and give the spring colors a jump! But Mother Nature does her own thing—we're on her clock!"

Kevin Hrushka, who farms in the Gerald area, agrees that conditions are prime but also wonders what the tail end of an El Niño winter will bring.

"I would say moisture conditions in our area are excellent; ideal. I do believe that all the way to the U.S. border, moisture conditions are very good. There's still some snow cover, ditches have water, you can see there's puddles sitting in the field, so germination is inevitable," he said. "Now being that it's an El Niño year, people might anticipate or expect or hope to get seeding early. My experiences is an El Niño year also might mean some weird storms. I expect a big storm end of April, beginning of May, but how can you predict the weather?"

Of course, once crops are planted, those lucrative 'timely rains' are the next ingredient to success. While some think we're in the midst of more damp years in relation to the wet/dry cycle, one group believes being proactive on drought conditions ought to be considered regardless of our place on the bell curve.

The Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan recently announced their call for a provincial drought preparedness committee in the vein of better risk management.

"It's all part of APAS' new directive with their new general manager; to be more proactive than reactive," said Trevor Green, Moosomin area farmer and APAS representative. "Previously in agriculture, we've always waited for the disaster to happen and then reacted to it."

Through key points of early warning, resource allocation, stakeholder engagement and long-term planning, APAS is confident that such a committee would better prepare for and navigate such disasters.

"The impact of drought on our province's agriculture sector can be devastating, affecting farmers and ranchers, our rural communities and the overall economy," said Ian Boxall, APAS president. "The recent increase in frequency and severity of drought events underscores the pressing need for immediate action to better prepare for these challenges."

Even in those drought years, decent production is still possible with a little science at hand.

"A couple years ago, we were fairly dry this way and even last year wasn't great," Green said. "In the cattle world, the hay and the pasture land kind of suffered last year, but there was enough moisture for the crops to grow decent. I think a lot of that is due to the new varieties that are out there. If we had the same seed varieties as we had even 10 years ago and grew them last year, we wouldn't have anywhere near the crops up in the Moosomin area."

Those new seed varieties Green spoke of also have greater effects beyond a decent-yielding crop.

"There's a lot to be said about the dollars that are spent on research and development of new varieties and new ways of doing things," he said. "It's made us more competitive on the world market and probably kept a lot of farms in business."

Getting ready to seed

With a lot of area producers eyeing that end of April target to get machinery in the field, this is the season of preparation work. Digging cultivators out of snowbanks and bringing those units in for servicing; all the while trying to predict which part is going to inexplicably fail three hours into those initial days of seeding ... if a person doesn't spend those first hours pulling equipment out of a surprise muddy sinkhole, that is!

The crew at Hebert Grain Ventures in Moosomin is looking forward to a 'more traditional' start date as Jeff Warkentin explained the last couple of years saw seeding begin mid-May.

"We've got our fertilizer and seed positioned, and chemicals. We're just making sure we double check in that we've got everything ready to go here," he said. "It's a large logistical task to get everything to the field. We budget for 21 days of seeding, so we have to move a lot of product and we have to do it efficiently."

There's a short window where off-season work can take place, and it's often a race to get everything completed on



Kevin Weedmark photo

Crops maturing in the Moosomin region during a previous growing season.

the checklist before factors such as road bans come into effect.

"For us, we've been busy at trying to get some grain shipped out before it gets really busy," said Hutchinson. "With these snow storms and up and down temperatures, it's really made our gravel roads soft enough where the RM has been closing some. Then the spring weights came into effect earlier than the set date, so it's been a challenge in that department."

One producer who gets to hear all about rural road conditions is Atwater/Stockholm area farmer Blake Duchek. From his perspective as Councillor for the RM of Fertile Belt, he noted the roads are fairly decent in his area, considering the amount of grain hauling traffic.

"If you're booked in to the crusher's and you don't haul in on your scheduled days, you might not get back in for another month," he said. "You have to take those loads."

Duchek has been quite busy through the winter, highlighted by an earlier receipt of fertilizer that helped get a jump on things.

"We were busy right up to the end of December doing fieldwork like burying stone piles and bush piles," he said, adding that seeding could be a month away. "It creeps up on a person."

Green echoed the sentiment of how the busy season tends to arrive at a surprising rate.

"Most of the drills are still buried in snow, and then all of a sudden, you get two weeks to work on them and get them ready for next year," he said. "Then you're going, so it all happens pretty quick."

Challenges facing producers

It is amazing how conflicts in countries thousands of miles away can affect local producers so drastically. One example is the Russian invasion of Ukraine that began in February, 2022, setting off an immediate disruption to the global wheat market, affecting food prices and food security around the world.

"Our biggest concern right now is that wheat market," said John Van Eaton, who farms near Maryfield. "We're probably like a lot of other producers, we're looking at other crops we can substitute for wheat. There is a theory that when everyone's running away from the fire, you should run towards it, but I'm not sure how fast we're going to run towards the fire."

He sees Russia's wheat dump as a way to finance their war, but if that technique positively affects their economy is the real head-scratcher.

"I don't know that they lay awake at night and worry about how cheaply they're selling the wheat," Van Eaton said. "They're just trying to generate cash."

Duchek also pointed to the conflict as a huge factor in low wheat prices. He explained that when the war first started, the price of grain shot up as shipping on the Black Sea halted. Instability in that shipping region translated into spikes and valleys in terms of grain prices.

"It seems that the shipping is restricted," Duchek said. "The price is still staying down because there's so much grain—they can buy grain anywhere."

Another huge challenge facing producers—one that just seems to linger like a nasty stink—is the federal carbon tax. In fact, the most common response when the topic was broached with producers was "don't get me started!"

"I think the biggest challenge to our industry and others—and the general public as well—is that absolute ridiculous idea that taxing everything that moves or that everybody touches on the continent—or at least in our country—with a carbon tax: expecting that not to cause inflation is faulty thinking," said Van Eaton.

'So what are you seeding this year?'

Given what the weather and the world is doing, the general consensus between producers was to continue

with those tried and true crops that continually perform.

"We have no big plans to change anything up," stated Hruska. "We're always experimenting with varieties and different things, we have the odd thing we're testing, but our farm doesn't make big maverick moves. If we make big maverick moves, we make big mistakes. So we make slow incremental change on our farm."

On their 53,000 acres, Hrushka plans to seed half wheat and half canola, humbly noting "we're just your typical family farm."

Hutchinson also plans to continue with a wheat/canola rotation, which has been the same strategy for several years.

"Nothing has changed as of now, but hopefully into the near future, we might add a third rotation to help with preventing unwanted diseases and help with putting certain nutrients back into the soil," he said.

With canola prices looking better, those intense yellow blooms will continue their reign over the Saskatchewan landscape.

"Canola is back into a profitable position; the cereal grains are going to be a little tighter," noted Warkentin. "The crush capacity that the domestic crush market has, has been about one dollar a bushel over the export market, so the more capacity we can get in Saskatchewan, the better. Pretty much all our canola production has been going into the domestic crush market."

All things considered, Warkentin doesn't expect the growing season to be a breeze by any stretch.

"It's going to test our management skills this year," he said. "We've got to pay a little more attention than we have the last couple of years, to be honest."

Should those warm spring days be delayed, Schatz Leeds reminded that wheat can generally take a cooler seeding temperature—even if that soil is around five degrees. This early seeding opportunity allows for the potential of higher yields as well. Another perennial favorite in the region is barley, according to Schatz Leeds, but she says there's also still room for producers to consider more pulse crops.

"I would like to maybe see a few more pulses in our rotation," she said. "Pea is the best pulse that we could grow, but again, sometimes they don't like really wet summers, they can be prone to disease and they're slow."

One point Schatz Leeds made for peas is how beneficial they are for the ground, creating an extremely healthy soil biome.

"They're just not super popular, and I can understand why," she said after a general 'pros and cons' comparison.

While not a pulse crop, Duchek noted having experience with growing soybeans, which seemed to yield better in wet years. In fact, the area enjoyed somewhat of a soybean boom for a short time, but as Duchek said, "now you hardly see soybeans around here."

He's also in favour of staying with stability going into seeding, but will be tweaking his wheat choices.

"Prices have been going down, we are switching some of our cereal acres out," he said. "Instead of hard red spring, we're going to durum, there's a few guys growing it for the last four or five years."

The switch from wheat favoured for bread to that used in pasta may not be permanent, but drawing from Duchek's soybean experience with regards to weather, durum might be a good 'for now' alternative.

"If it stays drier, we'll see some increased acres for a few years, but once we get back into our normal precipitation, we'll probably go away from it," he remarked. "We've tried canary seed, yellow mustard, but all those niche crops you don't want to put big acres in just because the market is so volatile."

Farming has got to be one of the most risky occupations around, and given all the pressures of ever-rising input costs for an uncertain outcome, we've really got to tip our hats to those fine folks who feed the world.

Canada's role in global food security

Continued from Page B6

Production potential is curbed by unfavourable weather conditions in some major grain producing countries and Russia's war in Ukraine. Global demand is still robust and China's increased purchases of wheat and corn contribute a major way to the tightening stocks. As a measure to promote its domestic food security buffer, China's stocks are largely under government control and isolated from global markets. Excluding stocks held in China, the global stocks-to-use-ratio is even tighter at just 8 weeks of supply, the lowest in more than 10 years.

Canada's contribution to global food security

The relative tightness of global grain stocks, coupled with possible future disruptions in supply suggests that food prices are likely to remain volatile. Hence, the need to boost agricultural productivity to increase supplies, lower food prices and improve global food security.

To quantify the effects of a declining stocks-to-use ratio (SU), we examine its relationship with the food price index (FPI). Not surprisingly, low stocks are associated with high prices. We use this relationship to estimate the impact of Canada's production on global stocks-to-use and food price index.

At the current level of the world's annual grain consumption (2.3 billion tonnes) and SU of 13 weeks, global crop production would need to increase by 130 million tonnes to attain the SU of 16 weeks achieved in 2016/17. This calls for an increase in global production to replenish stocks and higher exports to meet the robust food demand. A collective effort from all the major grain producing countries by way of increased productivity and technical assistance to food insecure countries will support the attainment of this goal, which could take years of productivity gains.

To achieve this goal, global production would have to increase roughly 6%. Canada's share of the additional global produc-

tion would be 18 million tonnes or 28% growth over the next decade. This is a tall task and would require major productivity gains in the agricultural industry. Canada's share of global crop exports would then rise from 8% to over 11%. As a result, global food prices would be around 7% lower, everything else being equal. This would also potentially reduce the number of food insecure people by nearly 350 million (36% below current levels).

Canada is a key player in world fertilizer market

One major area where Canada can support productivity gains in the agricultural sector worldwide is by leveraging its status as a fertilizer producing powerhouse. Fertilizer can play a crucial role in addressing global food security concerns because it plays an essential role in replenishing soil nutrients to increase crop yields.

Potash is a crucial crop nutrient, a source of potassium that helps crops such as corn and soybean increase their yields. Alongside phosphate and nitrogen, they are the foundation of modern fertilizers. Canada is the world's largest producer and exporter of potash, accounting for about 45 per cent of global reserves estimated to be over a billion tonnes. Russia's war against Ukraine has provided Canadian potash producers a unique opportunity to increase their market share. Canada became the world's second-largest exporter of fertilizer in 2022, more than doubling export value from a year prior (Figure 3).

Canada can take a leadership role in addressing food security

Canada's endowment of arable land and water, combined with advanced production technology and knowledge position the country to be an even more prominent leader and supplier of reliable, safe and sustainably produced food. Ongoing threats to global food security present Canada with an opportunity to strengthen its food superpower status by boosting productivity while supporting the world food program.

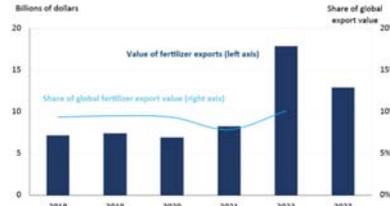


Figure 3: Canada's fertilizer exports

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Innovative new crop protection developed with USask research

University of Saskatchewan (USask) researchers are helping protect crops using biologicals as an ecofriendly alternative to synthetic chemicals and GMO solutions.

Two USask scientists were instrumental in developing an innovative, biological crop protection that will be used by growers for the first time this spring.

Professors emeritus Dr. Vladimir Vujanovic (PhD) and Dr. James Germida (PhD) with the College of Agriculture and Biore-sources worked with USask to patent and license their invention based on the recent discovery of using microbes for protecting crops and promoting growth at the seed stage.

Germida and Vujanovic's research into biological-based defences for crops has led to the creation of a new bionematicide—a pesticide created from biological sources for battling plant parasitic nematodes and protecting crops.

"Living micro-organisms can target an insect or a microbial pathogen in a number of different ways," Germida said. "With biologicals, because they become associated with the plant and the plant's microbiome, they become a member of that community during the life cycle of the host plant . . . The biological is there and ready to react."

Building on the academic research started at USask, scientists at Indigo Ag have developed and launched a new bionematicide product to support growers and protect their crops.

Indigo Ag's biottrinsic® Z15 was commercially launched in August 2023 and is available for farmers to begin using in the 2024 planting season on soybeans and corn. Per Indigo Ag's press release, the new bionematicide not only helps defend plants from harmful nematodes but also improved the yields of row crops including soybean, corn, cereals, and legumes in testing.

Z15 is applied to crop seeds before they are planted and works to fend off problematic nematodes



Two USask scientists were instrumental in developing an innovative, biological crop protection that will be used by growers for the first time this spring. Photo by Gloria Gingera

and reduce their ability to reproduce.

"Despite the fact that there are several nematicide products available—both synthetic and biological—soybean cyst nematodes continue to spread geographically, and the economic losses are increasing. Soybean cyst nematodes alone cause an estimated \$1.5 billion in crop losses in the U.S. Farmers need new products that are effective in combating these pests.

biottrinsic® Z15 combines multiple defense and protective actions, providing an effective new choice for farmers," said Georg Goeres, global head of biologicals for Indigo Ag.

Vujanovic said his research focuses on micro-organisms that have the potential to increase the vitality of seeds. He stressed the value of using naturally occurring biologicals to defend crops and said research into beneficial plant micro-organisms

continues to bear fruit as new biological protections are discovered.

He highlighted the importance of collaboration combining different areas of research—Vujanovic with more of a focus on plant and food microbiology and Germida on soil microbiology—to develop new ways to protect crops.

"It is so critical that we should not just continue to combine our traditional with modern approaches in science . . . we have to

discover integrative scientific strategies to meet sustainable agriculture standards that are more safe, secure, and more efficient," Vujanovic said.

According to Germida, using microbial inoculants is a solution that has existed for many decades. But researchers continue to find new organisms with new applications, and Germida said that can lead to the possibility of new and better products like biottrinsic® Z15.

"Some of the newer technologies are focused on organisms that are yet to be discovered, and their benefits are yet to be identified," Germida said. "Anything that we can do to increase food produc-

tion and protect plants . . . is just a real benefit for society."

As Indigo Ag provides growers with biottrinsic® Z15 to go into the ground this spring, Vujanovic said he is "extremely pleased" to see the results of their research going to the farmers.

"The role of academia is to ensure the future," he said. "When we are talking about the future we are talking about food security, we are talking about climate change . . . if we have more safety products and as human beings we continue to do something for the well-being of society, it definitely is our role, and it's rewarding for any scientist, including myself."



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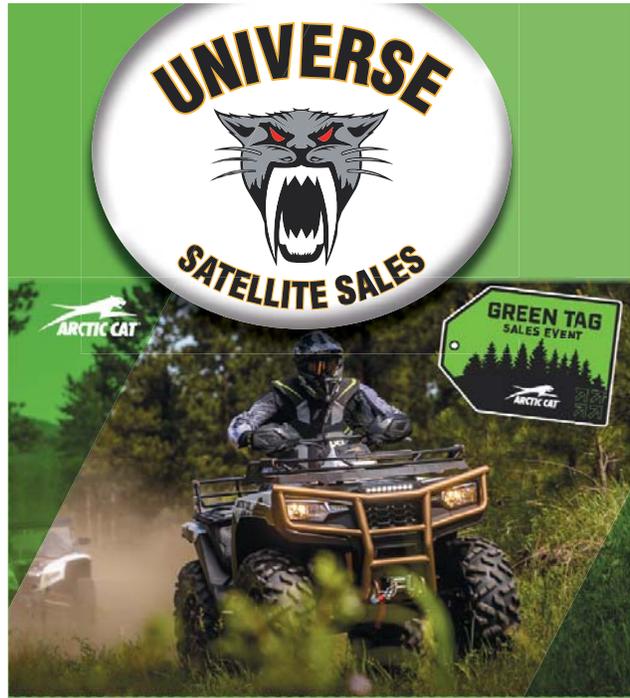
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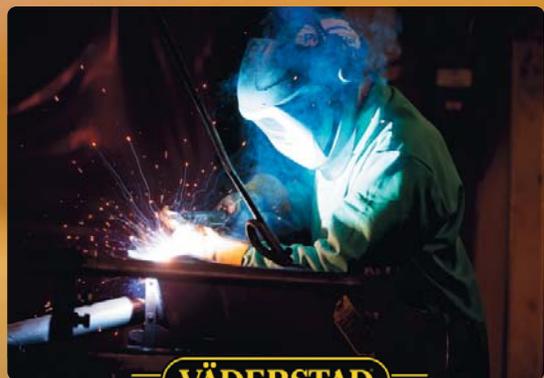
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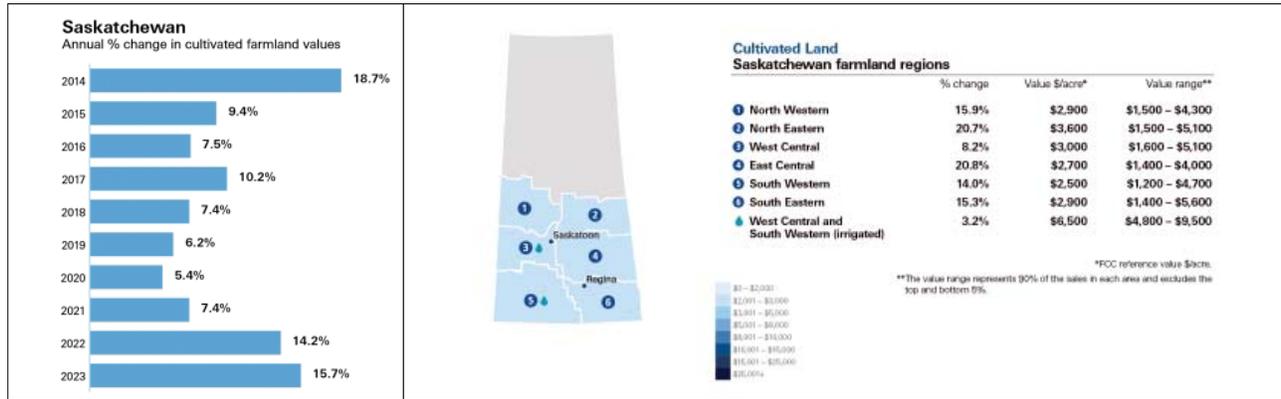


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BY RYAN KIEDROWSKI
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Land continues to rise in value according to the latest numbers from Farm Credit Canada. Their findings noted the value of farmland across Canada as climbing by 11.5 per cent last year, with Saskatchewan in particular leading the country with a 15.7 per cent increase in 2023.

The highest average provincial increases in farmland values were observed in Saskatchewan, Quebec, Manitoba and Ontario, with double-digit average increases of 15.7, 13.3, 11.1 and 10.7 per cent, respectively.

"Farmland prices have continued to increase at a rapid pace over the last couple of years, even when economic conditions suggested the growth should slow," said J.P. Gervais, FCC's chief economist.

Other provinces marking average increases (but below the national average) were Nova Scotia (7.8 per cent), Prince Edward Island (7.4 per cent), Alberta (6.5 per cent) and New Brunswick (5.6 per cent). British Columbia recorded a 3.1 per cent decline in 2023, but retains bragging rights as having the highest farmland values on average.

"The good news is that farmland value increases reflect a positive outlook for the demand of agriculture commodities and the quality food we produce in Cana-

da," Gervais said. "Producers have a long track record of making strategic investments in land. These long-term investments in food production have spurred growth and create a bright future for Canada's agriculture and food industry."

So what's driving those prices up year over year? Some say it's a simple supply and demand scenario.

"The supply is limited compared to the demand, and so when you get that demand/supply curve in that direction, that means traditionally prices go up," said Ken Gurney, a senior appraiser with FCC based in Lethbridge. "If you're the one that has the land and are selling, then it is a good position to be in."

With those land values increasing, equity in land holdings follows—making for a prime seller's market.

"But on the flip side are young farmers or the smaller people that are trying to expand their operations," Gurney noted. "Often that can be a real barrier to get over, the price of land."

Whether the trend will continue this year is anybody's guess as even the 2023 numbers were somewhat of a surprise given conditions at the beginning of that year.

"We came into the year with headwinds—the interest rates climb dramatically, compared to historic and then we had weather issues, lack of moisture, we had com-

modity prices dropping, and we still had increases in land values," Gurney said. "So looking into 2024, who knows where we're going because we're still kind of in that same boat right at the moment."

A constant theme spanning generations is the tenacity of producers across the province.

"The one thing I've learned over the years is farmers are a very resilient bunch of people," Gurney said.

Gervais echoed that sentiment, adding that a note of caution remains evident when comparing numbers over the past several months.

"Purchasing land in the year ahead will come with careful consideration of the price and timing," he said. "Some operations will prefer to wait and see where land values will settle while others may move more quickly should adjacent land become available, or simply because it fits their strategic business plans."

The FCC noticed a slight decline in farmland transactions in 2023 as compared to the year previous—an example of lowered confidence in the overall economic climate.

"The expectation of weaker farm revenues and elevated borrowing costs and input prices are expected to stretch out this cautious environment for farmland transactions into 2024," according to Gervais.

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Government supports irrigation development in Saskatchewan

BY JAMIE SHANKS, AGRICULTURE

The Government of Saskatchewan has announced more than \$19 million to ensure the continued success of irrigation districts in the province.

The funding will help to sustain irrigation infrastructure formerly owned by government and support future development opportunities. This includes pumps, pipes, canals and associated water management infrastructure.

"This announcement reaffirms the government's commitment to supporting irrigation within Saskatchewan," Agriculture Minister David Marit said. "More than 55,000 acres of irrigation were developed between 2020 and 2023, and this investment will help keep this infrastructure working and help our producers for years to come. These funding agreements will also help us reach our Growth Plan target of 45 million metric tonnes of crop produced by 2030."

Irrigation allows more diverse crops to be grown and increases the number of livestock that can be supported. It is also important for diversifying rural economies and stabilizing crop production with a consistent source of moisture.

"This support from the provincial government will go a long way to ensuring the continued success of irrigation projects for our members," Irrigation Saskatchewan's co-



chair Aaron Gray said. "The future of our agriculture industry and producers is closely tied to water resource management, and infrastructure management is critical to our ongoing efforts to meet those long-term needs." The Government of Saskatchewan is committed to cre-

ating more irrigated acres and supports irrigation in the province through the Irrigation Rehabilitation Program, the Irrigation Development Program and the Irrigation Efficiency Program.

The six irrigation districts that will receive this Irrigation Rehabilitation Program funding are:

- Luck Lake Irrigation District, to receive up to \$3.8 million over five years.
- South Saskatchewan Irrigation District, to receive up to \$9.5 million over five years.
- Riverhurst Irrigation District, to receive up to \$3.8 million over five years.
- Moon Lake Irrigation District, to receive up to \$159,005 over five years.
- Grainland Lake District, to receive up to \$441,180 over five years.
- Miry Creek Irrigation District, to receive up to \$153,710 over five years.

The Miry Creek Irrigation District will also receive a one-time payment of \$1.3 million from the ministry to repair the water intake portion of their pumping system as part of the asset transfer agreement.

Previously, Luck Lake Irrigation District, South Saskatchewan Irrigation District, Riverhurst Irrigation District, and Moon Lake Irrigation District were part of five-year funding agreements.

Creating food and economic security for a stronger Saskatchewan

BY PATRICK BOYLE, WATER SECURITY AGENCY

Last week, Premier Scott Moe announced the Government of Saskatchewan is moving forward with constructing the early works of the first 90,000 acres of the Lake Diefenbaker Irrigation Project. The total cost is estimated to be \$1.15 billion which will be shared between the provincial government and producers who choose to participate in the project.

"Our government is happy to take the first major step in creating the most sustainable food and economic security project in Canada which will create major benefits for generations," Moe said. "Saskatchewan can be a leader across the country and move this project forward which will provide billions in economic benefits and thousands of jobs."

The engineering, design and engagement with stakeholders and Indigenous rights holders is expected to be done over the next 12 to 14 months, with major construction of the 90,000 acres being targeted for 2025.

"Saskatchewan has an amazing food security story to tell," Agriculture Minister and Minister Responsible for the Water Security Agency David Marit said. "Since 2020, over 58,000 acres of irrigation have been developed, which is the largest growth since the early 1980s. The Lake Diefenbaker Irrigation Project will position Saskatchewan to meet the needs of a growing population across the globe. We continue to encourage the federal government to come to the table in a more meaningful way and be part of this important project as it moves forward."

"Today marks an important point in our history for rural municipalities, SARM applauds the provincial government for moving this project ahead and ensuring

future generations of rural residents will experience the benefits," SARM President Ray Orb said. "This is the start of a journey to bring Saskatchewan and Canada much-needed food and economic security."

By 2050, the world's population is expected to increase by nearly two billion people, from eight billion to close to 10 billion. This means global food production must increase by 70 per cent to meet this demand.

"Irrigation expansion across Saskatchewan will be essential to move our province forward into the future," Saskatchewan Irrigation Projects Association Chairman Aaron Gray said. "Irrigators in this province are committed to helping feed the world and create significant ben-

efits for the people of Saskatchewan."

For more information on the Lake Diefenbaker Irrigation Project, visit <https://diefenbakerirrigation.ca/>

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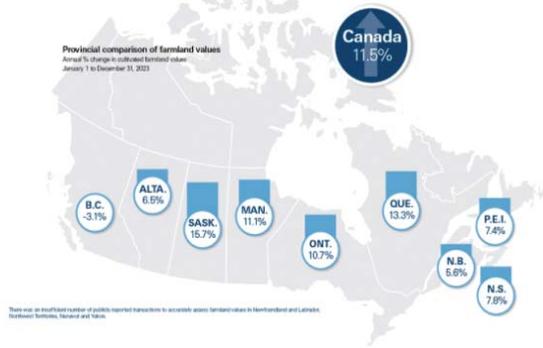


Figure 1: Average cultivated farmland value changes for 2023.

	2021	2022	2023	'21 → '22	'22 → '23
	(million \$)			(% change YoY)	
Alberta	7,700	9,399	9,329	22.1%	-0.7%
Atlantic	98	125	114	26.7%	-8.3%
British Columbia	76	132	112	72.5%	-15.0%
Manitoba	4,718	5,747	5,997	21.8%	4.4%
Ontario	4,866	6,196	5,279	27.3%	-14.8%
Quebec	1,575	2,029	1,981	28.9%	-2.4%
Saskatchewan	14,143	16,083	17,069	13.7%	6.1%
Canada	33,176	39,710	39,882	19.7%	0.4%

Table 1: Total field crop receipts (including deferred grain receipts)

2023 upward trends in farmland values suggest a resilient market

BY CORBIN CHAU
FCC DATA ANALYST, VALUATIONS

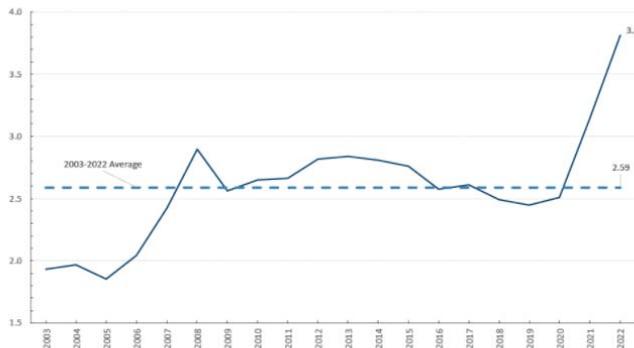
Economic conditions in the agriculture sector worsened throughout 2023. Canadian field crop production declined in 2023 due to drought conditions in Western Canada along with overall pressures on commodity prices. Input costs and interest rates remained high, resulting in tightening profit margins. Yet FCC is reporting an average increase of 11.5% in cultivated land values for Canada in 2023, the second highest increase since 2014, and slightly below the average growth recorded last year. This post summarizes provincial trends observed in cultivated land, and the full FCC Farmland Values Report also presents provincial and regional trends in irrigated land and pastureland values.

Provincial trends

Our analysis covers the period of January 1 to December 31, 2023. The highest reported increase in average farmland values was in Saskatchewan at 15.7%, followed by Quebec at 13.3% with Manitoba rounding out the top three at 11.1% (Figure 1).

All other provinces were below the national average: Ontario's average was 10.7%, Nova Scotia reported 7.8%, P.E.I. recorded an increase of 7.4%, Alberta's growth stood at 6.5% and New Brunswick had growth of 5.6%.

For the first time in recent years, we are publishing a provincial decline with British Columbia recording an average decrease of 3.1%. This province is where



Sources: Statistics Canada, FCC Calculations

Figure 2: Average current ratio of SK, MB, ON & QC

we find the highest per acre values in the country, and the largest decreases in values were observed in regions of the province with the highest per acre value.

Cash on hand stimulates growth

Statistics Canada reports that total field crop receipts recorded the strongest growth between 2022 and 2023 in Saskatchewan (6.1%) and Manitoba (4.4%) (Table 1). The largest appreciation reported

between 2021 and 2022 was in Quebec and Ontario at 28.9% and 27.3%, respectively. These four provinces led the country in farmland value appreciation in 2023. This positive correlation between receipts and land value appreciation suggests that liquidities lead to stronger purchasing power and higher demand for farmland.

The average current ratio of these four provinces

climbed from 2020 to 2022 (Figure 2). At the end of 2022, it stood significantly above the average of the last 20 years. Farm operations overall were in a strong position to meet financial obligations as current assets far exceeded current liabilities. The balance of Canadian agriculture in 2023 likely deteriorated because of lower commodity prices, weaker yields in the Prairie provinces and elevated interest rates and input costs (2023 data will be released later this year). Yet the trend prior to 2023 suggests that the robust financial health of Canadian agriculture can be supportive of the demand for farmland. Strong demand for farmland combined with a tight supply of farmland available explains the strong increases in values.

Looking forward to 2024

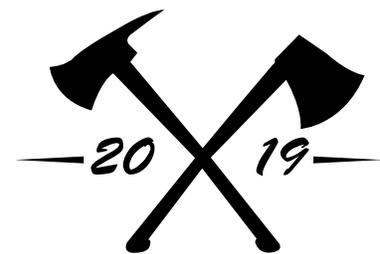
The farmland market posted on average another year of solid growth last year, with 2024 having the potential to be a pivotal year. Profit margins for grain, oilseed and pulse operations are expected to be tighter than the most recent five-year average. While the Bank of Canada is likely to bring its policy interest rate down in the second half of the year, borrowing costs will remain elevated. Against this economic backdrop, our upcoming blog on March 27 will investigate the deterioration in the affordability of farmland.

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School and community engage youth in farming

Continued from page B4

Farming fosters community

"When the students come to school in the morning, the first thing they do is chores and then we have breakfast ready for the whole school. Then we go about a regular school day," says Van Lagen.

"We do have a block each day where students can work on the farm - whether it's doing chores, building something or working with an animal, whatever it may be," he adds.

Wednesday is harvest day, and a small store in the school opens that afternoon for locals to pop in and buy their produce and meat. On Thursday, the students reseed.



Little pigs at the AAE farm.

Business management in the everyday

The farm leaders meet regularly to make decisions. "I tell them that as long as the decisions are keeping our program sustainable and educational, I'm okay with whatever decisions they make," Van Lagen says.

"They decide when our steers are ready to go to the butcher, if we are going to sell the steer to somebody and they'll get it butchered, or if we are going to get it butchered ourselves and sell it," he explains.

Decision-making is based on the best evidence available to them at the time. "Students find out the prices associated with the different ways of selling, as well as the costs associated with the different ways of selling and then make decisions," Van Lagen says. "They do the analysis and decide."

Incentives motivate

The incentive for students is real. "Based on how well the farm does each year, we hand out scholarships," he adds.

The farm continues to evolve as the students express their interests and ambitions: the upper elementary students are learning about pollinators, so beehives and honey production are now in the works. There's also interest in investigating the feasibility of raising pheasants for a local pheasant hunt - though those details haven't entirely been worked out yet. The students still have some numbers to run through.

Now into his ninth year as principal at Altario School, Van Lagen says he's seeing a growing sense of pride in the students and the community.

"It's exciting," he says. "This really is a model of what can happen when an entire community comes together for a school - it's amazing what you can do."



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Recent snowfall improves spring runoff forecast

The Water Security Agency (WSA) issued the Spring Runoff Forecast for 2024. A near normal runoff is expected in the Saskatoon area and west toward Biggar, as well as in the eastern portions of the grain belt along the Manitoba border. The remainder of the province is expected to experience below to well below normal runoff this spring.

As of March 4, 2024, snowpack generally ranges from below to well-below normal across the province. Recent

snowstorms in early March brought up to 40 cm of snow to much of southern and central Saskatchewan, which has improved runoff potential for the province.

"Although, the recent snowfall will help our situation and our producers this spring, we as a government will still be prepared to help those areas with dry conditions," Minister Responsible for Water Security Agency David Marit said. "More moisture will be needed as tem-

peratures continue to stay above zero. WSA will still be taking as many proactive measures as possible to prepare for changing conditions."

This runoff forecast report updates the preliminary report issued in February 2024, with the inclusion of data from snowpack surveys.

Over the winter, WSA took action with conservative operating plans focused on retaining water supplies that has helped keep water levels at most major reservoirs at or above normal levels for this time of year.

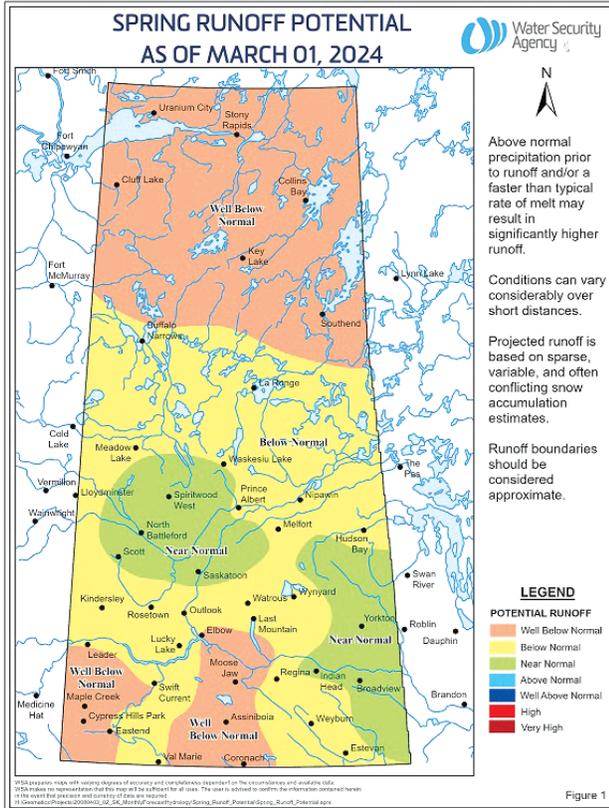
In some southern areas, including the Big Stick and the south-central area of the province, persistent drier than normal conditions may lead to drier than normal conditions and localized water supply shortages this spring. The spring runoff is dependent on fall

soil moisture, snowpack water content, and how quickly the snowpack melts.

Although drier conditions persist, most major water supply reservoirs in southern Saskatchewan are at or above normal levels; however, reservoirs such as Avonlea and some in the southwest (e.g., Altawan and Cypress) may experience surface water supply concerns due to the depleted snowpack.

WSA continues to work internally and across other government agencies to identify opportunities and programming to support communities and producers who may be facing challenges from dry conditions.

WSA continues to monitor moisture conditions and forecasted weather patterns in preparation for the spring runoff and will issue updates to the runoff report throughout the runoff period.



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Are you estimating your overheads well?

BY RICHARD KAMCHEN

As a farm operator, you need to keep a close eye on overheads for an accurate picture of your profitability.

Alberta cattle rancher Ryan Copithorne suspects many cattle producers aren't accurately measuring their overhead costs. And this likely translates to other types of farming operations as well.

"Most ranchers think they operate at \$1 per day grass costs in the summer and \$2.50 to \$3.50 per day wintering costs, but if they properly valued their overheads, they would find it is much, much higher," he says.

Overhead is another way of saying fixed costs, which when combined with variable costs, measures cost of production.

Fixed or overhead costs exist no matter what is produced on the farm. Rent is a good example.

"Cows can't afford to pay rent - in most cases, it's difficult to turn a profit on cows if you're paying land rent," says Copithorne, who also owns market analysis and risk management firm Cows in Control. "Land expense can be 20 per cent of the operating cost of a cow. You're competing against older operators who own their land outright and don't have this expense. This has been the challenge



for young people."

Fully account for overheads

Justin Shepherd, senior economist with FCC, says that failing to fully account for overhead costs leads to inaccurate profit calculations and a false sense of how

your farm operation is performing.

"Future investments always have a degree of uncertainty, so starting with incorrect data magnifies the risk," he says.

Get on top of it

Shepherd says financial literacy con-

tinues to grow among farm operators, who may even run into challenges from an overabundance of information when selecting systems that work best for their operations.

"Like all things in agriculture, there is a wide range of measurement and awareness of fixed costs. While there are slightly different methods used for calculating cost of production, the key is that a farmer has a consistent process so that they can compare current and future years' cost of production against their historical records," Shepherd says.

Overhead costs to watch:

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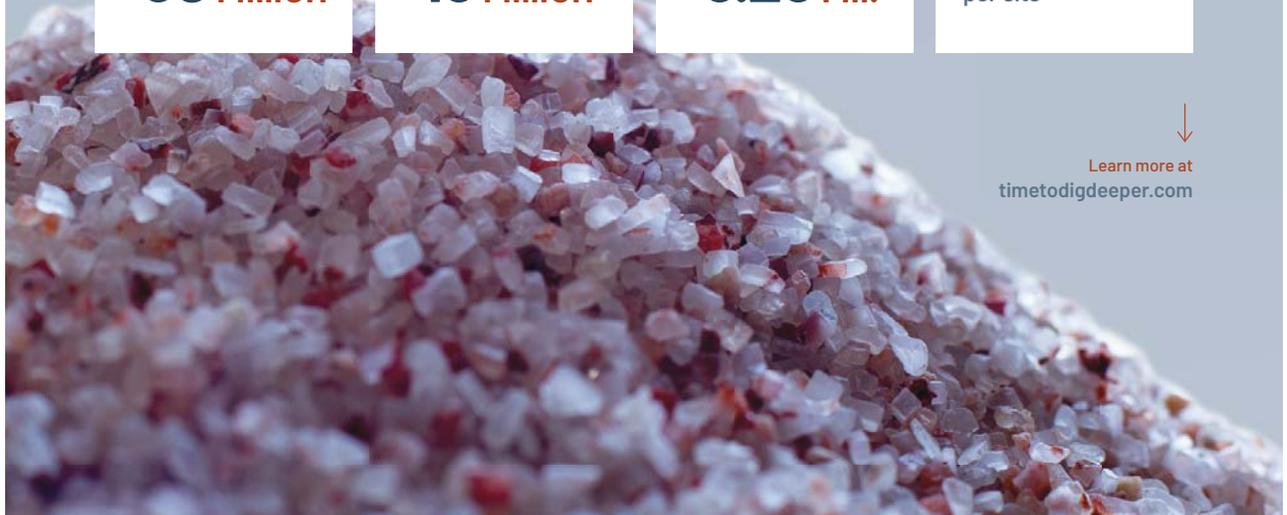


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Where water meets the field

As the United Nations put the spotlight on World Water Day on March 22, irrigation and livestock water quality remain among the leading research topics at the University of Saskatchewan (USask).

BY JOANNE PAULSON

Can you think of anything more important to agriculture than water?

No?

Neither can researchers in the College of Agriculture and Bioresources at the University of Saskatchewan (USask).

Whether it's growing crops or hydrating livestock, water comes into almost every conversation about food.

Now, new research projects are getting underway to investigate two important elements of water management.

Making the irrigation decision

Irrigation is the focus of a project led by Dr. Patrick Lloyd-Smith (PhD), associate professor in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics and a member of the Global Institute for Water Security at USask.

Funding of \$200,000 for the three-year project, which will ramp up this summer, comes from the provincial Ministry of Agriculture through the Agriculture Development Fund.

The project is motivated in part by the provincial government's announcement in 2020 to spend \$4 billion on expanding irrigation to capitalize on irrigation potential. The project will focus on guiding agricultural producers through decisions around whether to adopt irrigation while evaluating potential profits and the capital costs of installing a system.

Lloyd-Smith said irrigation is a big decision, not just a crop choice change.

"This is a wholesale transformation of your operation, starting with a big capital outlay," he said.

For example, going from dryland farming to irrigation expands cropping opportunities, and not just switching from "canola dryland to canola irrigated, but canola dryland to potatoes irrigated or other specialty crops."

The project will evaluate existing crop choices, with or without irrigation, from data compiled by the Ministry of Agriculture, the Saskatchewan Water Security Agency, and other sources.

Lloyd-Smith and his team will also engage producers through interviews, focus groups and a large-scale survey, to gather



A canal connecting to the Broderick Reservoir, built in 1967, and located approximately 82 kilometres south of Saskatoon.

information "and also some of the behavioural factors that may influence the decision whether to irrigate or not."

The research will also look at the policy side, he said.

"What sort of management changes or water allocation rules could be or should be implemented?"

Lloyd-Smith has seen an interest in moving to flexible allocation mechanisms for Saskatchewan.

"As an economist, I'm interested in different water market allocation systems and water pricing systems that can ensure there's enough water to go around as well

as facilitate water being allocated to areas or producers or sectors that value it the highest," Lloyd-Smith said.

He added that he is "lucky to be working with" Dr. Dionne Pohler (PhD), associate professor at the Edwards School of Business, along with Jillian Brown, a PhD student in the Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy "who has considerable experience in the irrigation industry in the province."

Also on the irrigation front, the College of AgBio is offering a new micro-credential sustainable irrigation program under its continuing education arm.

The non-credit community-level program introduces learners to the foundational knowledge required for sound decision-making in irrigated agriculture.

Saving livestock from sulfate

Dr. Greg Penner (PhD), a professor in the Department of Animal and Poultry Science, and USask Centennial Enhancement Chair in Ruminant Nutritional Physiology, is starting a new project—the fourth in a series—to evaluate the impact of high-sulfate water on cattle and sheep.

Continued on page B34

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The snow is melting and the fields are calling...

"Must be trouble with a cow calving!" I said as I sat straight up in bed, rudely awakened by the landline phone at six something ish one Sunday morning. Hubby was already at the phone, both of us ready to dress quickly and head to the farm to help.

"No, I am not interested," I heard hubby say. Huh? You are telling your son you aren't interested in helping him? That's just rude.

"Reader's Digest," he grumbled as he fell back into bed, somewhat disoriented with heart still pounding from the abrupt awakening, knowing his sleep for the night had come to an end. This call at least, wasn't telling him (as a scam call a day earlier) he had won the Stars lottery and that a \$175,000 truck and camper was ready to be delivered to him Once he paid the appropriate fees of course. "I can't quite understand what you're saying," he said to the fellow on the other end, "just mail me the information on my win." We hadn't bought a ticket on the lottery so it was a no-brainer: we could not have won. That plus the fact the fellow on the other end hung up when hubby told him to mail him the info.

When we left Palm Springs at the end of February, in what can only be described as a marathon road trip to try and beat the storm that was being forecast for Saskatchewan and parts of the northern mid west states, I was attuned to each state's 'Highway Hotline,' constantly checking road conditions and forecasts. Should we travel up through Idaho, Montana and home through western Saskatchewan or should we travel east through Wyoming from Utah and then north up to Regina or perhaps east as far as Minot and up? As it was, we traveled under sunshine and blue skies through Wyoming and eastern Montana and were safe in our house in Whitewood for several hours before the snow hit.

Now, for two people used to walking out in shorts and flip flops to enjoy breakfast on our California deck each morning, it was a bit of shock to the system when we started shoveling all that snow we end up with the next time. I went out with boots and mitts only to come back in for thick mitts and a scarf, only to come back in for a toque and hot shots for my mitts. Fortunately, the neighbour took pity on us and came along with his snowblower!

And so we were well settled and ready to tackle our

The Lighter Side of Life...
DOWN ON THE FARM
by donna beutler
FREELANCE PHOTOJOURNALIST
dl_beutler@yahoo.ca



first week home and perhaps accomplish much when we realized we had arrived home on the first weekend of the Brier and so I absolutely did nothing but watch curling! I have to say though, it's a good thing the Brier has come to an end. My nerves are absolutely shot. Wow! There was some serious good curling happening all week long and while I totally felt the pain of those who didn't get a much-needed win, I have to say the calibre of curling we saw was really quite remarkable.

When my neighbour called one afternoon to ask if I was chewing my fingernails (I had to wonder if she had her binoculars out, lol), I knew it was time to put gloves on. Hubby berated me for covering my eyes for some of those shots coming across my television screen. How completely ridiculous to watch curling but not 'watch' it was his theory.

I think I truly understand how these professional curlers' wives must feel and why I saw one of them with their hands up over their eyes a few times. The only difference being is I don't personally know a single one of them but oh I wish I could meet them. When our 15-year-old granddaughter sent me a picture of her with Brad Gushue after her family's visit to the Brier one day, I was ecstatic for her (okay, so a bit envious too). I totally love watching the Gushue team doing what they do best! With some of these curlers competing in the Tankards held in Whitewood in recent years, it's extra exciting to watch them and I have to admit, I am a bit partial to Matt Dunstone. As for Mike McEwen, if he and his

mates had been as on fire against Gushue as they were against Bottcher, it may have been a different ending for Team Saskatchewan. Sadly, our hopes were dashed.

When the farm grands and their parents were at the Brier, hubby was on check-the-cattle duty and while he didn't personally welcome any new babies to the barnyard (nor, luckily, have to assist with a tough birth), it was fun to see the little ones that had arrived while we were down south romping around in the warm Saskatchewan sunshine.

The twins (12) have really enjoyed a winter season that saw lots of snow for snowmobiling and some really nice temps for ice fishing with their dad. A few days ago when hubby and I were out at the farm, we watched one of the twins take off on the snowmobile down a trail through the bush and very shortly thereafter, come walking back through the snow and across the yard with no snowmobile in sight. Two minutes later, we see him trudging back through the snow with his brother at his side, and down the trail through the bush. And then we hear the snowmobile take off and the second brother come trekking back through the yard. Not a word had been said to us by either as they walked on by.

"Whatcha doing?" we ask. And from the young man of few words: "He was stuck."

And that's all we needed to know to fill in the blanks on that story. How cool they have a built-in buddy system to call upon when necessary. And they seem to just take it all in stride, doing what has to be done and carrying on, reminding me every day of another young fellow I once knew (also one of few words) who always seemed to do what had to be done without much fanfare. The apples have not fallen far from the tree.

Sadly we have come to the end of ringette, hockey, figure skating and curling (save for the Farmers & Friends Spiel) and our opportunities to watch the grands in action will be no longer for this season. Spring will offer some dance and ball perhaps, so we will just keep our fingers crossed for that and for all this snow to melt so we can think about the next big season for us and grain farmers throughout the area, one that, after 47 years now for me (more for my guy), still manages to get us all pumped up for a brand-new growing season. Here's hoping all our farmers and friends are excited to get back on the land and see what 2024 has to bring!



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CAAIN Project Story—PIP 3

Plant protein extractor partnering with advanced Sask farm operation and Calgary Tech Company

Continued from B2

Christine Lewington's three favorite letters are R, O, and I. As a kid growing up in small-town Southern Alberta, she realized running a stable of babysitters was far more profitable and a better use of her time than simply babysitting on her own. That sharp-minded assessment has been her hallmark ever since, including driving her to complete a four-year engineering degree at prestigious Brigham Young University in three years, because the ROI was better.

Several years later, then a single mother of two who had spent the better part of a decade raising her kids, she considered putting her educational credentials to use but discovered that despite her degree, Alberta's engineering regulatory body, APEGA, demanded she complete an extra year of study at a recognized Canadian university before considering her for the PEng designation. That option was not feasible, so she took a job as an agri-food engineering project manager, where she discovered her true calling. Christine obtained her PMP certification and quickly determined it made no sense to work for a company that farmed out her services—the ROI theme again—so she struck out on her own. Around that time, she met her current husband, with whom she teamed up to run three businesses, while taking on project management contracts and raising her children.

With so much on the go, and wanting the freedom to spend time being a mom, Christine decided to focus full-time on project management, spending 12 years with Pepsi Frito Lay. Eventually her ROI radar kicked in again, and, not wanting to depend on a single source of income, she returned to self-employment. Over the next few years, she took on some of Canada's biggest food companies as clients, building a knowledge and competencies base that has served her well as project lead of the CAAIN-supported F3: Farm to Factory to Farm: Pea Protein Quality and Traceability, and CEO of the company she founded during Covid, PIP International, whose journey has been almost as interesting and impressive as the work in which she and her team are engaged.

In late 2020, through a series of serendipitous opportunities, Christine found herself signing a global master licensing agreement with the French researchers who developed the protein extraction technology PIP is employing. This state-of-the-art process is under her control, allowing her to commercialize it anywhere in the world. By early 2021, PIP had five employees and a 20-acre Lethbridge site that will eventually house the 200,000 square-foot facility she realized was far too big to serve as a launchpad if PIP were to stay in business. Needing a mid-sized building with scale-up potential, she bought a bankrupt local microbrewery because it was more manageable and had all the piping infrastructure the extraction operation would need. Rather than use the brewery as a proof of concept, however, she decided to make it a fully functional site, allowing her to commercialize at a reasonable initial product volume. Effectively, she went from bench to full market access, gambling on the uniqueness of her offering.

The roll of the dice paid off. The extracted protein is tasteless and not denatured, and it does what it's intended



Christine Lewington notes that the CAAIN funding is allowing the partners to take risks that would otherwise be unthinkable.

to do when added to a food, meaning artificial supplements are not needed. Some of North America's biggest food companies are already clients, and one even offered to buy her entire output, which Christine politely declined, as it would have killed her potential market. But the offer was a strong indication of the product's quality and market potential.

The protein extraction, however remarkable, is not what CAAIN is supporting. In its first three years of development and operation, PIP has required a \$3 million investment, in part because Christine added a research layer that forms the basis for the project CAAIN is funding. She was not satisfied with knowing the approximate origin of the peas she buys—they are all sourced through Swift Current's Monette Farms and some of its Prairies-based subsidiary producers. So, she decided to work with Monette and Calgary-based agri-food software developer Provision Analytics on a traceability backbone that will eventually provide real-time comprehensive data on every bushel of peas PIP purchases. All farms that feed into the Monette collective will be supplied sensors providing data ele-

ments such as location, weather, and soil conditions. Each facility's harvest will be identifiable, a process made easier because Monette acts as a clearing house for everything PIP buys.

The value of this kind of data is obvious. Not only will Christine's team know where all their raw materials come from, they will be able to match quality to growing conditions and various other factors. Sub-par product will be easy to identify and discard but more importantly, farmers will have data to support their efforts to improve the quality of the peas they grow. Hence the project title—F3: Farm to Factory to Farm. For the first time, there will be a closed loop linking farmer to processor and back to farmer. All parties will have real-time access to data on every aspect of the growing, harvesting, storage, and delivery processes, ensuring consistency and creating a robust accountability platform.

The three-legged partnership is essential to the project's success. First, there's the leadership, co-ordination, management, and quality control provided by PIP.

Then there's the involvement of the superbly run Monette Farms, led by visionary CEO, Darrel Monette, who stretches the definition of the term "agricultural producer" to a level rarely seen in the sector. Finally, there's the code-writing ability and technical savvy of Provision Analytics. Led by co-founders Erik Westblom and Michael Gibbons, the six-year-old firm, with offices in Calgary and Chicago, develops scalable software solutions for a range of agri-food clients. Individually, the members of this triumvirate are impressive; collectively, the trio is taking traceability in agriculture to a whole new level of accountability and accuracy.

Continued on page B29

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Volume of Saskatchewan's agri-food exports to India sees over 70 per cent increase

BY JAMIE SHANKS

India, already one of the top global markets for Saskatchewan's agriculture producers, is also one of the fastest-growing with provincial agri-food exports increasing in volume by over 71 per cent in 2023, when compared to 2022.

Exports of Saskatchewan lentils and peas to India, the province's largest pulse market, experienced significant growth by the end of 2023. Saskatchewan's total agri-food export volume to India ranked second in year-over-year growth among its markets, behind only Nigeria and ahead of Algeria, Indonesia, Peru and China. India ranked sixth among Saskatchewan's agri-food ex-

port markets in terms of value for 2023, at \$712 million. "Our agriculture producers are among the best in the world at supplying safe, nutritious and sustainably grown products," Agriculture Minister David Maritz said.

"With India being Saskatchewan's fifth largest trading partner, we want to help our companies and producers remain profitable and competitive by reinforcing our global links with key trade partners in support of Saskatchewan's long-term economic goals."

Saskatchewan has already surpassed its 2030 Growth Plan target of \$20 billion in agri-food exports with total shipments of \$20.2 billion for 2023. Overall, there was a

26 per cent increase in Saskatchewan's total agri-food export volume in 2023 over the previous year.

Saskatchewan's exports have grown by more than 52 per cent since 2013, contributing to Canada's total exports to India in 2023, reaching a value of \$5.1 billion. The province also continues to strengthen and diversify its economic links with India beyond commodity trade, exemplified by the recent renewal of a Memorandum of Understanding to enhance academic collaboration with the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute, a bi-national educational organization with 194 member institutions including the University of Regina and the University of Saskatchewan.



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Photo by David Stobbe

From left are, USask's VP Research Dr. Baljit Singh, Saskatchewan Minister of Agriculture David Marit, and GIFS CEO Steven Webb.

Government commits \$15 million to Global Institute for Food Security at USask

Agriculture Minister David Marit announced a funding commitment on March 11 of \$15 million over five years to the Global Institute for Food Security (GIFS) at the University of Saskatchewan.

Founded in 2012 as part of the University of Saskatchewan's world-class agri-science hub, GIFS works with its partners to provide expertise and leadership in the discovery, development and delivery of innovative solutions to produce globally sustainable food.

"This kind of substantial commitment is fundamental to keeping our agriculture industry a global leader in technology, production and best practices, and the track record GIFS has established proves

it," said Minister Marit. "Investing in research activities undertaken by GIFS and similar institutions is the first step toward enabling Saskatchewan's producers to not only stay competitive, but proving that they remain among the most productive, innovative and sustainable in the world."

In January, GIFS released the results of a two-year study providing evidence that Saskatchewan's production of five major field crops has a significantly smaller carbon footprint in comparison to regions that export the same products, including Australia, France, Germany, Italy and the United States.

Continued on Page B35

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USask pulse research part of \$11 million federal investment

The federal government has announced an investment of up to \$11,017,979 to Pulse Canada to support key pulse crop research at institutions across the country—including the University of Saskatchewan (USask)—and to drive the pulse industry forward.

The announcement was made on Friday, Feb. 9 by Ben Carr, Member of Parliament for Winnipeg South Centre, on behalf of the Honourable Lawrence MacAulay, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

The funding is provided through the AgriScience Program – Clusters Component, which is part of the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (CAP). The Sustainable CAP is a five-year, \$3.5 billion agreement between federal, provincial, and territorial governments to continue building up Canada's agricultural and agri-food sectors.

"Canadian pulse farmers are vitally important to our economy. This investment will bring together the top experts in pulse growing and research from across the Prairies to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of the sector for generations to come," MacAulay said in a statement.

Research projects supported by this cluster will target issues of sustainability, disease prevention, and greater yields and profits for pulse growers.

"Canada is a world leader in sustainable pulse production and exportation. These investments in research from the Government of Canada, matched by our sector, will help enhance our resiliency to meet the growing global demand for sustainably grown, high quality pulses and ingredients while making a positive impact on our environment and economy," Kevin Auch, the chair of Pulse Canada, said in a statement.

USask-led projects that

have received support from this funding include:

- Large Root Systems in Pulses for Drought Tolerance, Carbon Sequestration, and Root Rot Resistance – Dr. Maryse Bourgault (PhD), College of Agriculture and Bioresources
- Identifying Potential Resistance to Pea Aphids and Aphid Transmitted Viruses in Lentil – Dr. Sean Prager (PhD), College of Agriculture and Bioresources
- Phenotyping Pulse Crops for Improved Performance Under Cli-

mate Change – Dr. Steve Shirliffe (PhD), College of Agriculture and Bioresources

- An Integrated Approach for Accelerating Genetic Improvement of Yield and Agronomic Characteristics of Chickpea – Dr. Bunyamin Tar'an (PhD), College of Agriculture and Bioresources
- Development of Improved Pea Cultivars to Enhance Canada's Leading Role in International Pea Markets – Dr. Tom Warkentin (PhD), College of Agriculture and Bioresources



Pulses being studied at the University of Saskatchewan College of Agriculture and Bioresources in Oct. 2021. Photo by Carey Shaw/USask

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PIP International

CAAIN Project story—PIP 3

Continued from page B24

It will take several years to accumulate the critical mass of data needed for the F3 system to have predictive capacity, but some useful data is already available. Christine notes that the CAAIN funding is allowing the partners to take risks that would otherwise be unthinkable, allowing them to remain profitable by providing a safety net that covers capital costs and subcontractors, expenditures that would otherwise represent lost dollars. This support means that despite the surprises that will present themselves along the way, PIP, Monette, and Provision will be able to make necessary adjustments that will allow the data they collect to provide commercial value.

Christine is as enthusiastic about where PIP is today as she is excited to see what the future holds. "We're going to be collaborating with Agriculture and Agri-

Food Canada and Lethbridge College researchers. And while our focus is obviously on pulse crops, there's potential to apply the eventual technology to the agriculture sector more broadly." She pauses before concluding, "This project has many moving parts, including the environmental sustainability we are building into our electrical use and heat generation. What's been great about working with CAAIN is that you guys have allowed us the latitude to pivot when necessary. This kind of R&D rarely progresses in a straight line, and it's so refreshing to work with a funding partner who allows us the flexibility we need to succeed."

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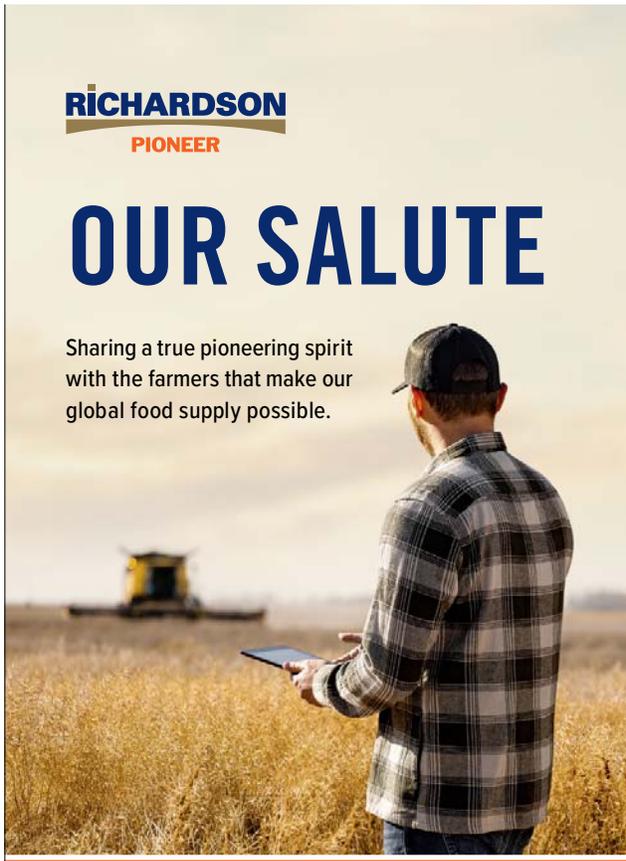


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2024 Pulses outlook: Looking good now, but it may be short-lived

Continued from page B25
Canadian lentil and pea acres to increase in 2024

With prices soaring for green lentils and peas, FCC Economics' forecast of producers' seeding intentions shows a YoY increase this year.

A possible negative development for prices: Pulses are better than many other field crops at handling dry weather and the anticipation of dry growing conditions in an El Nino summer may increase the acres devoted to pulses for 2024/25. More seeding will be challenged by tightening seed availability, however.

Accordingly, AAFC forecasts Canadian lentil production to rise significantly in the 2024/25 crop year (32%), with growth in total supply and carry-out stocks. That will, in turn, boost exports this year after the available Canadian supply was depleted in 2023/24 by a drought-impacted drop in production. The stocks-to-use ratio is fore-

cast to more than double with the new crop. Production of dry peas is forecast to grow 18.8% YoY after poor growing conditions reduced the 2023/24 MY crop 28% YoY. Both total supply and carryout stocks will grow enough to pressure prices of the new crop.

Trends to monitor

India's continued suspension of tariffs on yellow peas in an era of production self-sufficiency: On February 21, India announced an extended suspension of pea tariffs by six to eight weeks beyond March 31st. The added demand has boosted prices at least temporarily. In the broader context however, it's uncertain how long the suspension will last, although the stickiness of India's elevated food inflation bodes well for yet another extension.

India - the world's largest producer, importer and consumer of pulses - is boosting production in efforts to become as self-sufficient as possible. The recent Global Pulses

Conference took note of the country's self-reliance in chickpeas and many other pulses crops. Pulse production has grown by 60% from 17.1 million tonnes in 2014 to 27.0 million tonnes in 2024. That could challenge Canadian producers who've received higher Indian pea and lentil prices lately. India was Canada's second-largest export market for pulses (behind China) over the last five years, accounting for 17.3% of Canadian export values. The Indian election this year could easily dictate changes in tariffs, policy and production incentives.

The development of China as an important export market has helped bridge the gap in exports to India whose demand has fluctuated due to weather-related domestic production constraints and the imposition of import tariffs. Going forward, Canada will vie with Russia and other pulse pro-

ducers to build trade relations there.

Australian pulse production and pricing: Australia is projecting 1.39 million tonnes for its 2023-24 lentil crop production, slightly below the record-breaking 1.69 million in 2022/23. It has boosted exports of red lentils to global markets recently.

Shipping constraints in the Middle East: The war in Gaza has reignited delay issues and increased costs for cargo diversions around the Red Sea, where pulse shipments are carried by container.

An El Nino summer: Pulses can tolerate dry growing conditions better than other crops, but drought again this year would reduce yields for the second year in a row. There still seems to be price support for lentils and peas based on this possibility, but that could evaporate with good moisture levels.



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Government of Canada and Saskatchewan announce 2024 Crop Insurance Program enhancements

BY SAMANTHA EDEL
SASKATCHEWAN CROP
INSURANCE CORPORATION

Federal Agriculture and Agri-Food Minister (AAFC) Lawrence MacAulay and Saskatchewan Agriculture Minister David Marit have announced details of the 2024 Crop Insurance Program, administered by the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation (SCIC).

"As a farmer myself, I know it can be hard to protect your business while continuing to produce the food Canadians and customers around the world rely on," Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Lawrence MacAulay said. "In the face of increasing challenges, it's vitally important that farmers in Saskatchewan have risk management tools available to them, like crop insurance, to help minimize the economic effects of production losses."

"It is important to ensure Business Risk Management Programs are comprehensive and provide relevant, reliable coverage for the diverse operations of our Saskatchewan producers," Marit said. "We recognize weather conditions brought significant challenges in recent years and these programs are a producer's first line of defense. I encourage all producers to take a proactive approach to tailor their coverage to further manage and mitigate their risk."

This year's enhancements build on SCIC's existing suite of Business Risk Management programs that have demonstrated success in providing support to producers impacted by drought conditions. Over the last three years, this suite of programs has largely responded to weather-related production losses, providing over six billion dollars of insurance claims and other program benefits directly to Saskatchewan producers.

For 2024, multi-peril crop insurance average coverage is \$389 per acre, a decrease from 2023, largely due to an average decrease in insured commodity prices. As a result, the average premium is also decreasing to \$12.71. Producers' coverage and premium are individualized to their operation. Coverage reflects each producer's production records and premium reflects each producer's claim history.

SCIC's existing Weather-Based Programs include Forage Rainfall Insurance, the Corn Rainfall Insurance, and Corn Heat Unit Insurance. The rainfall insurance programs provide protection in the



event seasonal precipitation is below the long-term average, adjusted for extreme heat. The Corn Heat Unit Insurance Program insures against a shortage of heat units over the growing season. A selection of program options allows producers to tailor coverage to their needs.

Introduced for the 2024 Crop Insurance Program, SCIC's weather-based programs now provide options to insure intercrops and additional feed crops. The Mixed Forage Rainfall Insurance Program protects any forage feed crop not previously covered under weather-based programs, including mixed forage, greenfeed and silage, if seasonal precipitation is below average. With the Inter-crop Rainfall Insurance Program, annual intercrops intended for harvest can now be insured for below average seasonal precipitation.

Additionally, coverage is increasing for the 2024 Forage Rainfall Insurance Program. Coverage levels now better reflect the productive capacity of the insured acres and increased transportation allowance (which recognizes the costs associated with replacing lost feed). Producers can select from three levels of coverage, Low, Medium, and High, offering flexible risk management and related premium cost options.

For 2024, SCIC is pleased to announce an additional 38 weather stations to supplement its existing network. All weather-based programs are enhanced by this increased weather station density

province-wide. With 224 weather stations across the province, most land is located within 30 kilometres of at least one weather station. One weather station can be selected for each insured land location. This allows producers to insure each of their land locations with relevant coverage.

"During our Town Hall drought meetings last summer, producers emphasized changes to programs such as Forage Rainfall Insurance Program were needed to provide better coverage and flexibility, especially during times of prolonged drought," Saskatchewan Cattlemen Association Chair Keith Day said. "It's clear to SCA that Minister Marit and SCIC took the feedback from those meetings into consideration when making changes such as increasing the number of weather stations, improving communications and increasing the transport allowance. Expanded coverage for cover cropping, green feed and silage is also a significant improvement. We will continue to work with SCIC to improve programs for the benefit of cattle producers."

"SARM appreciates the province's ongoing commitment to Saskatchewan agriculture and producers will appreciate the enhancements that were announced this morning," SARM president Ray Orb said. "We thank the Ministry of Agriculture and SCIC for listening to concerns brought forward from SARM and other organizations that will promote increased communications and provide

better insurance programming for farmers and ranchers alike."

"The improvements made to the forage and rainfall insurance options underscore the ongoing evolution of the program in meeting the requirements of producers," APAS Vice President Bill Prybylski said. "We eagerly anticipate collaborating with SCIC to further enhance this crucial program and urge farmers to thoroughly review their information to fully understand their coverage and explore available options."

"We want to thank the province's ongoing commitment to Saskatchewan agriculture," SSGA's Chay Anderson said. "We support SCIC for adding additional weather stations to address gaps in their network. Additional options to their weather-based programs can further help producers reduce their risk on their operations."

"Saskatchewan Forage Council is pleased about the changes to forage insurance programming that will benefit producers," SFC Vice President Kevin Steinley said. "An increased number of weather stations and expanded options around coverage for cover crops, greenfeed and silage are enhancements that will make insurance decisions easier for our producer members."

March 31, 2024, is the deadline for Saskatchewan producers to apply, reinstate or cancel their Crop Insurance contract. Producers must select insured crops and coverage levels or make additional changes by this date. Producers can speak to their local SCIC office to make any changes or coverage will remain the same as the previous year.

SCIC offers a full suite of programs that can work together to ensure you have every angle covered. These include Crop Insurance, AgriStability, Wildlife Damage Compensation and Prevention Program and Livestock Price Insurance. We encourage producers to review their options and find the right coverage for their operation. For more information, contact a local SCIC office, call 1-888-935-0000 or visit scic.ca.

Crop Insurance is a federal-provincial-producer cost-shared program that helps producers manage production and quality losses. Support for the program is provided by the governments of Canada and Saskatchewan under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (Sustainable CAP).



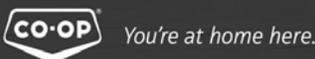
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Firearms Safety Campaign extended to Spring 2024

The Government of Saskatchewan is extending its firearm safety campaign, "Secure Firearms. Safe Communities," into the spring with updated materials to raise awareness about safety, education, proper firearms storage, and licensing.

"We want Saskatchewan firearms owners to know that safety starts with them," Corrections, Policing and Public Safety Minister Paul Merriman said. "The extension of the firearms safety campaign will continue to protect Saskatchewan's tradition of responsible firearms ownership, which is demonstrated by a commitment to ongoing learning, firearms licensing, proper handling and safe storage."

The campaign features several well-known Saskatchewan residents who are acting as spokespeople for the campaign. The extended campaign features Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities President, Ray Orb; and Elder and Senator with the Prince Albert Grand Council and Federation of Saskatchewan Indigenous Nations, Noland Henderson.

"SARM supports and encourages fire-

arms safety," Orb said. "Responsible firearm owners should follow safety practices and ensure their firearms and ammunition are properly stored, get their PAL firearms license, and help educate family, friends and neighbours on firearm safety."

Firearms owners are encouraged to get and maintain their Possession and Acquisition License (PAL/RPAL) and keep their loved ones and our communities safe by properly storing all firearms and ammunition.

"Thank you to all our outstanding spokespeople for helping to promote firearms safety and our long-standing heritage of responsible firearms ownership in Saskatchewan," Chief Firearms Officer Robert Freberg said. "The campaign allows the public to gain an understanding of the best safety practices related to firearms ownership, which will keep our communities safe."

Other important safety tips include:

- learning how to safely load, handle and store every firearm you use;
- never pointing a firearm at anyone or anything you don't want to shoot;

- storing ammunition separately from firearms or by locking it up;
- using the correct ammunition for your firearm;
- unloading all firearms before they are stored or when not in use;
- locking firearms in a cabinet or safe or attaching a secure locking device - such as a trigger or cable lock - to ensure the firearm cannot be fired or stolen;
- ensuring unauthorized individuals do not have access to the keys or combination locks that are used to secure your firearm unless they are licensed and have your permission to use them; and,
- storing firearms safely when they are being transported.

This year's firearms safety campaign messages will be featured on radio, billboards, print materials, and digital media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. The campaign begins

March 4, 2024, and ends mid-April 2024. The full-length video advertisements can also be viewed at saskatchewan.ca/firearms.

I'm a licensed firearms owner.
- Ray Orb, President of SARM

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Where water meets the field

Continued from page B21

The project was recently funded for \$699,000 by the Agriculture Development Fund, the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, and the Saskatchewan Cattlemen's Association.

"In Saskatchewan, we're very favourable in terms of having lots of water availability," Penner said.

"The problem is some of that water is not suitable for human consumption and in fact some of it is not suitable for livestock consumption."

Through a testing program run by Saskatchewan's Ministry of Agriculture, "we've realized that water sulfate is a very major challenge for our livestock producers."

When cattle drink water with high sulfate concentrations, two major problems can arise.

The first one, which Penner calls chronic, is a depletion of trace minerals in the cattle. In particular, sulfate can drastically reduce the amount of copper in an animal because it binds with the mineral.

Copper is important to reproduction, hoof and hair growth, the immune system and a component in enzymes and antioxidant systems, he said.

The other issue is that microorganisms in the animal's rumen can convert sulfate into hydrogen sulfide, which can induce polio, a neurological disorder.

"Cattle can lose vision; they start to stargaze or head press. It's a symptom of the challenges happening in the



Left is, Dr. Greg Penner (PhD), professor in the Department of Animal and Poultry Science, and USask Centennial Enhancement Chair in Ruminant Nutritional Physiology. Right is, Dr. Patrick Lloyd-Smith (PhD), associate professor in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics and a member of the Global Institute for Water Security at USask.

brain, and if it's too severe, death can occur," he said.

"What we're looking for are the strategies that we can use, not on the acute side but on chronic sulfur exposure, to help cattle maintain adequate trace mineral status."

It would be preferable, of course, to remove sulfate

with the minerals and makes them unavailable. What we thought was adequate no longer is.

"I hope I can develop solutions that mean we can turn the page on this."

from the water; but that is difficult.

Filtration is an option, but these systems don't work in areas where there is no power—such as in pastures far from the farm home quarter—and produce effluent that requires disposal.

Penner is involved with another option now being evaluated in a College of Engineering project led by Dr. Won Jae Chang (PhD) that is looking at passive filtration using various absorbent materials. These are showing promise but must be tested for scale-up and are early in their development.

And so, Penner is seeking to refine farm management tools to minimize risk and optimize the ability of cattle to maintain their trace mineral status. He is also hoping to expand knowledge on this topic for sheep, on which he is not aware of any sulfate research.

"When cattle are consuming high-sulfate water antagonistic effects occur between minerals in water and trace minerals in the diet. In these cases, even though we're providing a diet that might be expected to meet requirements, sulfate interacts

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Government of Sask commits \$15 million to Global Institute for Food Security at USask

Continued from Page B27

The conclusions of the study have become a fundamental aspect of Saskatchewan's sustainability story and the sector's increasingly important role in global food production.

"GIFS is grateful for this funding from the Government of Saskatchewan which is an investment in agricultural innovation for the entire sector and will support our operations and mission as we work with partners to deliver innovation for sustainable agriculture and food pro-

duction," said GIFS CEO Steve Webb. "The investment will enable collaboration with partners on our market-facing programs, including accelerated breeding, biomanufacturing and policy and regulatory—maximizing Saskatchewan and Canada's sustainable production of safe and nutritious food for a growing world."

The funding for GIFS will provide \$3 million each year from 2023-2027 to support its ongoing operations, contributing to Saskatchewan's agriculture sector

through work such as supporting crop breeding through sequencing, bioinformatics and data analytics services or technology development that facilitates commercialization of new products.

"This announcement reinforces our province's commitment to sustainable agricultural practices," said Peter Stoicheff, President, University of Saskatchewan. "USask has a storied history of leading agriculture advancements and the funding announced today will allow us to continue our world-leading agricul-

tural research and development."

The Government of Saskatchewan's commitment to strategic, long-term investments in research and innovation is essential for continued progress toward the agriculture-related targets in the province's Growth Plan economic goals for 2030. These include increasing Saskatchewan's crop production to 45 million metric tonnes and livestock cash receipts to \$3 billion, tripling the growth of technology sector, and growing the value of agri-food exports to \$20 billion.

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