



Crops in the Pipestone Valley south of Moosomin on June 27.

Ashley Bochek photo



Crops in southeast developing well

BY RYAN KIEDROWSKI
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

It has been a cool start to summer with rain and low overnight temperatures, but according to the latest provincial Crop Report, most crops in the southeast are coming along nicely.

"Producers within the region are continuing with in-crop spray applications as the weather allows and monitoring for insect and disease pressure," said Kim Stonehouse, Crops Extension Specialist in his report for the southeast from June 17 to 23. "Haying operations are just starting within the region but may be delayed due to rain in some areas. Storms that moved through the region over the past week caused hail damage to some parts of the region. Producers are still assessing the extent of the crop damage and waiting to see which crops are able to recover."

Of course, with all that rain, topsoil conditions are fantastic right now, with cropland topsoil rating 86 per cent

adequate, five per cent surplus, and only nine per cent short. Hayland is in around the same condition—three per cent surplus, 79 per cent adequate and 19 per cent short, while conditions in pasture land are rated as one per cent surplus, 78 per cent adequate, and 21 per cent short.

"Wind, hail and excess moisture caused minor to moderate crop damage in areas throughout the region," Stonehouse noted. "Dry conditions continue to be reported with some areas indicating severe crop damage. Gophers continue to cause crop damage with a few areas reporting minor to moderate damage."

As for pests, they're making their presence known, but not to an extreme extent so far.

"Producers report minor to moderate flea beetle damage with control measures being taken," Stonehouse pointed out. "Minor damage was also reported in a few areas due to cutworms, grasshoppers, aphids and pea leaf weevil. A few reports of crop damage due to plant dis-

eases are starting to be recorded."

Crops ready for the heat

After some timely rains, what's needed in most parts of the southeast right now is a good shot of sunshine for a couple of weeks. Recent rainfall in the Atwater and Stockholm areas are enough to set the stage for plants to really take off.

"We got anywhere from an inch-and-a-half to close to four inches of rain since Thursday night," said farmer Blake Duchek. "Where there's close to four inches, we got lots drowned out. Every little impression is full of water now, so we lost some there, but that was on some of our further away land. Around home and where it got an inch-and-a-half to two inches, it's really growing now. The crop has really advanced in the last week here."

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Crops in southeast developing well

Continued from front

Much like the provincial Crop Report, Duchek's crops are right where they ought to be for development, maybe a few days later than in 2024.

"I think we're probably a week behind last year, just from the cold weather we had there during the middle of May, and those couple nights it froze," he said. "Now we need some heat. We haven't had that many 30°C days yet."

It won't be long before Duchek's canola is a bright yellow against the blue sky.

"You can see how much the crops grew just when they got that shot of rain," he said. "Our canola is going to start to bolt, it won't be that far from blooming here pretty soon."

One big difference this year compared to the last growing season has been the pest situation, which is thankfully far less.

"At least this year there were no flea beetles," Duchek said. "Last year we were spraying some two or three times—you couldn't keep ahead of them on some quarters. This year we went out and checked, we only saw beetles one night, and after that they weren't a problem. At least with growing conditions like this, the canola can stay ahead of it, so that's good, not having to worry about the flea beetles."

In the Rocanville area, Rylar Hutchinson says the cold start to the growing season actually turned out to be just what was needed.

"Crops are coming up good, we've had the rains at the right times, nice half-to-one-inch rains," he said. "At the start of May, we had that week and a half of cold, rainy weather and it brought around three inches in our area. Everyone was shaking their heads, but looking back, I'm glad we had that moisture. It's soaked in good, and crops are off to a good start!"

He's noticed very few flea beetles in his canola as well—another positive in what's shaping up to be a fine season.

"I was okay and we didn't have to spray for flea beetles, there were very little," Hutchinson said. "I never seeded my canola until after May long, and that definitely helped."

In the Gerald area, Kevin Hruska also reports seeing excellent conditions on his land.

"We're in good shape, we're in the best shape of all of Saskatchewan," he said. "We had that big snow at the start of the season, which made it kind of burdensome with seeding and everything, and difficult, but we've had good, timely rains. We've had a couple inches of rain since and so growing conditions are ideal for us right at the moment."

Hruska has also made a first pass of chemical application, but as Murphy's



Crops in Southeast Saskatchewan on June 27.

Ashley Bocek photo

Law dictates, if you want the wind to start blowing, pull the sprayer out of storage.

"We've got our first pass done, and we're starting our second pass," he said, adding the pressure is on to get that second pass done. "As soon as you start spraying, it's a windy time of the year and we struggle with that. We're maxed out with our sprayers, we don't have big sprayer power. We have three sprayers only. Farms half our size have three sprayers."

As for the perfect rain ratio, Hruska noted "we could use three-quarters of an inch every week now for month."

Moosomin-area producer Trevor Green also believes the local area is in the perfect zone.

"Considering what some of those guys are going through east and west of Assiniboia, it's pretty much a write off in some areas," he said. "Even up at Churchbridge, usually those guys are complaining about too much water in potholes, and they're like 'we need some rain here pretty quick.' So, you know, we're doing half decent around Moosomin, I think. Grandpa always used to say, 'we're two weeks away from a drought in Saskatchewan all the time!'"

Green has noticed that the earlier-seeded canola looks as though it's performing

better than some of the crop seeded after April's big blast of snow.

"We've kind of had a cool spring and I think some of that stuff has struggled just a bit," he said. "A couple shots of rain and some heat here, it's really come on lately. I think it's quite a bit behind where it actually should be, compared to when it was seeded."

Some producers in the Shaunavon area even reported frost on June 24—a fact that really puts into perspective how fortunate the Moosomin area is.

"You sit and talk with the with producers from all over the southeast here and east-central, around Moosomin, we're very fortunate right now compared to a

lot of parts of the province," Green said.

On the grazing side, pasture and hay land is looking better than it has in many years.

"Even this year, some of the older stands look half decent," Green confirmed. "I attribute that to maybe that snow that we had, there was quite a bit of moisture in that last snow."

Ultimately, a good or bad year relies on six inches of topsoil and the fact that it rains here sometimes—when Mother Nature feels like smiling down on producers, that is.

"When you think you got her beat, she lets you know she's still the boss!" Green said with a laugh.

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New USask infrastructure to bolster agricultural research

The University of Saskatchewan (USask) has received \$11.8 million in funding for two new facilities that will provide critical workspace for crop and soil science research and teaching.



David Stobbe photo

Above, from left: Angela Bedard-Haughn, Dean, College of Agriculture and Bioresources, Tracy Broughton, Executive Director, Saskatchewan Oilseeds Development Commission, Honourable Daryl Harrison, Minister of Agriculture, Honourable Ken Cheveldayoff, Minister of Advanced Education, Wayne Thompson, Executive Director, Western Grains Research Foundation, Blair Goldade, Executive Director, Saskatchewan Wheat Development Commission, Peter Stoitcheff, President, USask, Jill McDonald, Executive Director, Saskatchewan Barley Development Commission.

Located on the USask Saskatoon campus, the Harrington Plant Growth Facility and the Soil Science Field Facility will provide capacity to expand research programs and enhance training opportunities for students in the College of Agriculture and Bioresources and the Crop Development Centre (CDC) at USask.

The project will also include a renovation to a portion of the Crop Science Field Lab at USask to provide additional workspace for the CDC. Construction is underway and is expected to be completed in July 2026.

"We are grateful to all of our partners and government supporters who have contributed to this important infrastructure project," said USask President and Vice-Chancellor Peter Stoitcheff. "These new facilities will be instrumental in advancing critical agricultural research and will set the stage for addressing global challenges as we aim to be the university the world needs."

Named after USask alumnus Dr. James Bishop Harrington (PhD), a member of USask's Class of 1920 (BSA), in recognition of his significant contributions to the field of plant breeding, the Harrington Plant Growth Facility will provide much-needed indoor growth room capacity for breeding programs. With a limited growing season in Saskatchewan, growth rooms are essential for researchers, allowing for multiple cropping cycles in a year.

The project will include an expansion in workspace capacity devoted to seed processing and storage as well as enhanced lab spaces for analyzing field samples. Providing increased capacity to meet the needs of the CDC's renowned plant breeding programs, the new infrastructure will improve efficiency and support research for many of the crop types essential to western Ca-

nadian producers.

The Soil Science Field Facility will better equip USask soil scientists as they address agricultural issues related to soil health and sustainability, soil fertility and plant production, Indigenous agriculture, and environmental issues such as mitigation of climate change and its impact on agriculture.

The facility will offer a modernized, central location to consolidate soil science field research activities, featuring spaces for soil and plant drying, soil and plant processing for analytical analyses, and storage of soil and plant material from research trials.

Funding for the project includes \$7 million from Western Grains Research Foundation (WGRF), \$2.3 million from the Saskatchewan Wheat Development Commission, \$1 million from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture through the Sustainable Canadian Agriculture Partnership (Sustainable CAP), \$850,000 from the Saskatchewan Barley Development Commission, and \$400,000 from the Saskatchewan Oilseeds Development Commission.

Additional funding has also been provided by BASF Canada, the Saskatchewan Cattle Association, SeCan, Bob and Norma McKercher, the Saskatchewan Alfalfa Seed Producers Development Commission, the Saskatchewan Forage Seed Development Commission, and SaskOats.

"The WGRF investment into these two new facilities will provide new opportunities for expanded research at the University of Saskatchewan," said Laura Reiter, WGRF board chair. "The research that takes place at the University of Saskatchewan has made a significant contribution to the success of western Canadian farmers and the new facilities will build upon that success."



David Stobbe photo

Cereal and flax pathology technician Ashely Smith works in a growth chamber in the Controlled Environment Facility in the College of Agriculture and Bioresources. The new Harrington Plant Growth Facility will provide expanded indoor growth room capacity for USask researchers.

This infrastructure project was made possible through the WGRF Phase 2 Capacity Initiative which supports the development of infrastructure necessary to accelerate crop research for the benefit of field crop farmers in Western Canada.

"This funding announcement is excellent and exciting news, and we're very proud to add our support to the group of industry partners who have come together to fund this initiative at the University of Saskatchewan and the College of Agriculture and Bioresources," said Minister of Agriculture Daryl Harrison of the Government of Saskatchewan. "We appreciate the importance of innovative ideas and getting them where they need to be—into the hands of our producers and value-added businesses to help them stay positioned as global leaders in the industry."

Sustainable CAP is a five-year, \$3.5 bil-

lion investment by Canada's federal, provincial and territorial governments that supports Canada's agri-food and agri-product sectors. This includes \$1 billion in federal programs and activities and a \$2.5 billion commitment that is cost-shared 60 per cent federally and 40 per cent provincially/territorially for programs that are designed and delivered by provinces and territories.

"USask researchers are driving the discovery and innovation needed to feed the world," said Dr. Angela Bedard-Haughn (PhD), dean of the College of Agriculture and Bioresources. "We are extremely grateful for this significant investment that will strengthen our research and teaching, and elevate our capacity to deliver the resilient crop varieties and soil research that are critical for a sustainable future."



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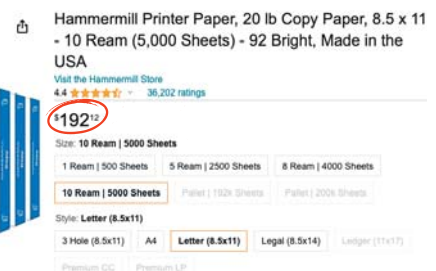
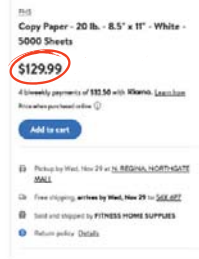
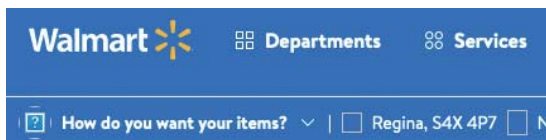
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It doesn't get much better than this

On a beautiful spring evening, as the sun begins to set I head out on the SXS, camera in hand, hoping for that one amazing shot. Just half an hour earlier I had fed the guys in the field amidst about 12 drops of rain but now, with the clouds scattered sporadically across the skies and little wind to speak of, I am simply enjoying the beauty that surrounds me. The trees, long brown and bare are now fully green and the fields of recently-sown wheat boast row upon row of two-inch high plants (at the time).

My camera and I make several stops along my pre-determined route – right back to the field I had been at before. The only difference is my mode of transportation. And my gloves. I am ultimately on a mission, one to pick twine and bits of scrap I had noticed earlier. Methinks hubby has turned up a few goodies in his pass along the edge of the field. Who knew it was some sort of dumping ground many years before.

My stop at the designated 'spot' nets me a five-gallon pail full of twine and junk and as I turn around to lift the pail into the back of the SXS, I see the most amazing, ground-to-ground rainbow across the sky. And yes, I captured it on my camera. And ok, it wasn't a breathtaking photo even though my breath was taken away with the unexpected sight. But in that moment, surrounded by the green leafy trees, the freshly turned-over black soil, the sun setting to the west and the rainbow and deep coloured clouds off to the east, I thought, "It doesn't get much better than this."

The next day, on that same field, the last seeding day in what seemed like a loooooong season, hubby says to me as I delivered lunch to the guys: "Found you a rake, dear." I immediately respond with, "In your tire?" Yup he says, pointing to the four-wheel-drive tractor. And so, with the end literally in sight, we were once again reminded that some days bring more frustration and challenges than others. And still, it doesn't get much better than this – out in the country beneath the incredible and ever-changing 'living skies' where the view goes on forever – and oh how I love it.

And speaking of frustrations, I can't begin to share those of the men in my world who worked so hard every single day from very early in the morning until it was time to roll into bed at night. My frustrations were on a different level. You know ... aren't the potatoes cooked yet? Where is that bottle of barbecue sauce I just bought? I am sure there are hamburger buns in this freezer somewhere! How can I be out of bottled water already? Is the grocery store still open? You know how it goes.

One day, the first start up after a rainy week, I actually had no idea the guys were rolling again. I went out to the farm at 5:00 p.m. but the twins didn't know where any of the guys were and I headed back to our home in town (where we stay on rainy days). A 5:30 text makes me aware that they are seeding and my plan for soup and toast when hubby got home suddenly went south. At 5:32 I threw some sausage into the air fryer and started a pot of boiling water. At 5:52 I was packed with water and plates of food (such as it was) and on my way down the highway. By 6:50 I had fed all three and headed back down the field. It was entirely possible that I might even make a 7:00 meeting by perhaps 7:04.

I didn't really pay much attention to the circle in the middle of the field that hubby had obviously worked a bit earlier, other than to slow right down because I hate bouncing my truck over the ridges. That's when I realized I was bogging down in a mud puddle (no, not a slough, just let me clarify). So much for slowing right down – I was stuck! Not even 4x4 did me any good. Frustrated and ripped right off, I turned the truck off, got out (in my flip-flops no less) and thought, "I'm walking home!" Well, at least to the farmyard some 3 or 4 miles away. And no way was I going to make the meeting that I thought I wouldn't, then thought I would make.

Hubby's laughing a few minutes later as he came to rescue me (I had walked all of 25 yards) didn't exactly sit well with me. I mean, really, what was so funny about it? No one had thought to tell me they were seeding despite a number of phones in the field. Just saying. And after being so careful about the "ridges," here I was having to pull my truck out of the mud. Easy peasy, according to hubby as he unhooked the rope and laughed some more. I personally didn't find the whole thing particularly hilari-



ous but it seems everyone hubby told had a good laugh. Hubby seldom saw home during our month of seeding as we had settled once again into our RV at the farm. Same spot. Same view. Dog house. Chicken house (no chickens). Old shop. Campfire out back of the camper where the kids and their mom and I spent at least a few minutes around nearly every night. It's where we unwind after the long, busy days, interspersed with a quick walk to feed the 4-H steers (them, not me). Or a SXS trip to check cows (again them, not me). A quick trip to the field to take/bring back a man or two. A chance to sit back, procrastinate doing the dishes that are piled up in the RV but also a chance to hear about the kids' day.

When the twins (14) get home from school, one is immediately off to till some patch of land; the other gets a few swings of golf in before starting the mower up. My days of cutting grass at the farm are dwindling though the boys still will ask me to do the ditch at the highway. I am honoured. By next year, I suspect I won't even need to do that. Their weed whacker and their chain saw keeps busy as they cut fallen tree branches, cut wood for the fire and trim up the yard, especially prior to a 4-H meet at their farm. "Maybe you wanna bring your weed trimmer out one day, Grandma," one says. No more words than that but perhaps it was his way of saying the 'camper yard' could be trimmed up.

Gone are the days of the twins' little 4-foot-square patch of dirt they so faithfully tilled up with the hand tiller, carefully seeding it to wheat and canola, surrounded by chicken wire to keep animals out. This year is a bigger patch, maybe an acre, seeded with the air drill in a little corner by the corrals. This is "their" patch. One of the boys carefully tilled along the edge of the dug-out as well and seeded a row of corn only to be reseeded shall we say, by the air drill when their dad rolled by seeding oats and grass seed. Their dad wondered why there was a neat little tilled row along the edge. Obviously, he didn't wonder hard enough. Oh well, this is life on the farm.

The other end of this little oats/grass patch was where the boys had planned to plant evergreen trees. With some help from our oldest grandson, I started the process while the twins were in school one day. Rope? Check. Sticks? Check. Bright colored tape? Check. The twins added more trees to the row later, sort of following the contour of the field just as I had done. Fortunately their grandfather hasn't exactly seen the row yet. It wouldn't meet "straight" standards by any means but the boys were happy with the end result so we will all be happy with it! And hopefully "Eagle Eyes Wayne" won't notice until the trees are super well-established.

When the boys' dad brought a water tank on wheels over from Great Grandma's, they were pumped! Dutifully each day they water that row of evergreens, pulling the tank along behind the garden tractor. One boy is on the tractor, the other (and the dog) riding along in the SXS, getting off every now and then to inspect the job. The dog digs holes. Too bad he wasn't digging holes for the trees I planted.

When seeding was over (oh, glorious day!), Wayne had to be in Brandon for an appointment, one that would result in him having to have some surgical procedure in his gums. Yeah, gives me the shivers, too. Within a week, we had made three trips to the city, the last one a bit unexpected due to some complications. As we approached home on the last appointment, hubby, who had been driving the old fuel truck back and forth to town, says to me,

"I am sure I locked the old fuel truck up." A few minutes later, he says, "I hope it isn't raining at home. I think I left the windows on the old truck open." Okay, so now we are both laughing. And sure enough, the truck is sitting in front of the house, all locked up, windows open. When he goes to close the windows, he can't find the keys. Yep, you guessed it. Left the keys in, windows open and manually locked the truck doors. I am pretty sure all those needles into his gums on repeated days may have fogged a few brain cells, something I too can relate too, especially during what has been a busy time of year.

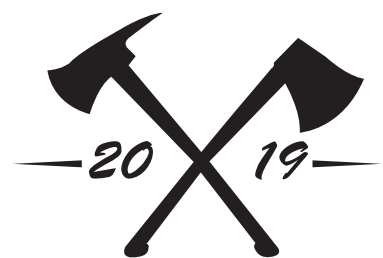
On top of the stresses of farm life during seeding, our son and his family and the families of their partners of their fishing camp up north (near Flin Flon) have endured the stress of the unknown. Is the lodge still standing was the question we had every single day. We followed weather forecasts for Denare Beach (near where the camp is) and NASA 'heat' maps for days on end, believing one minute the camp didn't survive, only to hope the next day's 'heat' map showed there was hope. In the end, some firefighting by water bomber pilots and guys on the ground on several different days has, miraculously (so far), resulted in all dozen or so buildings still standing.

As I write this (June 13, 2025), our camping days at the farm have come to an end for now and our heads and hearts are turned towards a very exciting moment – our oldest granddaughter's high school graduation. Formal grad photos are done (and are beautiful I might add, knowing I am a little biased). Now it's time for that diploma, a backyard barbeque and some finals and ta-da! Of course, this grandma is already at times weepy, just thinking about it. My mind floods with memories of the wee little girl, who by the time she could first form a sentence, would say every time we would attempt to help her with something: "I can do it mine own self!" And that has proven to be true, time and time again.

At the same time as we cheer on our graduate, I also had to say goodbye to a very good friend of mine, someone who welcomed me to town some 11 years ago. I was a little lost those first few weeks and every morning I would sit on my patio swing (which was sitting on clay out front of my house). I bemoaned the loss of the job I had just left; I didn't like not having a green grassy yard; I had a lot of clay to wheelbarrow to spots. Lost the best way to describe that period of time.

As it was, there I was, drinking orange juice (likely it was Pepsi) early each morning, swinging on the patio swing as my neighbour walked by on her way for coffee downtown. "Come for coffee," said 'the other Donna' to me. "Oh no, I don't do coffee," I said. "Oh, come anyhow," she insisted and off I went. That began a tradition for a few years and the start of a friendship that just really helped me adapt to life in town. It felt like such a loss when her eventual dementia meant a move to be nearer her kids. Her passing is another reminder of the fragility of life and how important it is to enjoy time with family and friends even when life is busy and challenging.

And with those closing thoughts, I best utilize the words: "the end." To our farmer friends and all our readers, enjoy each and every day and we'll chat again next month!!



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Farm Credit Canada has committed to invest \$2 billion by 2030 to advance agtech innovation in Canada's agriculture and food industry. This will direct more investment into innovative devices, instrumentation, research, and methodologies designed to improve efficiency, productivity, and sustainability.

FCC Capital announces \$2 billion investment into ag and food innovation

Farm Credit Canada (FCC) has committed to invest \$2 billion by 2030 to advance agtech innovation in Canada's agriculture and food industry. This will direct more investment into innovative devices, instrumentation, research, and methodologies designed to improve efficiency, productivity, and sustainability.

The funds will come from the organization's new investment arm, FCC Capital, a group offering capital solutions that catalyze the broader investing ecosystem and bolster growth. Launched in 2024, FCC Capital delivers an expanded offering of capital solutions to companies across the entire ag and food value chain, including investment funds and direct equity capital dispersed from pre-seed stage to growth-driven late-stage companies. In its inaugural year, it built a founda-

tion by closing nine direct investment deals totaling \$170 million, investing in three new funds, and adding a new business accelerator to its portfolio.

"Canada's economic future requires an agriculture and food industry leading the world in innovation and productivity. However, until now, investment dollars have been scarce and have not scaled to meet the increasingly sophisticated needs of the sector. Through this investment, FCC is delivering on its commitment to be a catalyst and support innovation and productivity in one of Canada's most important and investable sectors," says Justine Hendricks, FCC president and CEO.

This announcement comes at a time when various sources are showing that annual venture capital investment into Canada's agtech sector is lagging. In 2023,

Canada's venture capital investments in the sector were cited at approximately \$270 million, 10 times below the United States when adjusted for population. This low level of investment puts Canada at a strategic disadvantage. At the same time, Japan and the European Union have been demonstrating increased investments in agtech.

The formal announcement was made by Darren Baccus, executive vice-president, agri-food, alliances and FCC Capital, during the Invest Canada 2025 Conference, an event run by the Canada

Venture Capital and Private Equity Association. "With this \$2 billion allocation, FCC will continue its long history of supporting and partnering with the Canadian ag and food industry to offer greater security and sustainability in a highly competitive global market," said Baccus. "At FCC, we're uniquely positioned to provide catalytic capital and work with stakeholders to source compelling investment opportunities. We are confident that our investment commitment to the industry will 'crowd in' capital to amplify the economic impact."

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Farmers can salvage hay along provincial highways

The Government of Saskatchewan is reminding farmers and producers that they can salvage hay along provincial highways.

"The hay salvage and ditch mowing program provides several benefits for Saskatchewan residents," Highways Minister David Marit said. "The program offers a cost-effective way to keep vegetation along our highway system in check while supplying free hay to farmers and producers."

The program supports agricultural producers while enhancing road safety by improving visibility of signage, controlling brush and noxious weeds and ensuring safer intersections and curves by maintaining clear sightlines.

"Programs like this provide timely, practical support for Saskatchewan producers facing pressures from weather and input costs," Agriculture Minister Daryl Harrison said. "Access to quality hay is essential

for livestock operations, and this initiative gives producers another opportunity to secure feed while making good use of roadside resources."

Key program dates to remember:

Prior to and including July 8, landowners or lessees adjacent to a highway ditch have the first option to cut or bale hay.

After July 8 anyone may cut or bale hay without the permission of the nearby landowner or lessee, as long as these activities are not already underway.

All hay bales must be removed from ditches by August 8.

The Ministry of Highways will deliver

the mowing program with the assistance of contractors and local rural municipalities. About 45,400 hectares will be mowed in 2025.

"This initiative provides valuable support to rural producers, especially during challenging times like drought or feed shortages," SARM President Bill Huber said. "Allowing responsible hay salvaging helps reduce waste and supports the agricultural community's resilience. SARM encourages producers to follow safety guidelines and work collaboratively with local authorities to make the most of this resource."



Sask Wildlife Federation offers support to landowners facing gopher overpopulation

With escalating gopher populations causing increasing concern for landowners across Saskatchewan, the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation (SWF), with the support of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM), is stepping up to offer practical assistance.

Gophers are a significant cause of crop loss and land degradation, impacting the livelihood of Saskatchewan producers and landowners. In response, the SWF is connecting landowners with trusted SWF members who are ready to assist in controlling gopher numbers in a responsible and ethical manner.

Landowners experiencing challenges with gophers are encouraged to contact the

SWF Office at 306-692-8812. The SWF will then work to identify available SWF members in that area to coordinate arrangements directly with the landowner.

All SWF members participating in this initiative carry an additional \$5 million in liability coverage, and are expected to uphold the highest standards of safety, conduct, and landowner respect.

"We recognize the growing frustration gophers are causing in rural areas, particularly as they damage crops and create hazards for livestock," said Darrell Crabbe, SWF Executive Director. "We're proud to support our members in being part of the solution—helping our landowners while maintaining ethical hunting practices."

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Saskatchewan agriculture industry benefits from funding for research demonstration projects

The Governments of Canada and Saskatchewan announced that 32 Agriculture Demonstration of Practices and Technologies (ADOPT) projects and six Strategic Field Program (SFP) projects received more than \$1.4 million in funding for fiscal 2024-25 under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (Sustainable CAP).

"Research is at the root of how we grow the sector and strengthen Canada's position as a world leader when it comes to agriculture," Canada's Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Elise Bédard, said. "These projects will help get best practices directly into the hands of farmers and processors in Saskatchewan and keep them on the cutting edge."

"Saskatchewan is a global leader in agriculture technology and sustainability practices thanks to initiatives like ADOPT," Saskatchewan Agriculture Minister Daryl Harrison said. "By investing in demonstration and knowledge transfer projects, we are ensuring the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of Canada's agricultural sector."

The ADOPT program provides funding to assist producer groups and First Nations communities to evaluate and demonstrate new agricultural practices and technologies at the local level. ADOPT focuses on practical, short-term research projects that can be applied by producers soon after completion.

The SFP provides fund-

ing for relevant and timely field-level studies to support agriculture producers and processors in Saskatchewan and helps to develop new best practices that reinforce Saskatchewan's global leadership in sustainable agriculture production and expertise.

Several projects will be demonstrated at Agriculture-Applied Research Management (Agri-ARM) sites throughout the prov-

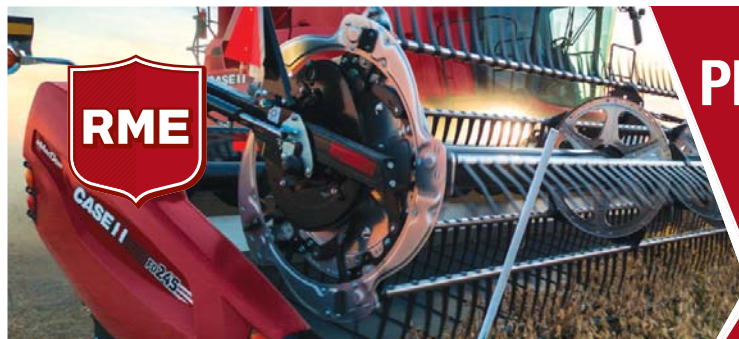


ince this year for producers to take part in learning first-hand about the new technologies and production practices.

Sustainable CAP is a five year, \$3.5 billion investment by federal, provincial and territorial governments to strengthen competitiveness, innovation, and resiliency of Canada's agriculture, agri-food, and agri-based products sector. This in-

cludes \$1 billion in federal programs and activities and a \$2.5 billion commitment that is cost-shared 60 per cent federally and 40 per cent provincially/territorially for programs that are designed and delivered by provinces and territories.

Sustainable CAP has committed \$10 million over five years to demonstration projects through ADOPT and SFP.



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Bison calves are born a rusty/cinnamon color like this one-month-old above. When they are three months old, they start to grow a darker brown coat that will get thicker in preparation for winter.



A cowbird perched on the back of a bison. This age-old relationship reflects a delicate balance of the prairie ecosystem. As the bison move through the field, they stir up insects creating opportunities for the cowbirds to feed.

Fairlight bison ranch thrives with focus on regenerative grazing practices

BY ANGELA ULRICH

Robert Johnson, together with his family, operates a thriving bison farm near the community of Fairlight, where they are deeply committed to sustainability and land stewardship. Their approach focuses on the natural prairie ecosystem as much as possible, allowing the land and the animals to thrive as they did centuries ago.

By raising bison, a species native to the region, they support regenerative grazing practices that improve soil health, encouraging native plant growth, in turn promoting a natural biodiversity that is becoming more uncommon in today's conventional farming environment.

When touring the ranch, it is apparent that the Johnsons are committed to working in harmony with the land and the animals that grow on it, ensuring both the environment and their bison herd are cared for with respect and balance.

With plans to expand the herd, the Johnsons purchased five quarters of land in 2022. They proceeded to do the opposite of the trend and converted every acre of conventional farmland into hay. Robert utilized the Resilient Agricultural Landscapes Program (RALP) through the provincial and federal funded Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership. RALP provides funding to producers to increase the environmental resiliency of agricultural land. The program helps producers achieve outcomes related to water quality, soil health and biodiversity through the adoption of beneficial management practices.

With assistance from a nutritionist, agronomist and a seed company, Robert seeded a hay blend consisting of brome grass, orchard grass, tall fescue, and legumes. Birds foot trefoil has thrived in his pastures and native landscapes. In areas with lower topography, he used varieties that work in saline wet areas including salt tolerant alfalfa, sainfoin, timothy, intermediate wheatgrass and creeping meadow foxtail.

After converting the conventional land to hay/forage production, the improvements of water retention were quickly apparent. Forages and legumes have the capacity to hold onto water with a strong root system even during dry conditions, contributing to improved soil structure and reduced erosion.

For marginal acres, Robert also seeded a pollina-



Robert Johnson in one of his forage fields grown in co-ordination with the Resilient Agricultural Landscapes Program.

tor blend with assistance from DUC's marginal areas program. The Ducks Unlimited Canada program is an alternative management strategy to address saline, weedy and hard to access areas. Some of these areas were seeded with the use of his drone.

"Not only is high quality pastures, winter feed and water important to the herd, a proper mineral balance is vital," says Robert. "A bison hair coat is two to three inches thick in the winter which requires additional minerals such as copper, zinc and selenium. This part of the province lacks selenium, and by working with nutritionists and mineral companies, we've developed mineral blends to maximize efficiency."

"The thick haircoat adds challenges such as deworming. The hair is so thick, the traditional pour on treatments do not work as it cannot penetrate the hide; injectable treatments are sometimes not viable due to handling constraints of such a massive animal. By working with nutritionists and veterinarians we have found that adding a dewormer to the feed pellets helps establish a more effective and non-invasive treatment plan. We have seen that using this type of treatment does not kill the dung beetle population, and in turn the whole ecosystem benefits."

When looking at simply the massive size of the bison, it is surprising to learn that they are generally a low input, forage efficient animal.

"Calving trouble is rare," says Robert. "Out of 400, I may lose one per year due to a birthing difficulty. Bison have survived thousands of years travelling over the great northern plains surviving droughts, cold and marginal feed sources. They have evolved under a low input system with little or no help. It is a survival of the fittest mentality that has enabled them to adapt and thrive."

"We try and mimic this behavior through frequent rotational grazing, leaving behind parasites in the manure and not grazing pastures down to the roots. Bison prefers different plants at different times of the year. For example, lush flowering alfalfa is too rich for them, and they will leave it until it's more mature to graze. They are selective grazers that require high fiber, so the addition of straw and long-stemmed grasses are utilized to improve rumen health. There is also no risk of bloat due to the fact they are selectively grazing out

on pasture."

Market and consumer demand

"The major market continues to be the United States, but we are seeing a growth in Canada partly due to rising beef prices," says Robert. "Consumers are starting to look for an alternative and seeing this in domestic bison."

"It is a more cost friendly option with a favorable amino acid profile, high in iron, higher in protein with an excellent flavor."

"Consumers are increasingly prioritizing transparency and accountability in the food they purchase. They want to know exactly where their food comes from—how it was fed and the practices used to bring it from farm to table. That is why we have worked with IMI Global to create a bison verified natural program. We were the first source-verified audited farm in North America under this program. The focus is on a high standard of ethical care, environmental stewardship and ensuring supply chain traceability."

Robert actively promotes the bison industry through his role as Vice-President of the Canadian Bison Association. He is also the Chair of the Strategic Advisory Board at the University of Saskatchewan Livestock and Forage Centre of Excellence. Through his advocacy, Robert continues to support responsible practices and advances the growth of a resilient, forward-thinking industry.

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Second farm, distant location: Can it be done?

Brian and Louise knew from an early age that their children, Isaac and Emma, aspired to be the seventh generation of their family to farm. They also knew the existing operation was not large enough to support three families if both children chose to farm full time. They started thinking about this when the kids were young because they felt that a transition to the next generation would start earlier than it did with their parents. With land prices at record highs, they needed a creative plan that allowed their children to farm if they chose to.

Expanding north: A strategic decision to secure the future

When an opportunity arose to purchase land two hours north at half the price of local land, they discussed it as a family and decided to proceed. With guidance from their banker, accountant and lawyer, they set up a second corporation to hold the new land and make dividing the farm business between their children easier. In hindsight, this also proved helpful in allowing them to better benchmark the success of each operation, which was a huge benefit in decision-making.

Initially, the new land was rented out when the children were teenagers. It wasn't feasible to move equipment to both locations for a small acreage. The logistics of getting labour in two places at once were too much. Over time, they acquired more land at the second location. When Isaac and Emma began driving, it became feasible for the family's time and energy to be split between the operations.



The children were able to expand the new farm more rapidly than their home operation and eventually grew it to a comparable size. At that point, it made sense financially and logistically to start farming it themselves.

Capitalizing on differences

The differences in growing seasons between the locations allowed planting to be spread over a more extended period. By choosing seed varieties with appropriate maturities, they could effectively spread harvest timing across locations. Most years, they were able to finish seasonal tasks for each crop at the home operation before moving to the new one.

While land was less expensive in the new location, equipment was not. Moving all their equipment between the operations

would be time-consuming, stressful and costly. However, having two full equipment fleets was also expensive and tied up a lot of capital. In the end, they settled on having a complete set of planting and tillage equipment at both locations. Their grain trucks moved between locations, and a custom operator sprayed at the north location.

Balancing logistics

In the early years, Brian spent a lot of time at the new operation, setting it up to his satisfaction, clearing and tilling and working on the buildings and equipment. He built strong relationships with many neighbours and suppliers in the area. It took trial and error and advice from local farmers to learn the different agronomy realities. Initially, there was some resistance and curiosity from the

locals, but the family worked hard to overcome that.

Growing into roles

Having two locations allowed Isaac and Emma to grow into their respective roles and responsibilities. After college, Emma returned to the farm full time, while Isaac already worked off the farm part time.

It evolved to the point where Brian and Emma spent a lot of time at the new farm learning the logistics and agronomy details together. Eventually, Emma took ownership of a lot of the decisions there. This arrangement also allowed Isaac to flourish. With Dad less present, he took a more active role in the management at the home farm.

Louise managed the financial and administrative tasks for both locations and corporations. She

was careful to ensure that the two operations were kept as separate as possible. Crops were marketed to different locations and expenses were paid by the appropriate entity. Both locations had their own accounts for government programs and crop insurance. While the bank required some guarantees from the original operation to fund the initial acquisitions, they were able to keep all borrowing tied to each location. Having two corporations was critical to maintaining this segregation.

Challenges pay off, opportunities realized

Expanding through a second location wasn't easy. Brian and Emma spent a lot of time and money driving between the operations. Family and social functions were often missed because it wasn't always possible to come home for just a few hours. Planning and time management were crucial.

However, expanding further north has provided a financial opportunity that wouldn't have been possible otherwise. There were logistical, operational, financial and social challenges, but today, the new operation is generating as much cash flow per acre as the home operation.

The original objective was to create an opportunity for both children to farm. More than 10 years since they started the plan, Brian and Louise are confident they've succeeded. They now have an option for one family to live at the second location or continue operating it as they are now. A third option is to sell it and capitalize on the growth to reinvest at home.

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Sask company turns flax straw into solid business

BY RYAN KIEDROWSKI
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Flax straw used to be viewed as an unwanted waste product by producers with seemingly only two possible outcomes—burn it or let it sit in the field. One company is seeing not only dollar signs in every stalk, but possibilities.

The once wasted flax straw has become the latest environmental darling due to its flexible and valuable applications. Biomass fuel, building materials, animal bedding, fibre, mulch, feed, and bioplastics are a few of the many end-product uses of flax straw, but there's one catch: somebody needs to process the raw material.

That's where Saskatchewan-born Prairie Clean Energy steps in, forming a five-year overnight success story. Launched in the midst of the Covid fervor, PCE founder Trevor Thomas devised a way to make good use of the flax straw he watched being burned all around him. Now five years hence, the company headquartered in Regina is renovating a building in Weyburn to become the first processing facility of its kind in the world.

"We chose it because it was an existing building and we could quickly get rolling there," said PCE President and CEO Mark Cooper. "Renovations are underway, which is good, and should conclude by the end of July, I would think at the latest. Then equipment will be installed in July and August, we'll be in some form of production in August, and fully in production mode, I think, by the end of September."

PCE gained approval from Weyburn City Council back in February for a discretionary use development permit at 54 Queen Street, which was formerly the NorAmera Bioenergy ethanol plant. Zoned Medium Industrial, the discretionary use does allow for grain storage, milling, cleaning, and/or drying.

"It really is going to work out well for us," Cooper said, adding that everything seemed to happen at the right time for the Weyburn facility. "We're probably about a month behind the original schedule, but a month is not too bad."

So why Weyburn?

"There's two main reasons," he said. "First of all, it had a building ready to go that could meet our needs, and we could lease it at a fair price. The second factor is it's a good location from a flax straw availability perspective. Some of the world's best flax is growing right around there, and we've got good relationships with the farmers in the region, so it's conveniently located close to the supply which is an important factor."

One thing the PCE crew wasn't expecting was how willing the city was to work with them, which was a pleasant surprise.

"It has made a big difference since," Cooper said. "It is a wonderful and welcoming community. Everybody from the mayor on down has been active in welcoming us, meeting with us, and seeing what they can do to help support what we're trying to do. All of these things have been just a sign that we've made the right choice and that it's the kind of place that really fits with who we are as a company."

Another interesting fact is that a rail line leads right into the building as well.

"That's an additional piece," Cooper said. "We would need to do some work to get it up and running. We don't have any plans to do that in the short term, but it does allow for longer term expansion and shipping, which is great."

Producers optimistic

PCE has been actively buying flax straw for the past three years, and Cooper says he's heard a mix of enthusiasm and healthy skepticism from producers.

"Enthusiasm from the perspective of the fact that anybody who grows flax knows that the straw is a real nuisance and a problem," he said. "They've been looking for solutions forever, and they are really welcoming to a solution that will see them make some money from dealing with something that otherwise costs them money and time."

As from the other half of the initial reaction, some folks are still a bit cautious of what happens next.

"Skepticism from the perspective of the fact that lots of people have tried different things at different times," Cooper explained. "So they are cautious about committing to anything until they know that it's real. Now, despite that, we've had over 60,000 acres of flax secured under long-term right of first refusal agreements with farmers and we've got a great database of something like 400 or 500 producers who have flax in their rotations. We're the only registered buyer of flax straw in Saskatchewan or in Manitoba. So we've built the relationships that we need to do that, and they've been supportive, but they also have a healthy degree of, 'okay, show us. Don't just talk to us about it, show us.' For three years, we bought flax straw, we've put it to use, and this year we're gonna buy more. Now, they'll have a facility that they could come and visit, so we think that this is a launching pad for the next phase of growth of our business and the next phase of relationship-building with our farmers."

"It's on up from here," he continued. "This will be one facility of what eventually will be many, and we'll be able to take this model and roll it out across the prairies."

A common summer sight across the province is a field of bright, yellow canola right next to pale blue flax pet-



Once thought of as a waste product, flax straw is now a hot item for one Saskatchewan business.



Processed flax pellets have multiple uses.

als—something that Cooper is confident will be more common as the processing facility kicks into high gear.

"It's a good idea to have flax in the rotation, and I believe—and I think most people in the flax world believe—that with a steady, reliable source for the straw, we will see more flax growing, not less," Cooper said. "We don't need that to happen in order for our business to be successful, but we believe it will happen and we're going to be focused on helping to see more flax being grown."

Grateful for start-up boosts

Over the past five years, PCE has been the fortunate recipient of certain funding dollars that helped launch the home-grown business. Among them was a \$1.1 million Mining Innovation Commercialization Accelerator in 2023. Of the 24 projects that received MICA funding, PCE was the only recipient from Saskatchewan.

"It was monumental," Cooper said when asked how the MICA funding helped the company. "Not just in terms of the credibility that comes from that, and from the opportunities to work with mining companies and other things, but also because they were prepared to help advance funds to us to allow us to start to purchase equipment. Without MICA's grant, I don't know that we would have gotten to this point."

Tapping into timely provincial government incentives also helped PCE grow, especially through the Saskatchewan Technology Startup Incentive, which offered eligible companies a 45 per cent tax incentive with minimum \$15,000 investment.

"MICA and the Government of Saskatchewan have both been instrumental in allowing us to get to this stage, and we're forever grateful for that kind of support," Cooper said, expanding on how that support secures local companies within provincial borders. "You got to go

where the flax straw is in our business. So you're going to be here in Saskatchewan, but a business built here and headquartered here, right? And not some company from the States or from Europe coming in and doing this, a Saskatchewan-built company, built from scratch here by Saskatchewan people keeping that here and making sure that the benefits from what we can do stay in Saskatchewan. That's a huge thing, and that's been made possible by the supports of the government for sure."

Even the constantly changing U.S. tariff situation hasn't seemed to affect the flax processing markets—both locally and beyond provincial borders.

"We are in a good place for a couple of reasons," Cooper explained. "First of all, we have customers in Europe, and a lot of our product development focus and sales development focus is based in Canada. It's good timing, because we can talk about 'buy Canadian' and 'buy local' and all those kinds of things. There's a strong appetite in the market for that, so it fits really well with who we are and what we're trying to do."

In fact, the tariffs have actually helped PCE in some aspects.

"We do sell horse bedding into the U.S. and there are tariffs on that today," Cooper said. "I mean, who knows if there will be tomorrow, but there are today. That has added to the price for our customers. So far, it seems like they're okay with navigating through that in the short term, but on the flip side, it's helped us out a little bit because of the volatility in the U.S. dollar. Some of the stuff we're buying has become cheaper, so you try to navigate through them as best as you can. So far, we've come out and balanced on the positive side of all that."

Circling back to the importance of location, the proximity to the American border was another pro to choosing Weyburn as a processing facility.

"We looked in that Weyburn/Estevan corridor partly for that reason, because initially all of our product will be leaving the facility via truck, and a portion of it will be going to the States," Cooper said. "Being an hour closer to the border than we were in Regina doesn't hurt."

Dan Seminuk was named Weyburn facility manager, with a decent number of jobs expected to result from the new business. Wages alone are anticipated to bring more than \$3 million per year to the local economy.

"We anticipate between 30 and 40 full time jobs from the facility when it's running 24/7 and that will probably take us about a year to get to that level," Cooper said. "In addition to that, there will be secondary opportunities for people who want to do custom baling or trucking, so there will be some contracting jobs. Even just the revenue that farmers will see from that will be helpful, too. All of those pieces really fit with our value of investing in the communities in which we worked, and that's what we want to do."



The future site of Prairie Clean Energy's Weyburn facility.



Chris Hendrickson photos

Above left: Dr. Arthur Nery Finatto (DVM) and his research team have discovered porcine-defensin 5, a novel molecule that may help to reduce the industry's reliance on antibiotics. Above right: As director of the CDC, Dr. Curtis Pozniak (PhD) leads the variety development program. By integrating basic research into crop breeding, the CDC translates scientific discoveries into new high yielding varieties that can be used by growers.

USask researchers discover genes that protect wheat from disease

By ERIN MATTHEWS, RESEARCH PROFILE AND IMPACT

Bacteria, viruses and fungi are masters at evolving new strategies to infiltrate plants and cause disease that harm crops. To get ahead of these pathogens, University of Saskatchewan (USask) researchers like Dr. Valentyna Klymiuk (PhD) and Dr. Curtis Pozniak (PhD) are studying wild wheat varieties that carry resistance to these harmful pathogens. This led them to discover something they've never encountered before — a unique pair of genes that work together to protect against disease.

To support its variety development program, USask's Crop Development Centre (CDC) has been diving back into the gene pool of wheat and screening its wild relatives for useful traits that can be effectively deployed in new wheat cultivars. Wild wheat has not been domesticated, so it cannot be used directly in breeding, but it contains useful diversity to respond to environmental threats. This makes it ideal for learning new methods of crop resistance.

Research at the CDC focuses on improving crop varieties. By integrating basic research into crop breeding, the CDC translates scientific discoveries into new high yielding varieties that can be used by growers.

"Part of our research is keeping one step ahead of pathogens by identifying new resistance genes which ideally could be stacked, like Lego blocks, so the pathogen can't easily overcome the resistance," said Klymiuk.

Looking deeper into a wild strain of wheat, Klymiuk and Pozniak found that it demonstrated significant resistance to stripe rust, a type of fungal infection that is one of the top five diseases of concern for producers. Klymiuk and Pozniak soon realized that the resistance they identified in this wild strain was behaving differently than expected. Their findings were recently published in Nature Genetics.

"Once we started assessing the resistance, we could see that it was different to others that we have studied before. The resistance was acting in an atypical way, which signalled a very different plant response," said Pozniak, professor and director of the CDC at USask. "We were quite intrigued about what was really going on."

Klymiuk, a research officer in Pozniak's program, said that typically one gene is responsible for the expression of a stripe rust, but in the case of this wild wheat, they determined that two genes working together as a pair were required for full resistance. One gene is responsible for sensing the invading pathogen while the other activates the immune response of the plant to stop the pathogen in its tracks.

To confirm which genes were responsible for resistance, Klymiuk's experiments turned each of the genes "off" like flipping the breaker to see which room of the house goes dark. When the gene is switched "off" the plant can no longer protect itself and becomes susceptible to the pathogen. However, this unique gene pair proved to be a bit of an anomaly, which caused a hiccup in the researcher's results.

"Initially, we thought only a single gene was responsible. Most of our results made sense but there were a few plants that didn't give us the expected results. This was a head scratcher, so we went back to rethink our experiments and to test if two genes were actually involved. Once we retested, the results became clear," said Klymiuk.

The team dug deeper and found that the two outlier genes interact at a protein level, physically coming together to initiate the resistance response.

"A lot of the time when things don't line up the temptation is to move forward, but we really dug into the weeds to figure out what was going on and that's when we realized that the genes were communicating and working together and that's what's really new," said Pozniak. "If we had given up after the first set of experiments, we never would have concluded that two genes coming together was needed for resistance. It's a great science story."

Identifying complex gene interactions that offer greater resistance, like the ones published in this most recent paper, are crucial in the continued battle against crop disease. Because of the genes' odd behaviour, Klymiuk developed a DNA test to ensure the pair of genes are present in new plants. With this DNA test, these genes can be used routinely in the breeding program.

These discoveries allow the CDC to add robust tools

to their genetic tool kit, helping to produce stronger and more resilient varieties of wheat for many years to come.

"The interconnectivity of research and breeding lets us keep the eye on the prize and develop the most productive varieties for farmers. This project also really helps us understand and appreciate the complexity of plant biology. Plants really need to adapt, and they do it in cool and interesting ways," said Pozniak.

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Nitrogen's role in food systems

Envision change as a ripple effect, reverberating outwards to affect various interconnected domains. The impact can be substantial, especially if the starting point is a central element like nitrogen, where a shift in practices can lead to benefits across multiple areas, suggests University of Saskatchewan researcher Kate Congreves.

BY GLOBE AND MAIL FUTURE
OF FOOD REPORT

"It's not a linear spectrum where we have to try balance environmental gains against economic benefits," she says. "It's more like a synthesis, where working towards a better understanding can help advance a number of objectives, including food security, environmental and economic goals, health and nutrition as well as a thriving society. Nitrogen intersects all of these spheres in visible and invisible ways."

Nitrogen—a "key component of DNA, proteins and amino acids" is vital for all living things, and this has earned it a special role in food systems," says Dr. Congreves, an associate professor in the Department of Plant Sciences and the Jarislowsky and BMO Chair in Regenerative Agriculture in the University of Saskatchewan's College of Agriculture and Bioresources. "An interesting juxtaposition about nitrogen is that it is simultaneously an essential resource for agriculture and an environmental threat."

While nitrogen fertilizer is crucial for supporting crop production, its application starts "a cascade of transformations where some of that nitrogen can be lost to the environment, for example, when it is emitted as nitrous oxide, a potent greenhouse gas," she says.

As a result, nitrogen fertilizer applications represent the largest source of anthropogenic emissions. "Lowering these emissions through improved fertilizer use is an important strategy for reducing the carbon footprint of the overall supply chain and for



Matt Braden photo

Field measurements are part of the research efforts of Kate Congreves, an associate professor in the Department of Plant Sciences at the University of Saskatchewan, who aims to enhance outcomes for farmers and mitigate fertilizer-related greenhouse gas emissions.

meeting fertilizer-related emission targets set by the government," Dr. Congreves proposes.

"The pathway to sustainability relies on a better understanding of the nitrogen dynamics and the

various practices designed to reduce losses."

A collaborative approach

Interest in sustainable agriculture is growing, whether that's "under the banners of land stewardship, soil health, regenerative agriculture, agroecology, nature-based solutions or climate-smart agriculture," says Dr. Congreves. "These terms are increasingly common in our collective lexicon—and these concepts are being embraced not just by farmers but also the general public."

The resulting boost in awareness can—together with evidence-based recommendations and tools and technologies—contribute to better outcomes for farmers and ecosystems, she says. "However, due to the complexity of these interconnected areas and their unique challenges, we need cross-disciplinary collaboration. We need to understand all the costs and impacts as well as consider the broader perspectives."

Just as nitrogen is positioned at the core of several key challenges, so is the University of Saskatchewan—with its location "in the heartland of Canada's major crop producing region, which makes it a good place to explore challenges and opportunities in the Canadian food system," Dr. Congreves says. "One of USask's signature areas is agriculture but there is also a strong focus on health and wellness and sustainability, areas that come together under One Health."

Field measurements are part of the research efforts of Kate Congreves, an associate professor in the Department of Plant Sciences at the University of Saskatchewan, who aims to enhance outcomes for farmers and mitigate fertilizer-related greenhouse gas emissions.

Continued on page C22

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Governments invest \$3.4 million for Usask's integrated Genomics for Sustainable Animal Agriculture and Environmental Stewardship Project

Canada's Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Heath MacDonald and Saskatchewan Agriculture Minister Daryl Harrison have announced \$3.4 million over four years to support the development of two new facilities at the University of Saskatchewan (USask).

This includes the Omics Resource Centre at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCV) and Beef Reprotech facilities at the Livestock and Forage Centre of Excellence (LFCE).

The investment will be delivered through the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (Sustainable CAP) as part of the governments' commitment to support partnerships with strategic agricultural research organizations.

The new initiative, called IntegrOmics (Integrated Genomics for Sustainable Animal Agriculture and Environmental Stewardship), will advance beef genetics by matching genomic markers with desirable traits and evaluate reproductive efficiencies. This integrated approach will enable producers to make more precise and data-driven breeding decisions that improve livestock productivity in Saskatchewan.

"Innovation—like what we are seeing through genomics research—is vital to the continued success of Canada's agriculture sector," MacDonald said. "This shared investment with Saskatchewan will



Christina Weese photo

Cattle at the Livestock and Forage Centre of Excellence's Beef Cattle Research and Teaching Unit

support the expanded efforts of these facilities and ensure a vibrant future for Saskatchewan's livestock sector."

"Saskatchewan producers already bring generations of expertise and innovation to our livestock sector, and this investment builds on that legacy—helping ensure Saskatchewan's ranchers remain global leaders at what they

do best," Harrison said. "The work of USask is recognized globally, and we are proud to support this initiative and the livestock sector it serves."

The IntegrOmics project will address issues of beef cattle production and reproductive efficiency, animal health and the environment through the adoption of genomic tools. Saskatchewan producers will

benefit from having access to these tools to stay competitive in the domestic and international market.

"Genomic research is advancing rapidly, and USask is leading the way in this evolving field," University of Saskatchewan Research Vice-President Baljit Singh said. "Our researchers are applying cutting-edge methods to advance our understanding of beef ge-

netics, which couldn't be possible without the support of this joint funding from the provincial and federal governments. We thank them for their continued support as we aspire to be the university the world needs."

USask, the WCV and the LFCE are world-class research, teaching and knowledge-transfer facilities that connect innova-

tion across the livestock production chain. USask's work in feedlot and cow-calf management, veterinary science and forage systems plays a vital role in driving improvements in productivity and sustainability in the sector.

This investment builds on the long-standing support for agricultural research by the governments of Canada and Saskatchewan. Through shared priorities under Sustainable CAP, over the past five years nearly \$170 million has been committed in Saskatchewan toward research to improve productivity, expand markets and ensure our agri-food products remain globally competitive.

With this announcement, USask's LFCE and the WCV continue to strengthen Saskatchewan's reputation as a global leader in high-quality, safe and sustainable food production.

Sustainable CAP is a five-year, \$3.5 billion investment by federal, provincial and territorial governments to strengthen competitiveness, innovation and resiliency of Canada's agriculture, agri-food and agri-based products sector. This includes \$1 billion in federal programs and activities and a \$2.5 billion commitment that is cost-shared 60 per cent federally and 40 per cent provincially/territorially for programs that are designed and delivered by provinces and territories.

Enhanced FCC Transition Loan terms aim to better support ag and food entrepreneurs



Agriculture and agri-food business owners transferring farm or business assets to new owners now have a new option to consider, given recent changes to Farm Credit Canada's (FCC) Transition Loan. The loan's new terms come at a very important time. Canada's agriculture and food system is sitting on more than \$50 billion in farm assets expected to be transferred in the next 10 years.

"Transferring the family farm or business can be a stressful thing to manage, but the support of the FCC Transition Loan can help address the financial barriers folks experience," said The Honourable Heath MacDonald, federal minister of agriculture and agri-food. "It also creates opportunities for people looking to start or expand their operations, making it a real investment in the future of our agricultural sector."

The enhanced FCC Transition Loan is specifically designed to facilitate the transfer of assets, making it easier for both buyers and sellers. The new terms allow disbursements

to the seller over a period that extends to 10 years. The loan is available for farms, agri-business or food businesses going through changes in ownership, be it within or outside the family.

"One of the most consistent challenges faced by Canadian producers is transitioning their operations to either family or an outside qualified buyer. It is complex, nuanced, and emotional," said Justine Hendricks, FCC president and CEO. "For our part, we've been working hard to build a loan product that makes transition and sale easier for both buyers and sellers. Whether the buyers are new to the sector or not, this product is focused on delivering peace of mind and flexibility to Canadian agriculture and agri-food producers. It's designed specifically with affordability and success in mind."

Benefits for the seller:

- Guaranteed full payment of the sale proceeds by FCC
- Customized payment schedule for up to

10 years, and

- Opportunity to support a next generation entrepreneur

Benefits for the buyer:

- No need for upfront capital for a down payment
- Flexibility to choose between improving cash flow or building equity (potential to reduce interest expense and pay off loan sooner), and
- FCC's AgExpert software is included

"The FCC Transition Loan has been a

game changer for our farm," said Aaron and Amber Hoffus, grain, oilseed and cow-calf producers in Bjorkdale, Sask. "It has helped us to secure land and equipment, with flexible terms and saving interest helped us to continue growing. We've had the opportunity to grow and build our family farm for our kids, and hopefully generations to come, and would recommend the FCC Transition Loan to anyone looking to do the same. The enhancements to this particular FCC loan come at a critical time and can help other entrepreneurs like us better manage the realities that come with the transfer of assets."

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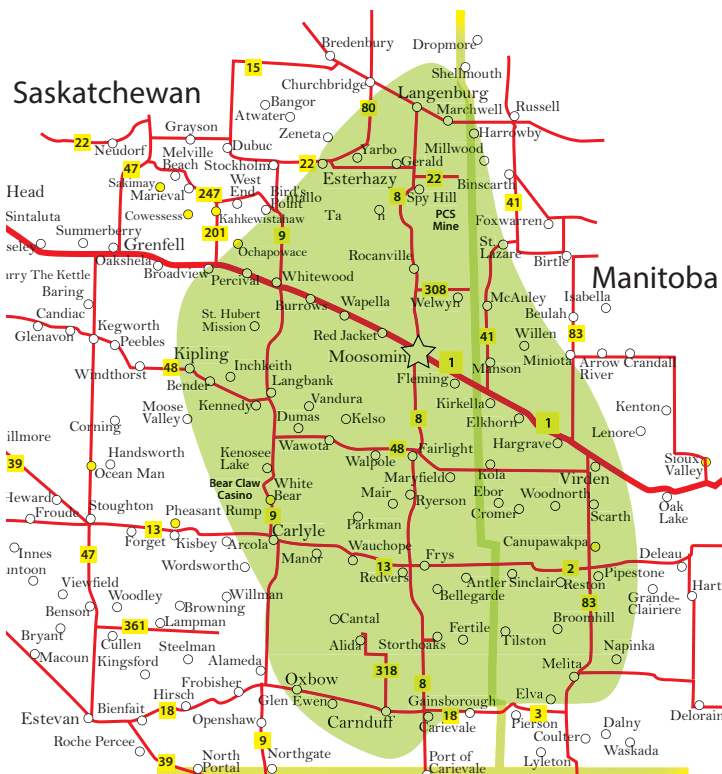
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Canada sees rising interest in controlled environment agriculture

As Canada continues to rely heavily on imported fruits and vegetables, especially during its long winters, different types of controlled environment agriculture (CEA) are gaining momentum to help overcome this problem. The goal is to support domestic production and reduce reliance on foreign supply. As trade dynamics evolve and consumers become more conscious of Canadian grown food, understanding the potential and limitations of CEA has never been timelier.

In this report, we build on previous work by exploring the strengths and opportunities CEA offers Canadian agriculture, while also highlighting weaknesses and threats it must overcome. While greenhouse-grown crops are the most recognized form of CEA, the category also includes other sectors like insect farming, aquaculture, lab-grown meat, and crops grown in vertical or containerized systems. We focus on fruits and vegetables grown in greenhouses, by far the largest and most established segment of CEA in Canada. However, many of the insights and trends discussed here are also relevant to other emerging CEA methods like vertical and container farming.

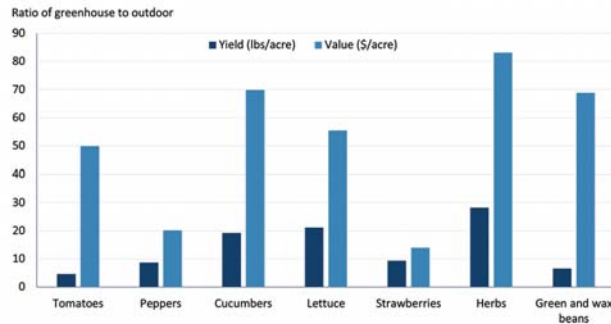


Figure 1: Higher yields and farm gate value per acre for greenhouses compared to outdoor production

Strength: Yields outpace outdoor grown equivalents

By extending the growing season and stacking crops vertically, greenhouse operations unlock higher yields than traditional outdoor farms growing the same fruits and vegetables. The advantage is striking, ranging from five times more pounds per acre for tomatoes to an impressive 30 times more for herbs (Figure 1). Part of this advantage is a result of the ability for greenhouses in Canada to operate for nine months of the year on average, with multiple harvests. Some vertical and container farms push this further with year-round production.

The space and time advantage in greenhouse production also translates into a higher farm gate value per acre. Again, herbs dominate this category followed by cucumbers (Figure 1). Even field-grown vegetables often get their start in these controlled environments, highlighting the strength greenhouses have in overcoming Canada's typically short outdoor growing season.

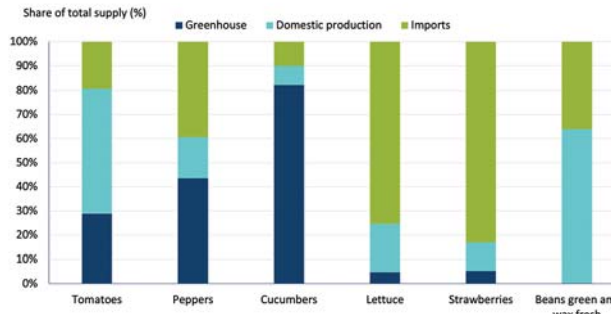


Figure 2: Supply of select Canadian fruits and vegetables by origin

Weakness: Limited number of crops suitable for production indoors

Despite their strength in yields, greenhouse production still meets only a fraction of national demand for many crops. Most fruits and vegetables on Canadian tables still come from outdoor farms or are imported. This is because many crops simply aren't suited to controlled indoor environments and swapping them between indoor and outdoor systems isn't as simple as it sounds.

In fact, only a few greenhouse-grown crops (e.g., tomatoes, cucumbers, and peppers) make a large contribution to the national supply. Others, like strawberries, lettuce, and green beans, contribute only a small portion (Figure 2). Beyond these few, most fruits and vegetables that can be grown in Canada are still cultivated outdoors due to specific environmental needs that are difficult and costly to replicate indoors. For example, potatoes require deep, loose soil while cranberries need large amounts of water, conditions that challenge even the most advanced indoor systems.

While innovation in CEA is advancing rapidly, expanding its reach to reduce Canada's reliance on imports across a broader range of crops will require time, investment, and continued research. For now, the limited number of crops that thrive in greenhouses remains a key weakness of this otherwise promising production method.

Opportunity: Protection and resiliency in trade

Exports of greenhouse-grown peppers, cucumbers, and tomatoes now meet or exceed imports. Canada is also self-sufficient in mushrooms, thanks to the ability to produce indoors year-round in a controlled environment. Between 2013 and 2023, Canada went from being a net importer of peppers and tomatoes to a net exporter, while strengthening the cucumber and mushroom trade balance (Figure 3).

The sector has also introduced new products and increased operations in more provinces outside of Ontario. For example, strawberry production in greenhouses was negligible before 2020 but reached 16.5 million pounds by 2024. In addition, there are 70 more operations and 19% more greenhouse area since 2013 outside of Canada's largest

concentration of greenhouses, Ontario.

There are opportunities for further expansion. For crops like lettuce, herbs, and strawberries, Canada remains a net importer despite increasing greenhouse production in recent years. Boosting output from these operations presents a clear opportunity to meet domestic demand, reduce reliance on foreign supply, and help stabilize prices for consumers.

To realize this opportunity, Canada must invest in practices to boost productivity through labour and resource saving technologies, research and development for new crops, and explore ways to bring CEA to more regions.

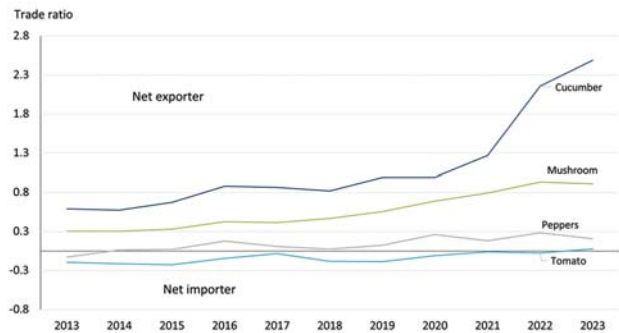


Figure 3: Canada becoming more self-sufficient in some fresh fruits and vegetables over time

Threat: Availability of inputs and markets pressure longevity

Setting up controlled environment farms requires substantial up front capital for land, buildings, climate control systems, LED lighting, and automation. These high startup costs sometimes mean preparing for longer payback periods and operating on a large enough scale to manage fixed costs while remaining price competitive against imported or outdoor grown produce.

In addition, CEA comes with steep operating costs and labour requirements related to the management of heat, moisture, and lighting based on the crop type and location of the facility. Operating expenses for greenhouses are rising, up 6.0% on average annually over the last decade. However, sales did increase slightly more at 6.4% over the same period, keeping margins a little above breakeven for the sector.

While rising costs are a challenge, the bigger threat is the availability of inputs. The under-60 workforce in greenhouse production has shrunk by an average of 8% annually over the past five years, and for every worker nearing retirement, there are only 4.2 younger replacements (Figure 4). At the same time, CEA businesses must compete with other high-tech sectors for limited municipal infrastructure like energy, water, and waste services, making expansion or new builds even more challenging or completely out of reach.

While technology may ease some of these pressures by helping to boost productivity, the sector's ability to scale up production hinges on solving both the cost and capacity threat.

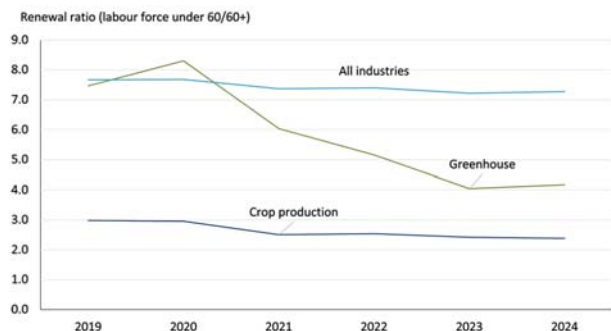


Figure 4: Ratio of younger workers to older workers in greenhouses falling quickly

Bottom Line

CEA offers a promising path to complement outdoor farming, by extending the growing season and delivering high yields. With innovation helping boost productivity and enabling the viability of a broader range of crops and growing regions, the sector is gaining momentum. However, CEA still represents a small share of Canada's total fresh produce supply and remains limited in the variety of crops it can grow.

Investment and the adoption of technology will be crucial to overcoming high operational costs, address labour and infrastructure constraints, and allow the sector to reach its full potential. In the meantime, the supply of most fruits and vegetables in Canada will continue to come from imports and outdoor production.

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Cultivate financial literacy, boost farm resilience



BY MATT MCINTOSH

Financial planning professionals spend years acquiring the experience and skills to do their jobs effectively. This is a level of training most people don't have — but that doesn't mean financial literacy is unattainable.

For Lance Stockbrugger, Saskatchewan farmer and veteran chartered accountant, taking steps to better understand what the numbers are telling you is an important means of improving the profitability and stability of your farm business.

It will also equip you with essential tools to navigate your business effectively. Understanding financial management will empower you to speak the language of your advisors, ensuring clearer communication and more productive consultations.

It also helps you to calculate costs accurately, negotiate the best deals and make informed decisions to protect your bottom line. By improving your financial capability, operators can foster stronger, more strategic conversations with stakeholders and advisors, ultimately leading to smart management and long-term success.

Learning opportunities

An ideal time to develop better financial knowledge is in school, Stockbrugger says. Not everyone can or wants to attend post-secondary education for finance and business, but taking courses is an option. Courses, seminars and opportunities that actively connect you to mentors and advisors can drive learning.

"You can also get involved in organizations. It helps you see how other businesses run and how they're financially reporting and managing things," Stockbrugger says. Joining a municipal council or the board of directors of a local grain terminal — the latter being something Stockbrugger himself has done — are two examples of such opportunities.

Stockbrugger notes that the sheer number and variety of financial courses and tools available can make it challenging to find one suited to your knowledge level.

FCC's Manage Your Farm Finances program is an example of an effective (and free) course series. The three-part series includes informational sessions with financial experts, case studies, exercises and other resources designed to help people with varying degrees of financial literacy actively learn analytical techniques relevant to their farm operation. Stockbrugger — who helped develop the course — says the idea was to ensure as few barriers to entry and as much flexibility as possible.

"I like the course because it gets down to the basics," he says. "You can go through it at your own pace. If you find an exercise too simplistic, you can skip it. Or if it's hard, keep doing it until you get the right answers."

Leverage advisor teams

Maintaining relationships with trusted financial and legal advisors is essential, says Stockbrugger, who stresses prioritizing expertise over a multitude of opinions. Clients, however, shouldn't expect advisors to know it all.

"No one knows everything," Stockbrugger says. He recommends having multiple advisors with diverse expertise, though usually one or two will "rise to the top," offering key support and insights for different business scenarios.

"Take that one individual you really trust and make them that key go-to person. Then, utilize their network. They work with different people and their own team, who they call on to help."

Stockbrugger emphasizes that effective financial advising requires genuinely engaged clients who understand their business. Without this, meetings are less productive and both sides may feel unsatisfied. Clients who invest in financial literacy generally see better returns, are equipped to make more informed business decisions and often have lower advisory costs.

Use smart tax strategies

Tax and business planning are linked but not the same, yet Stockbrugger often sees farm owners mistakenly treat them as such, sometimes taking undue risks or missing opportunities in an effort to not pay as much tax.

Deferring grain cheques — not requesting payment from the company that bought your grain — to avoid tax is an example. In such cases, the commodity provider essentially provides an unsecured line of credit to the grain purchaser. If that purchasing company collapses, though, the money owed to you can disappear.

Another common strategy is to incorporate a farm to capitalize on corporate tax rates and increase the amount of available net income. While incorporation has many benefits, says Stockbrugger, understand that personal income, among other tax realities, still applies.

"So many people got into corporations and didn't understand what that meant. One main misconception is that after a farm is incorporated, they sometimes feel no need to pay further personal taxes. This can cause a lot more tax problems in the future when it comes time to retire or transition the farm," Stockbrugger says.

Honest communication is key

Regardless of your level of financial literacy, Stockbrugger reiterates the importance of honest communication — with both advisors and yourself.

"Accountants like to say numbers don't lie. They tell the true story of financial efficiency and profitability. Embrace the numbers and ensure you use them to your fullest ability."

Investing in your financial literacy is one of the most impactful steps you can take to ensure your farm business's profitability and resilience. Free resources like FCC's Manage Your Farm Finances program or paid courses tailored to your needs can provide invaluable insights in bite-sized pieces.

Whether you're just starting or looking to sharpen your skills, gaining knowledge bit by bit can help you to navigate complex decisions and build a stable, sustainable operation.



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Nitrogen's role in food systems

Continued from Page C17

One Health, a signature area of research at USask, explores solutions at the animal-human-environment interface. An understanding that human, animal and environmental health are interconnected—and that one cannot progress at the cost of others—has inspired broad interdisciplinary collaborations, which benefit from advanced research infrastructure and partnerships, says USask President Peter Stoicheff.

"For example, we have the Global Institute for Water Security and the Global Institute for Food Security," he says. "We also have Canada's only synchrotron facility, the Canadian Light Source, and the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization – facilities that act as a talent magnet for people from around the world."

Creating a research hub in the Canadian Prairies has led to a culture where experts from different fields work collaboratively with one another as well as "rub shoulders with international researchers who use our cutting-edge research infrastructure," Dr. Stoicheff explains. "This informs our focus on being the university the world needs—and inspires efforts to come up with solutions for a better future."

Dr. Congreves and her team collaborate with the Global Nitrogen Innovation Center for Clean Energy and the Environment (NICCEE) as well as the Canadian Nitrous Oxide Network (CANN2ONET), organizations that aim to gather data and advance best practices related to nitrogen use and production.

"Better information, including from field measurements, can enhance our predictive capabilities," says Dr. Congreves, "which, in turn, can help us make informed recommendations."

A better nitrogen system

Co-ordinated efforts to advance measurements, model-



USask President Peter Stoicheff

ing and recommendations can provide valuable insights, for example, for strategies for more efficient and sustainable nitrogen use, which can focus on three aspects: soil, crops and fertilizer, according to Dr. Congreves.

"Looking at soil, we found that management practices aimed at soil health, maintenance or improvement can also bring nitrogen benefits. For example, using cover crops in crop rotations is a common soil management strategy that can help to improve nitrogen use efficiency,"



Dr. Kate Congreves

she says, adding that research suggests such improvements bolster synchronicity between when crops need nitrogen and when the soil releases nitrogen in mineral form.


Field measurements are part of the research efforts of Kate Congreves, an associate professor in the Department of Plant Sciences at the University of Saskatchewan, who aims to enhance outcomes for farmers and mitigate fertilizer-related greenhouse gas emissions.



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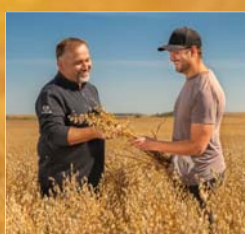
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KENNEDY MOOSE MOUNTAIN 92ND PRO RODEO

Saturday, July 19 – Sunday, July 20



SATURDAY

- 3^{pm} Parade (note the time change)
- 4^{pm} to 5^{pm} Happy Hour in Rodeo Beer Gardens
- 6^{pm} Rodeo with Bull riding under the lights
- Sheep Scramble during intermission
- The Truco Trick riders and wild ponies following rodeo performance
- 9^{pm} Saturday night - DJ Dale from Moosehead in the Beer Gardens

SUNDAY

- 9^{am} Pancake Breakfast at Kennedy Friendship Centre
- 11^{am} Cowboy Church Service at the Rodeo Grounds
- 2^{pm} Rodeo
- Sheep Scramble during intermission
- The Truco Trick riders and wild ponies following rodeo performance

Food Booth & Beer Gardens open for the weekend

**ADMISSION : Adult Day Pass- \$25.00 | Student Day Pass - \$10.00
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