



## Many crops better than expected: Farmers wrapping up 2017 harvest

BY KARA KINNA

The 2017 harvest is nearly complete in Southeast Saskatchewan and Southwest Manitoba and local farmers are reporting a harvest that was good to above average. "It's looking to be a really good year," says Derek Smart, who has crop east and north of Moosomin.

"We've still got just a little bit of canola—about 100

acres—and our soybeans and corn," he said last week.

"Everything we did grow did well. I think we grew a crop on the reserve moisture we had. If we don't get moisture next year we'll be in trouble, but we'll just be happy that we got what we did this year.

"The yields were quite good and the quality was there because we had such a nice run of heat for the cereals."

Smart says his canola and barley both yielded high.

"The canola was doing 50 bushels an acre, so you sure can't complain about that," he says.

Smart says his corn is looking good while the soybeans could have used a little more rain.

"The corn is looking good. It's nice and tall and we've had enough heat that it should mature, and that's the biggest thing is getting that kernel size uniform and getting those heat units," he says. "And soybeans could have used maybe a little more moisture when they were filling. We'll know better once we are combining."

As of last week Smart said they had only about one day of harvesting canola left and three to four days of soybeans, while the corn would be taken off later in the fall.

The story of high yields and high quality is a common one.

"It came together similar to how we thought it might," says John Van Eaton of his harvest. Van Eaton farms in the Maryfield area.

"Our canola is average or a little better. Our land is spread out a little bit and I think a couple of fields maybe missed a shower or two during the summer and I think that late July heat cost us some bushels in the canola.

"But it's slightly better than average based on all our seeded acres overall.

"For the wheat the quality is really good, the yield is very good, so we are happy there. Our malt variety barley was a very nice crop. The peas were really good.

"We have one small field of soybeans we haven't done yet. We're not experienced soybean growers but we're told that they look good."

Van Eaton said they had their soybeans and about a day and a half of harvesting wheat left last week.

"Overall we are quite pleased with the quality and the quantity," he says.

Craig Roy, who farms near Moosomin, said he only had one field of soybeans left to take off last week. Roy planted canola, winter wheat, spring wheat and soybeans.

"It was a bit better crop that I thought it was going to be with how little rain we had," he says, "for both yield and quality.

"The bright spot was spring wheat. In terms of quality and yield both were excellent.

"The canola was probably 10 bushels more than we thought was going to be there. I wouldn't quite say it was bumper but it was at least average to slightly above average. When you get anywhere from three to five inches of rain on your land that's pretty good."

Roy said the only thing that seemed to suffer a bit was soybeans, which could have used more moisture.

"I've only done one third of the soybeans. It's the first time we've grown them. I would say they are below average. They kind of like some later July or August rains and we just didn't get them. Mine personally aren't running very well."

Roy said he only had one day left to take off crop last week.

"We are pretty happy with it," he says.

*Continued on page C35*



Photo taken by Kelly Bowes at Wilton Farms in Langbank. This is one of dozens of photos submitted in the World-Spectator's 2017 harvest photo contest.

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# Automation in Agriculture

## New technology is transforming agriculture

If you were at Rocanville's Museum Day on Sept. 16, watching threshing machines and steam tractors fired up for an old time harvest, you probably marvelled at how much farming has changed in the last century.

Where automation will take farming in the next hundred years is anyone's guess.

John Deere recently spent \$305 million to buy a robotics company. John Deere has been around for almost two centuries, but it has its eyes on the future, says Deanna Kovar, a marketing director for John Deere.

Its acquisition, Blue River Technology, is a startup that makes agricultural robots capable of identifying weeds and other unwanted plants, and dosing them with high-precision sprays of herbicide, without wasting herbicide on soil or crops.

The smart sprayers operate much the same way as conventional spraying equipment, but these come equipped with computer vision, artificial intelligence and automated sprayers, with cameras that use machine-learning software to discern the difference between plants.

The technology works in conjunction with a traditional tractor, and their addition makes the farming tools more advanced, and more appealing to potential consumers.

The first tractors revolutionized agriculture with an unprecedented leap in efficiency, as one machine was able to do the job of multiple farmhands.

As technological capabilities have evolved, agricultural tools have, as well.

"People assume that farmers don't use technology," says Saskatchewan farmer Kim Keller.

"In fact, farmers are often on the forefront of using technology, and we use a lot of technology in our day-to-day operations," says Keller says, creator of an app called Farm at Hand, which was designed to keep track of everything from seeding and harvesting schedules to equipment, stock and sales (it was later sold to FarmLink Marketing Solutions).

In addition to this kind of farm management software, some farmers use drones to monitor their fields and collect data on their crops.

And now, robots can even be the farmers. The Hands Free Hectare project, out of Harper Adams University in the U.K., successfully planted, tended and harvested 1.5 acres of barley using only autonomous vehicles and drones.

According to Jonathan Gill, a technical developer and researcher on the project, the team decided, "Let's take the brains from a drone and put it in a ground rover that can actually do all of the tasks."

"An entire crop could be grown from start to finish



John Deere has acquired Blue River Technology, maker of 'smart' machines like the See & Spray, which uses artificial intelligence to identify weeds and robotic sprayers to dose them with herbicide. (Blue River Technology)

without us ever going into the field." (See the full story on the Hands Free Hectare project on the next page.)

According to Kovar, Blue River's smart system can significantly cut down the use of herbicides, pesticides or other agricultural chemicals.

"The sprayers can pass over the entire field but only put the crop protectant on the weed, reducing—by a dramatic amount—the product that has to be sprayed across the field," says Kovar.

Keller explains that traditional farming equipment, which has steadily grown in size, can be taxing on soil health and, ultimately, on crop yield. "If the ground is compacted, it becomes a lot harder for plants to grow," she said.

Machinery that doesn't require a human driver can reduce the weight and size of the equipment, thus compacting the ground less.

There are potential financial benefits, too. "I think that we're in a really exciting time in agriculture and there's a lot of change happening," says Keller. "There's a lot of investment going into agriculture, and farmers aren't quite seeing that return yet, but I do think in the coming years that that will change."

With each step forward comes new challenges. For instance, as tractors have become more advanced, they have become reliant on proprietary software. While the machines might be capable of impressive operations—like automated steering—farmers are no longer able to fix their tractors themselves.

The changes coming in agriculture will require more skills of farm workers.

"What we're trying to actually do is increase the skill level that farm workers will have, where they'll become a fleet manager overseeing the autonomous vehicles," Gill said. While the repetitive motions of crop tending can be done more effectively and with more precision by autonomous vehicles, the agronomy and all of the difficult decisions still need to be done by humans, he said.

From Keller's perspective, as the industry evolves, jobs won't disappear, they'll just change—and that could be a good thing. "Maybe it will free us up from doing very labour-intensive jobs to doing jobs in other parts of our operation," she says.

"It's sort of like the old adage: you're able to spend a little bit less time in your business and a little bit more time on your business."

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# Automation in Agriculture British university grows 'hands-free hectare'

A British university has grown a crop of barley without a person ever entering the field.

The Hands Free Hectare (HFHa), run by Britain's Harper Adams University and Precision Decisions, which aimed to be the first in the world to plant, tend and harvest a crop with only autonomous vehicles and drones, has come to an end after a successful harvest.

"The weather can be an issue when farming, and provide only small windows for work to be completed; we've experienced it ourselves with this project. Just like anywhere in the UK, we've had to adjust our spraying times and harvest times due to the rain. This is part of the reason machines have been getting so much bigger over the years; we need to be able to complete work quickly. We believe the best solution is that in the future, farmers will manage fleets of smaller, autonomous vehicles. These will be able to go out and

work in the fields, allowing the farmer to use their time more effectively and economically instead of having to drive up and down the fields.

"But it's going to take new talent entering the industry to develop the technology. We hope that this project has helped to inspire some people and shown them the range of interesting and innovative jobs that are available now in agriculture."

Martin Abell, mechatronics researcher for the industry lead, Precision Decisions, said: "This project aimed to prove that there's no technological reason why a field can't be farmed without humans working the land directly now and we've done that. We set-out to identify the opportunities for farming and to prove that it's possible to autonomously farm the land, and that's been the great success of the project."

"We achieved this on an impressively low budget compared to other projects

looking at creating autonomous farming vehicles. The whole project cost less than £200,000, funded by Precision Decisions and Innovate UK. We used machinery that was readily available for farmers to buy; open source technology; and an autopilot from a drone for the navigation system."

Jonathan added: "Despite our combine being 25 years old, it performed absolutely wonderfully."

"It's phenomenal to know that I was part of this world-first project. To know that we've actually done it and you can now look out at the field and see it's all gone. We grew it, nursed it and now we've harvested it, completely autonomously. What an achievement."

"It feels amazing to have finished," said Martin. "We've worked all year for this. At some points it didn't feel like it was ever going to happen, but we've done it."

"Our major challenge leading up to harvest was getting the combine ready. We

spent a lot of time practising; getting our headland turns right and on the day they appeared to be perfect, which was amazing to see."

"The combine drove a lot better than the tractor. We made a bit of a breakthrough with that. Unfortunately, we didn't have the time to make the same adaptations to our tractor, so even though we'd practised a rolling team, as a precaution during the actual trial, we didn't allow the tractor to get too close to the combine to avoid any accidents."

"Throughout the year we've been predicting a yield of 5 tonnes. Looking in the trailer, it looks like we're not quite there. Our agronomist predicted 4.5 tonnes and it looks like he's on the money."

The team now plan to make a Hands Free Hectare beer with the spring barley that has been harvested. They also hope to bring the project back by repeating the experiment, but with a winter crop.

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# Getting to the bottom of low protein

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 Harvest timing always bring the question "why is my wheat protein lower than my neighbors?" Debunking the coffee shop talk and getting to the bottom of low protein requires an understanding of several variables on your farm. Simplistically, low protein is the result of insufficient available Nitrogen. There must be enough Nitrogen in your system, both soil and applied fertilizer, for your targeted yield. Any extra nitrogen then has the potential to go to protein. A good rule of thumb is that one bushel of wheat needs 2.5 bus/ lb of N. So a 60 bushel yield at 13.5% per cent protein will need 150 lbs of N both from soil and applied fertilizer. Yield and protein work inversely to each other. In a productive farming operation, agronomists like myself use yield and protein as a gauge for crop use of N. For instance if you have applied sufficient N for your yield target and are experiencing lower yields and higher protein, there

were bushels left on the table. If you achieved a higher than targeted yield but low protein then more N is needed to satisfy the equation. If you have reached your targeted yield and have 13.5 per cent protein, you have often efficiently used your resources. Simplistic moves to a bit more complicated when you add the following variables to the equation. Soil N - Soil tests to 24 inches help to understand the N at depth that a plant can grow and access. Soil tests also give an indication of how much additional N is needed to be applied. Organic matter - indicates the amount of N that can be mineralized from the soil and available to your crop—often later in season when more N going to protein. Varieties - Some wheat varieties are more predisposed to slightly higher protein. Balanced nutrients - increasing only N without looking at P, K and S levels is not ideal. A balanced fertility program leads to the best yield potential. Sulfur is a critical part of

protein production in the plant. In cereal crops applying a 10:1 ratio of N to S is a good practise. Economics - it will take 30-40 lbs of N for one per cent protein increase. If protein spreads are not great it may not pay to try to increase. Moisture/Environment - mother nature's wild card in determining the true genetic yield expression of the plant, affecting all aspects of N utilization in the equation. One strategy to boost protein if growing conditions are good is a split application of N. Top dressing extra N before the flag stage may lead to both a yield and protein bump. Top dressing at boot to heading may just lead to a protein bump. New research is being conducted in collaboration with John Heard (Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Development) and the Manitoba Wheat and Barley Growers Association.

New higher yielding wheat varieties we will see coming to the market will generally have a lower protein content. They are looking at top dressing later in season to boost protein levels following the "7-10-20-30" rule. Application 7 days post fusarium fungicide timing; 10 U.S. gallons of 28-0-0 and 10 gallons of water; spraying when temperatures are below 20 degrees Celsius; an 30 lbs of N. Hope this quick insight into protein helps your production decisions on the farm. Have a safe and prosperous harvest!

Wendy Schatz Leeds is the Lead Agronomist at Sharpe's Soil Services Ltd.





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# Grain handlers spend big as Canadian crops set to feed more

The gatekeepers of Canada's rich agriculture exports are spending hundreds of millions of dollars to upgrade export terminals as they prepare the country to become an ever-growing bread basket to the world.

Canadian grain shipments have been steadily rising and hit a record high in the last crop year. And Canadian companies are making long-term bets on the growth of crop exports.

Statistics for the 2016-2017 crop year show Canada continues to improve on the massive logistical hurdle of

moving prairie grains to global markets.

"It was the best year we've ever had in terms of total movement and total amount of grain that was exported," says Mark Hemmes, president of Quorum Corp., which monitors grain shipping for the federal government.

The numbers show Canada's rail network moved 50.7 million tonnes of grain from Western Canada for a five per cent bump from the year before, with about 39.7 million of that getting shipped to the ports of Vancouver, Prince Rupert and Thunder Bay.

Farming techniques and climate change are set to make Canada even more productive, says Karl Gerrand, chief executive of grain handler G3 Canada.

The company, which bought a majority stake in the Canadian Wheat Board's assets after it lost its single desk in 2012, is in the midst of spending more than half a billion dollars on a modern grain shipping terminal in Vancouver, the first built from scratch at the port since the late 1960s.

Gerrand says climate change will also increase in-

ternational demand for Canadian agriculture, which has already seen a big jump in shipments to Asia.

"What you're going to find over time, and research would indicate, is that geographical areas like Canada, the northern climes, will become more efficient at growing grains, at the expense, unfortunately, of the more southern climes," Gerrand says.

G3's terminal will be a dominant player, with capacity to ship about eight million tonnes a year, but all the major grain handlers have been making investments.

Winnipeg-based grain handlers Parrish and Heimbecker Ltd. and Paterson Global-Foods have a West Coast terminal in the works that will be able to ship about four million tonnes of grains a year.

The export terminal, to be built on the Fraser River in Surrey, B.C.'s port lands, is still going through regulatory review with a potential construction start next year.

And further north, Ray-Mont Logistics International officially opened its new grain terminal in Prince Rupert at the end of August, which can ship about a million tonnes a year.

The recent investments come on top of work wrapped up last year, including Vitera Inc.'s tripling the capacity of its Vancouver terminal to six million tonnes a year, and Richardson International doubling the capacity of its terminal, also to about six million tonnes.

Hemmes of shipping monitor Quorum Corp. says the capacity and efficiency invest-

ments are needed, since farmers have improved grain production by about 2.5 to three per cent a year for the past five years, with more growth on the way.

He says the latest efforts, are part of a long-term push to improve grain transportation, with travel times cut in half since he started monitoring the system in the early 2000s.

"It used to be 70, sometimes as much as 80 days to get from the farm to the time it got on a vessel at the port. That's down into the low 40s now. So the system has become far more efficient."

As Canadian farmers continue to improve efficiencies and produce more grain, handlers and exporters commit to investing in the growth of crop exports.



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# Student studies vitamin A-boosted chickpeas

In developing countries, more than three million children are at high risk for permanent blindness due to severe vitamin A deficiency.

BY FEDERICA GIANNELLI

But University of Saskatchewan researchers think that the power of a little seed could make a difference.

"Chickpeas are a well-known source of protein and minerals," said Bunyamin Tar'an, plant sciences professor and chickpea breeder at the U of S Crop Development Centre. "Now due to our latest research, we can add to

the list that chickpeas are also a good natural source of vitamin A."

His PhD student Mohammad Rezaei, an Iranian student attracted by U of S agricultural research excellence, has been studying how to increase the natural content of vitamin A in chickpeas. This would help Tar'an develop new varieties to combat dietary deficiencies.

"Developing new chickpea varieties will help keep Saskatchewan—and Canada—among the world's top producers of pulses," said Tar'an.

In a 2016 published study, Rezaei identified the genes in chickpea DNA that control the plant's production of vitamin A. He used the chickpea whole genome sequence generated from the collaboration of Tar'an's lab with many national and international research institutes and universities.

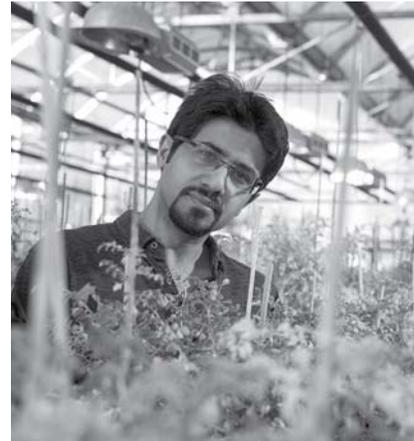
Rezaei said new chickpea varieties could boost Canadian exports to the Middle East and India, where chickpeas are the most common alternative to meat.

And with vegetarian lifestyles increasingly taking over Western countries, "vitamin A-boosted" chickpeas would also greatly benefit the health of Canadians. Research shows vitamin A enhances brain function, improves sight and skin health, and it may naturally slow down aging.

Rezaei has also found that green seed chickpea is the variety with the highest concentration of vitamin A currently available on the market. This concentration is even higher than the first developed variety of Golden Rice, a genetically modified organism (GMO) grown in areas where people struggle with vitamin A deficiency.

Rezaei's next goal is to find the genetic markers — key regions of the chickpea genome — associated with the vitamin A trait which 'paints' veggies yellow, orange and red.

He has been dissecting thousands of chickpea seeds from more than 250 known varieties carrying different



Student Mohammad Rezaei found the secret to boost vitamin A in chickpeas (photo by David Stobbe).

concentrations of vitamin A to study how this trait is transmitted to their "children" and isolate the best lines.

Once Rezaei has identified the genetic markers, Tar'an would use them for a marker-assisted selection to speed up the process of developing new varieties. This technique would enable him to cross, pre-select and release only the most promising chickpea lines that carry the genetic markers associated with higher vitamin A production.

Funded by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture and Saskatchewan Pulse Growers, Tar'an and Rezaei's study is one of the many cutting-edge plant breeding projects led by the U of S Crop Development Centre (CDC) to improve and develop new crops.

"Since the 70s, the CDC has been under the international spotlight for releasing hundreds of new varieties of pulses including lentil, pea, chickpea, dry bean and faba bean, and for hosting some of the most successful pea and lentil breeding programs worldwide," Tar'an said.

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# Attacks against GMOs? Why this farmer takes it personally

I'm a farmer who likes to scroll through Twitter. Not long ago, a tweet popped up from a Manitoba farmer criticizing a local cheese maker for pasting Non-GMO Project Verified labels on some products.

It started a conversation that I've seen a hundred times online:

Should companies be able to market whatever and however they want seeking price premiums? Or should they be responsible for ensuring that claims or implications of superiority are supported by good science, not just buzz words and fear marketing?

I've been asked those questions many times. But as I thought about it this time, I realized it goes far beyond scientific evidence and company sales. The reason I get upset seeing the non-genetically-modified-organism (GMO) label on items—or other fancy, feel-good gimmicks—is that I take it personally.

I have the same personal commitment to quality and integrity as

tens of thousands of other farmers. It's a passion that can last a lifetime—pride in what we do and sell. Farming isn't simply a job to pay the bills. It's about integrity and a commitment to do better, every day.

That means that I'm eager to back up everything that leaves this farm. Whether it's a wagon load of soybeans, a truck full of corn or a tanker of milk, I stand behind all of it. The guilt would eat me alive if I ever felt a product from my farm hurt anyone.

That trust is why I feed my kids the same milk we ship for consumers. It's why I look for Canadian canola oil grown using genetically-modified seed. I reject meat at the meat counter if it claims to be hormone-free (not possible) or antibiotic-free (as is all retail meat).

Our corn and soybeans are mostly genetically engineered (or genetically modified, GM). If I didn't use those, I'd need to till my soil or spray more often in order to control weeds.



Andrew Campbell

Some worry about pesticides applied to GM crops. Almost every crop, whether it's a GM or not, livestock feed or human food, gets sprayed with a pesticide. If we didn't, weeds would rob nutrients from the crop, insects would feast, and fungal diseases and mycotoxins would damage yields and food quality.

Farming isn't easy and Mother Nature's an uncertain ally. Something is always trying to reduce crop yield and quality. We fight to protect it and we are proud of what we have accomplished at harvest.

So where do the concerns come from?

Certainly not from the science community or government regulators, who have shown repeatedly that GM crops are as safe as all others and that registered pesticides (in-

cluding organic), when used as directed, represent minute risks compared to benefits.

Usually those concerns trace back to companies trying to sell alternatives. Just Label It is sponsored by Whole Foods, Stoney-

field Organics and others like it. Non-GMO Project Verified was started by two 'natural food' stores.

They're building their businesses trying to portray me and my family as bad guys—for simply doing what's best for our farm, community, family and customers.

So does it get me upset when I see a claim that defies what's proven to be safe and effective?

It's a gut punch to this

family farmer and thousands like me.

Today's food system is not perfect. That's why we work to make it better through dozens of farm and agricultural initiatives. But how we did it 50 years ago isn't better.

I hope you're proud of what you do for a living and your impact. As a farmer, I am.

Andrew Campbell is a dairy and crop farmer near London, Ont.



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# New ag tech creating buzz

BY CRAIG LESTER

A new type of hopper made to fit on most types of combines is creating a lot of talk this fall.

And no, it wasn't created by the traditional companies known for rolling out new fancy gizmos, but rather a father-son tandem out of Battleford, Sask.

Trevor Scherman and his father Pat, farmers and owners of ScherGain, developed a drop-pan to measure losses in behind the combine.

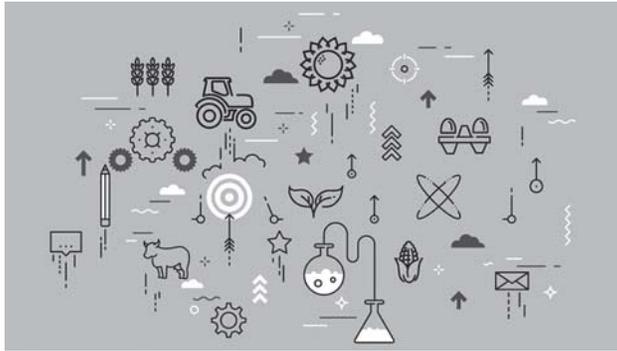
Scherman says it was created to be simple and accurate using volumetric measuring.

"You don't have to weigh anything and you just dump it into a grain gauge and you look at a chart and you can see what your losses are on the chart," Scherman says.

"It asks what crop you are harvesting, asks how big your header size is and from there, the chart tells your losses to the millimetre in the grain gauge."

Scherman says farmers go to do a lot of work to grow their crop and it's a shame if it is only to have profit be thrown out the back-end of the combine. He says they've had clients find they were throwing away more than \$60 per acre.

Scherman says the device has been an instant seller with very little marketing. It was debuted at canolaPALOOZA in Saskatchewan this summer, where they sold 20 in one day. Since then, they have been manufacturing them in their yard non-stop.



Scherman says their tag line reflects the mindset behind their technology.

"The most money per hour you will ever make farming is setting your combine and knowing your losses," he says.

## Water management

The topic of water management in fields has seen significant growth over the past five years. As a result, companies are starting to develop technology to provide farmers with surface and sub-surface solutions to excess water in their field.

One company providing beginning to end solutions is Rocky Mountain Equipment.

Steven Gillis, who is an ag technology sales specialist with RME, says the pick-up in conversations in the western Prairies can be attributed to the precipitation they received in northern Alberta in recent years.

"There's a lot of guys there dealing with substantial water for the past few years and lost a lot of crop with it," Gillis says. "It wasn't uncommon to see a combine in front of seeding equipment and that's be-

cause of the water last fall that kept them from getting the crop off."

And while it may be a new conversation in Alberta, it's a familiar one in Manitoba.

"When you go into the Winnipeg region, Red River Valley area water management it is just part of normal farming practices. You go west of there to the Saskatchewan/Manitoba border, it's fairly common practice, but not to the same extent it is in central Manitoba."

Part of the solution involves tile drainage, where Gillis reminds farmers they should know their soil before they come in and install it.

"With tiles, if you have clay, it's a very different solution than if you got light sandy soil. If you have sandy soil water, it will move through it very quickly. You can place your tile lines further apart and still have an effective solution."

"If you have heavy clay and the water can permeate the soil, your tile lines need to be closer together. That's something you need to be aware of before you go in there and start doing the installation."

Gillis says one of the advantages of their set-up is they can work with any brand of equipment.

## Bottom line

Improved efficiencies are frequently within reach with some inventive thinking and technical know-how - and farm shows are a great place to see the latest innovations.



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# Ottawa's tax changes could kill family farm

Two things have always been certain: death and taxes. We can now add a third: botching the promotion of a tax reform for political gains.

Federal Finance Minister Bill Morneau's tax reform has been a communications disaster, on both sides of the debate.

Various claims made about Ottawa's intentions to revamp our tax system for small corporations have been ridiculous. Some predict a recession due to the proposed changes. Others declare the end of entrepreneurship as we know it.

We should all take a deep breath and figure out how the changes will truly impact our economy. And in particular we need to focus on how Morneau's vision for taxing small corporations will impact the agrifood sector.

The tax system is generally not about pensions, legacy and social programs. But it is for family-owned businesses and there are thousands of them in agrifood. Canada has more than 43,000 incorporated farms, compared to 23,000 in 2001. We have fewer total farms today, but more of them have become corporations to encourage the next generation to take over the farm.

The federal government's proposed changes to capital gains rules would make it more expensive for a family member to acquire the farm than for a third party to do so. This is a critical piece of a highly complicated puzzle.

Keeping families and jobs in rural Canada is not easy. Many agricultural producers use our tax system wisely to secure the future of their businesses. In the food processing, retailing and service sectors, countless family businesses wonder how family values embedded in anything the corporation does can survive the next generation.

Morneau has also addressed income sprinkling. Corpora-



Sylvain Charlebois

tions can now hire family members, reducing the tax rate for everyone. The rules about who can be compensated and at what level are ambiguous at best. Morneau wants to change that and for good reason. Many small corporations pay family members who don't necessarily work for the company in order to avoid taxes. This should stop.

But defining tasks in a family-owned business can be difficult. Many of the contributions made by family members are ad hoc and can't easily be categorized. Recipes, tricks of the trade and family traditions all matter a great deal to small food outlets (it's difficult to imagine applying the same standard to accountants, doctors or dentists). A family business is like, well, a family. At a family-owned farm, restaurant or small food processor, job profiles are vague at best.

This political nightmare began in July when the federal government launched consultations on how best to address tax planning practices it believes are used to gain unfair advantages. Consultations end on Oct. 2.

Individuals set up corporations to pay less taxes in a variety of ways and Ottawa's intentions are noble.

But the bombastic tone used to promote the changes has been hurtful. Ottawa's condescending rhetoric labels small business owners as cheats, greedy tax evaders trying to dodge the system by using loopholes. This is simply insulting.

The government anticipates that the new regulations will bring in barely \$250 million a year, so the Liberals aren't using the changes to increase revenues to pay for a ballooning deficit. This is about politics, pure and simple. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's agenda to serve the middle class is driving these changes, although the changes will actually harm middle class farmers and business owners.

The stakes are high in agrifood industries.

This isn't about being unwilling to pay more taxes.

It's about the viability of an entire economic sector.

Our tax regime should differentiate and give the rural economy and family corporations some level of immunity.

In fact, Ottawa should find fiscal incentives to help the agrifood sector grow.

Right now, it's not clear how this can be achieved.

As the federal government tries to bring more fairness to the fiscal landscape and fix a largely urban issue, it shouldn't penalize the agrifood sector.

Despite Morneau's disgraceful performance as a tax reform salesman, changes will most likely happen, to the despair of many.

But even Canadians with corporations would have difficulty understanding what's being proposed. The confusion has led to a certain hysteria and that's the government's fault. When it comes to taxes, painting everyone with same brush is unacceptable.

Ottawa will get its way in the end but it should at the very least accommodate the unique intricacies of our agrifood sector.

*Sylvain Charlebois is Senior Fellow with the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies, dean of the Faculty of Management and a professor in the Faculty of Agriculture at Dalhousie University, and author of Food Safety, Risk Intelligence and Benchmarking, published by Wiley-Blackwell (2017).*

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# Canadian farm debt is on the rise – is that cause for worry?

BY AMY CARDUNER

FCC AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIST

Canadian producers have recently taken on more debt.

This is, in part, due to the farmland values and the overall intensive capitalization of agriculture.

Both increased recently. Historically low interest rates have also pushed up debt levels.

That may sound worrying but, at least for the moment, there's no cause for alarm.

That's the overall message of our latest report, FCC Ag Economics' Outlook for Farm Assets and Debt 2017-18, released today.

The sector has been financially stable for years and, thanks to rising net cash income, that should continue into 2018.

We expect increases in overall debt and their accompanying interest payments, but the sector is well-positioned to handle those.

For one thing, while both debt and payments are likely to become higher over the next year, their growth will be gradual enough to allow producers to absorb the extra costs.

## Farm debt highly correlated with farmland values

Farm debt has risen in recent years, and it's largely the result of farmers buying more farm land.

The low-interest environment of the past 15 years, along with the strong farm cash receipts that boosted income, pushed farmers to buy more land.

All that activity drove up the value of farmland.

In fact, farmland gained so much value relative to all other farm assets, it totaled roughly 70% of all farm assets in 2016.

Since land as a share of farm assets has been rising, so has farm debt.

Total liabilities in Canadian agriculture reached \$90.8 billion in 2016. (NOTE: This

is about \$5 billion less than the value we provided earlier, which included the additional household portion of farm debt).

Since 2012, the annual growth of farmland values has been increasing faster than the annual growth of farm debt outstanding.

2017 may be the year farm debt growth takes the lead.

If so, it'll be because of softening farm cash receipts and the addition of higher borrowing costs.

The recent Bank of Canada interest rate hikes will affect the value of farm debt outstanding, driving it up.

But it takes a back seat to net cash income, the factor that will have a larger im-

pact – and an impact that is good news for debt repayment.

## Rising net cash income matters more than interest rates

Canadian agriculture has been booming over the past 10 years, thanks to a \$19 billion increase in farm cash receipts.

With those revenues, and interest rates at historical lows, producers borrowed more to expand their operations.

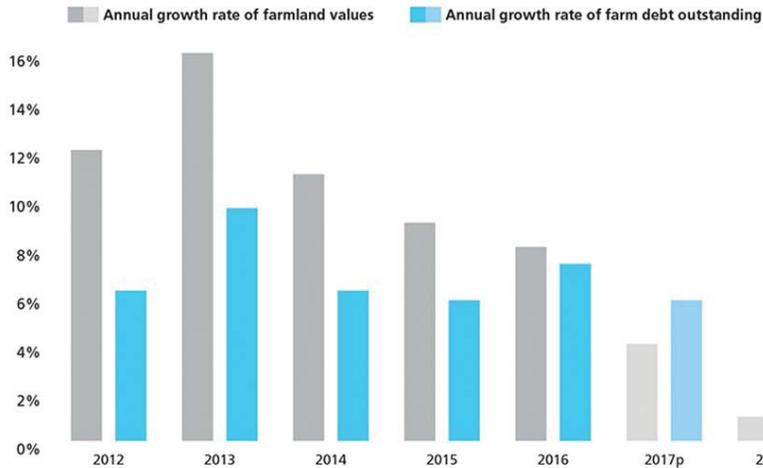
We expect net cash income to remain healthy over the outlook period, meaning producers will be able to repay the debt

they do incur.

Canadian ag is in a good position to weather the current interest rate climate.

For more on Canadian farm debt and assets, see FCC Ag Economics' Outlook for Farm Assets and Debt 2017-18.

*Amy joined the FCC Ag Economics team in 2017 to monitor agricultural trends and identify opportunities and challenges in the sector. Amy grew up on a mixed farm in Saskatchewan and continues to support the family operation. She holds a Master in Applied Economics and Management from Cornell University and a Bachelor in Agricultural Economics from the University of Saskatchewan.*



Source: Statistics Canada (Balance Sheet of Agriculture) and FCC calculations

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# This year Thanksgiving dinner will be inside, not out in the field during harvest

By DONNA BEUTLER

Day after beautiful day this year the combines just kept on rolling, one field to the next, to the next. It's bad when you wish for a rainy day just so you can have a break, but not this year.

On this particular day, maybe at the 75 percent complete mark, my husband and I were just finishing a canola field.

With just one row each to go, I was about 30 feet from the end when my 'hopper full' buzzer sounded.

My six year old twin grandsons and I had just been discussing this very matter or at least they were.

I, on the other hand, was quite certain that Murphy's law would somehow come into play as it most often does. They obviously had complete faith in Grandma's ability to get to the end of the row without overflowing.

Twenty feet.  
Ten feet.

And that's when we hear a trickling of canola seed raining down on the cab of the combine.

Not much though; just a little. I think.

My first response is to hope my husband won't notice. He is after all a quarter mile or more away.

But 'Eagle Eyes' over there stops his machine and gets out on the deck and waves both arms.

By this time the boys are telling me that Grandpa has noticed.

Yeah. I get that, I think to myself.

Maybe the semi driver will notice my plight and come on over my way, but no, he's already gone ahead to the next field with the grain cart and so, ever so slowly, I drive across the field to get to the semi.

I mean really, last year a stone (or a rock as some might have called it); this year a few seeds of canola.

Nothing really—in comparison.

And so, with that grand finale to the field, we moved on to the next one—the very hilly one.

I was a little nervous; after all I was on the smaller combine, no duals.

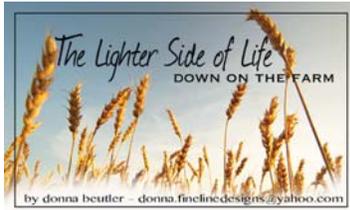
But my little sidekicks assure me we'll be just fine. Of course, I remind myself, they are only six.

Their non-stop commentary shows just how much they have absorbed in their short life span.

"Try not to dump in the cart if you see Dad coming with the semi,"

"The grain is up to the window, you won't make it to the end before the buzzer goes,"

"We didn't grow wheat on this field last year, Grandma! We grew winter wheat!" and the one I loved the most,



"Grandma! Just leave the sides of the hills for Grandpa to pick up."

Maybe they did have some reservations after all about following the side of a hill feeling like the combine wheels weren't going to stay grounded.

On that particular day the boys had been with me for most of the day and had no intention of going back to the yard with mom.

I appreciated their company—the acres passed by much more quickly.

As I traversed the hills, mostly the tops of them, the boys were watching Grandpa on a hill a half mile across the field.

I am not even remotely looking at anything but what's more or less right in front of me.

"Grandma! Grandma!" they both yell out at the same time.

"Grandpa's too full!" says one. "Yeah," says the other, "He's spilling out canola."

Aha! I think to myself. "Keep that as arsenal," I tell the boys, "you never know when you will need a piece of information like that."

I do not bother to stop my combine, get out on the deck and wave to Grandpa with two arms to ensure he knows he's spilling grain over the edge of his hopper.

I figure he will be hearing the canola raining down on his cab and he will be thinking, "I sure hope Donna doesn't notice this!"

On the following day, the boys and I were joined by their five-year-old cousin.

When they all get together, their commentary gets pretty interesting.

The difference between the farm boys and the town girl (besides who talks the most, LOL) is this: the boys ride the combine for hours and hours on end and never want to go home; after just three hours on the combine, their female sidekick is asking, "When will we be done?" I don't an-

swer, 'never,' but I certainly think it.

The canola swaths along the creek were being seriously blown apart by the wind and picking them up meant lots of stops, backing up, moving to one side then the other in a continual stop, lift the header, back up, lower the header, go forward, stop, lift the header, back up ... well, you get the idea.

While I did what I needed to do, which by the way was a pain in the butt, I told the kids to watch the creek along which we were combining because the bear are plentiful there and I just knew we would see some. We didn't. Nearly two days in that field and not one bear.

When the kids had to leave the combine to go to backpack night at the school, someone took over for me so I could run back to the yard to make supper.

As luck would have it, childless and alone in my truck, I pull off the highway and a bear runs across the laneway.

The bear sightings near the yard were plentiful from that point on, but once the corn is silaged, I suspect (I hope) they will head back to the creek.

Then I won't need to be looking over my back everytime I walk from the camper (our harvest-time home) to the shop.

A few days later, we were able to say we were officially done—September 12, four days sooner than the 2016 finish date.

It's quite different than the many years when we've still been combining at Thanksgiving and beyond.

In fact, just two years ago our Thanksgiving dinner was served on a flat-deck trailer complete with tables and chairs.

As the combines rolled down the field, and we spelled each other off so everyone could enjoy turkey, stuffing and gravy with the entire family, we were truly thankful for a safe and bountiful year.

When Thanksgiving rolls around this year, we again will thank the good Lord for his provision—the only difference being is that we will be cutting the turkey on the counter, not on the tailgate of a truck, and we'll be joining hearts and hands around the kitchen table and not across two tailgates and one flat deck trailer!



Donna Beutler farms at Whitewood, and writes the occasional newspaper story!

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- 10 p.m. Slack

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# Training a new generation of ag experts

BY HENRYTYE GLAZEBROOK

In the more than 100 years since the University of Saskatchewan's College of Agriculture was founded in 1909 the college has continued to evolve and expand.

Aside from the obvious changes, including the opening of the Agriculture Building in 1991, core programming at the college has adapted to fit the changing needs of the industry.

What was once a college heavily weighted toward instructing its students with a traditional connection to farming, programming within the college has expanded and transitioned to include the wide breadth of what comprises modern agricultural production, together with the management of the environment and associated bioresources.

"A number of years ago the college recognized that we weren't just production-agriculture focused—that our expertise spans issues surrounding agriculture, environment, resource management, food processing and more," said Fran Walley, the college's associate dean academic. "Agriculture remains as important as ever and many courses and programs continue to have a production orientation, particularly in the areas of animal science and agronomy."

"However, the scope of our programs has expanded to include environmental science, renewable resource management, food and bioproduct science and others that expand far beyond production agriculture. Although production agriculture remains an important core, we have a number of programs that reflect the diversity of research areas and scholarship within the college."

These days, AgBio has four Bachelor of Science degree programs in agribusiness, agriculture, animal bioscience and renewable resource management, alongside four diploma programs and two certificates.

"We want to provide students with every opportunity to succeed in an industry that is in a nearly continuous state of change," explained Walley. "The agriculture industry evolves and changes at a rapid pace."

"Farming in the prairies has changed rapidly in the past few decades from smaller family farms to really intensive operations where the operators require specialized skills spanning everything from sustainable crop production, environmental management, to marketing. It's



The College of Agriculture and Bioresources at the University of Saskatchewan

a new world for farming."

The college has been shaped by a desire to create opportunities for experiential learning. The idea, said Walley, is to offer students the chance to spend time away from chalkboards and books, and gain a real hands-on understanding of the work they have been studying.

"Experiential learning is really important. You can learn a lot in a classroom, and that's critical learning, but when you're actually seeing it and feeling it—literally doing the hands-on work in the field or the lab or wherever—those are often the

experiences that really stay with a student and shape them," she said.

As the college has evolved, Walley has

noticed students taking a keen interest in courses centred around the environmental impact of agriculture. The trend, she said, seems natural.

"Agriculture and managing our environment really do go hand in hand. There is a recognition that in order for us to be successful in areas of agriculture, we have to be concerned about our environment, water security, what's happening in terms of the climate, how we're managing our bioresources," she said. "Those things are all inextricably linked when we're talking about managing the environment around us so that we can foster sustainable food production systems."

The introduction of new diplomas in Aboriginal lands governance and in Indigenous resource management is consistent with the evolution of college programming. Walley said the move to diploma programs in Aboriginal land management is one that's equally beneficial to both students and the U of S as a whole, creating an environment where learning is more openly available and more easily encouraged.

"I think it's really important," she said. "We have different kinds of university students now who are here for all sorts of different reasons. We want our programs and programming to be flexible enough to allow students to have many different routes into our college and into our programs."

In all of the changes, Walley said one constant has remained the focus for the College of Agriculture and Bioresources: to help students become champions of their field.

"Our goal is to train our students to be the leaders of the future—in agriculture, in food production, in managing our environment," she said. "These are important times, and we need people to be able to take on those any challenges that we are facing."

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# New app maps crop health

BY HERYTYE GLAZEBROOK

A few months ago, Rahat Yasir visited a farmer from Tisdale.

He listened as the man spoke of walking through the crops, painstakingly inspecting for signs of crop disease, pest infestation and areas in need of herbicide or fertilizer.

The process may be a far cry from the work expected of a first-year master's student in computer science at the University of Saskatchewan, but it is vital for Yasir, a young developer working on a mobile application that will help farmers survey crop health with unheard-of efficiency.

"They are still doing the manual process," Yasir said. "They are walking through the fields and checking each individual leaf to see if there are visual changes, and then they apply medicine all over the land. If they use our system, they won't need to do that."

Yasir is building the project, a mobile application dubbed Project Beetle, in partnership with fellow first-year computer science master's student Rashid Chowdhury.

It is designed as an easy-to-use application for mobile phones that will allow farmers direct access to diagnostic information, identifying potential diseases through visual changes in their crops and predicting when and where larger outbreaks may occur.

One needs only to take a photo of a leaf and wait a few moments as the app scans it and provides a detailed breakdown of possible health issues, including potential diseases and nutritional information, as well as an estimate of how much of the surrounding crop is similarly affected.

The app earned first place in the Emerging Agriculture Hackathon.

The contest, an annual event hosted by the U of S Junior Chamber of Commerce, brings together students of technology and agriculture to compete and collabo-



Rahat Yasir and Rashid Chowdhury created Project Beetle to help farmers survey crop health.

rate on computer programming and related projects.

"We started almost four years ago," Yasir said.

"This project was originally designed for rice paddy crop diseases, then for this emerging Agriculture Hackathon we have updated the software, added predictive analysis, and at the same time we have made it universal, so that it can predict any type of crop diseases for any type of crops."

Project Beetle works through the use of artificial neural networks, which have made it possible for Yasir and Chowdhury

line.

The next steps are to hopefully partner with others working in similar areas, or with government agencies from which the duo will be granted even greater access to data on crop diseases.

"If there is an existing system that's already supporting problems, we could do a collaboration," Yasir said.

"Our tool is very handy and they could integrate it with their own very easily. And at the same time, our system would get access to their data. It would be a perfect collaboration. Once we get more data, our system will start to show us amazing results."

Yasir and Chowdhury first met during their undergraduate program at North South University in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and quickly banded together on a passion project that they believe has the potential to save billions of dollars in crop losses annually.

The two students have always been driven by a desire to curb world hunger, but their interest ignited when they started looking into global statistics that estimated nearly one billion people are starving annually, while 15-20 per cent of crops are lost due to preventable issues such as crop disease, lack of herbicides and improper fertilization.

"We came up with the idea that if we could develop something or come up with some solution that can reduce the number of crops lost to crop diseases or insects, then we would be able to make our world hunger-free," Yasir said.

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# Wheat market stabilizes into the fall season

BY MIKE JUBINVILLE

Wheat markets tumbled through the summer after high spike in early July, notably on spring wheat. There is now a sense of stability entering United States wheat futures trade - relative cautiousness ahead of the September crop reports from the United States Department of Agriculture report on Sept. 12.

Short crops have a long tail on price charts. The drought across the northern tier U.S. spring wheat states this summer drove fears and, in turn, Minneapolis spring wheat futures, on a big run up over US\$8 per bushel to start July - the first time above that mark in four years. The price spike triggered a wave of farmer selling on both sides of the border. U.S. producers had ample storage unloaded old crop supplies, while Canadians made forward sales against their 2017 harvest.

## Prices moved

Supply was rationed. New crop production results are coming out better than expected. Buyers found other alternatives, other places. As a result, prices moved back down, but probably now down to levels that demand picks back up again. I think the Kansas City and Chicago winter wheat markets have probably bottomed and I think Minneapolis may be in the process of bottoming as well.

Fundamentally, the wheat market still finds itself globally in an abundantly well-supplied bearish condition. However, I suspect wheat is a market that is trying to sock in a seasonal low. That is not to say its rally mode is immediately ahead - not likely - but the steady parade lower in wheat futures from the early July spike high has perhaps abated.

## In Canada

On this side of the border, Prairie spring wheat cash bids surged to almost \$9 per bushel at the early summer price peak and have since tumbled almost 30 per cent. Bids now sit between \$6.20 to \$6.50 per bushel for No. 1 Canadian western red spring wheat, depending on location. In our view, wheat prices have now stabilized.

The spring wheat supply story has evolved significantly over the past few months, with better than expected yield here in Western Canada an emerging theme.

Black Sea origin wheat shipping dominates the offshore international marketplace for the September and October markets, if not beyond. A huge Russia wheat crop just might top 80 million tonnes, whose quality is comparable to U.S. hard red wheat at 11 per cent protein. So there is probably not a lot of price upside into the early fall market.

The spring wheat supply story has evolved significantly over the past few months, with better than expected yield here in Western Canada. Good quality also is a big fix for the market. While Statistics Canada's Aug. 31 production report estimated Canadian all-wheat output 25.5 million tonnes, it seems more likely we are looking at a 28.5 million tonne crop - maybe more.

## Elevator pricing

Elevator pricing has sunk through the summer (better yield, Canadian dollar gain) and spring wheat prices are now at a level that farmers will probably take a more metered approach to deliveries after the initial harvest flush into the commercial pipeline.

With the bigger crop, however, wheat remains a "supply push" marketing environment, and that is not a scenario that inspires significant or sustained bullish sentiment, at least until some new market catalyst develops.

The Prairie harvest overall may be better than expected and protein levels appear variable. Global supplies of high-protein wheat are tight, despite a glut of grains, but not quite as tight as thought a month ago.

## Winter prediction

Timely delivery will be required from the Canadian farmer all year, such that I think we can expect winter flat price gains. Starting point low-enough nearby delivery spot cash bids of \$6 to \$6.50 a bushel likely marks important bottoming action this month.

We'll be keeping an eye on Australia now that they seem to be back to needing rain again. Official estimates are that the country will likely produce its smallest wheat crop in eight

years, down by 2.34 million tonnes from March, to 21.64 million tonnes. That's roughly a third from 2016-17's record-large crop.

Some market attention will also go to U.S. winter wheat planting conditions as operations now ramp up. Current spring red wheat/hard red wheat prices are not likely encouraging the American farmer to aggressively turn to planting wheat, and last year's winter wheat acres were already a 100 year low. I expect those U.S. acres are again probably going to be down again.

## Bottom line

In the early summer, weather concerns drove the wheat markets up, but given the various circumstances in Canada and around the globe, price stability is building.

Mike Jubinville of Pro Farmer Canada offers information on commodity markets and marketing strategies. Call 204-654-4290 or visit [www.pfcanada.com](http://www.pfcanada.com) to find out more about his services.



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# Pattison Ag expanding in Moosomin

BY KARA KINNA  
Pattison Ag has plans to expand its Moosomin location to allow for more sales and service, with part of the expansion work already underway this fall.

"Jim Pattison, who owns and operates the Pattison Ag John Deere dealerships, and has 19 stores now, he bought this location in the winter of 2016 and at that time he decided he was going to do some investment and upgrades to this yard and building," says Dennis Barry, the service manager at Pattison Ag in Moosomin.

"The grounds were in rough shape. To the north of us there are three acres of farmland that we bought and had been using and we are developing that to dis-

play equipment on. "The current yard is also in rough shape so they are redoing the entire lot.

"We've removed the cover-all shed that we were using for storage. We're replacing that with an 80-foot by 200-foot cold storage building. And in 2018 our plans are to add another 80-foot by 100-foot workshop to the south and then upgrade the outside and do an interior facelift.

"We're probably going to start the project in the spring of 2018 and will probably have completion by fall for the workshops



Work is already underway on the grounds at Pattison Ag in Moosomin and a new cold storage building will be built this fall.

and the exterior/interior upgrades." Barry says the upgrades

and expansion will allow for Pattison to hire more staff in Moosomin.

"With the added 8,000 square feet of shop space we are going to be recruiting two to three more service techs. And because of the expansion of the grounds we are going to be expanding our sales force by one more person.

"The intention is to have more equipment and have it better displayed, and we are expanding the aftermarket to support the sales."

This fall the 80-foot by 200-foot cold storage building will go up and should be completed in four to six weeks.

"The cold storage allows us to store customers' equipment inside when they bring it in for winter works programs," says

Barry. It's a must."

Barry says Pattison sees a lot of potential in the Moosomin location.

"Pattison and John Deere feel Moosomin and the surrounding area has the largest potential for its trading area," he says.

He says being part of the Pattison group has meant the dealership can do more.

"With being part of the Pattison group and 19 locations, we can draw equipment from so many of the locations," he says. "On almost a weekly basis we are bringing in used equipment this way.

"Farmers are more informed now with the internet. So much of that business is done before they ever come to the dealership. They will look online and see that we have a tractor in Swift Current and basically know what they want already."

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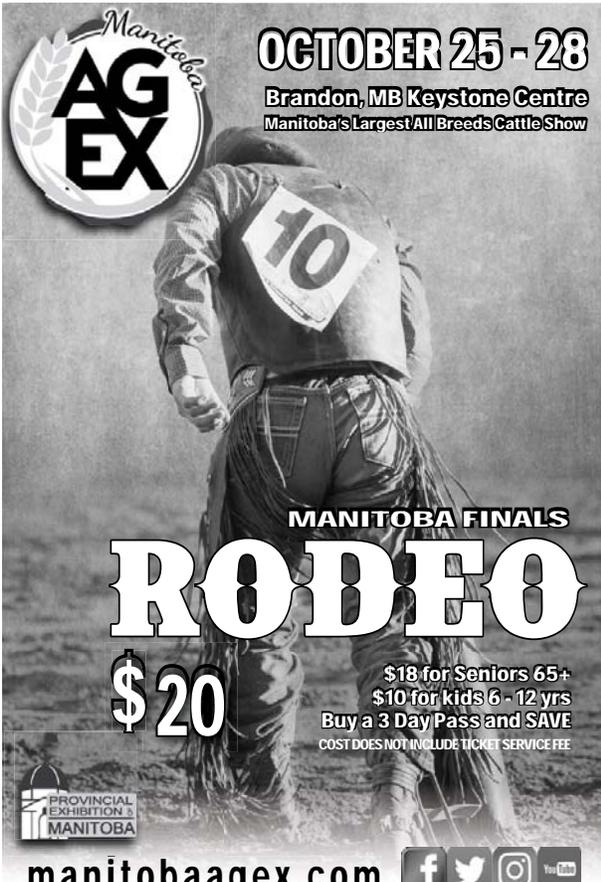
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# FCC chief economist: Farmers should review financial strategy

BY OWEN ROBERTS  
Producers should meet with their financial advisors to discuss the Bank of Canada's latest interest rate activity and make sure their financial strategy is tested against multiple scenarios and up to date, says FCC's chief economist.

The central bank increased its rate Wednesday by one-quarter point, to 1.0 per cent. That's the second 25-basis-point increase since July.

The bank says employment and wage growth sparked strong consumer spending. As well, business investment and exports also improved.

Think strategically  
For J.P. Gervais, FCC's chief economist, the hike means now is the time to think about financial strategy. Thoroughly understanding risk is key when interest rates are in flux, he says.

"Knowing what this modest increase could mean is important for considering strategies such as switching from a floating rate to a fixed rate, if you and your ad-

visor think that's a timely move," he says. According to Gervais, income is the primary driver of debt repayment. Fluctuations in commodity prices and interest rates will affect producers' ability to pay back that debt.

## Understand farm financial risk

So he's urging producers to understand exactly how much risk they're taking on, and what flexibility they have in facing higher interest rates or a lower income. That's called financial "stress testing."

Says Gervais: "Work with your advisor to look at various scenarios, and your capacity to repay your debt. It's the best approach to take."

Gervais says current financial ratios for Canadian agriculture are in line with historical averages.

And farm income was at record levels in 2016.

## Strong Canadian ag

To him, those factors mean Canadian agriculture is strong and well-positioned to withstand small interest rate increases, which the industry has been expecting after an extended lull. Interest rates and the Canadian dollar are likely to continue to rise in the short term. Whether it's a pattern that will continue is too early to say.

But Gervais believes the Bank of Canada would like to get back to 2015 rates, when it cut its rate twice in response to the Canadian oil sector slowdown.

But, he adds, only if interest rates climb over the two to three years can we expect this to be a signal of a long-term upward trend.

## The art of setting interest rates

"The Bank of Canada always looks beyond the immediate horizon," he says. "That's why setting interest rates is more of an art than a science. The Bank relies on

complex, long-term information that is often imprecise, so it's not unusual for it to revise or update its projection and chart a new course. That's what makes accurately predicting interest rates impossible."

He's also keeping his eye on the value of the Canadian dollar versus the U.S. dollar. He says that a move of the dollar above 85 cents would challenge profitability for some operations.

"A lower loonie gave us better commodity prices and makes the demand stronger for what we sell in foreign markets," he says. "You can always find some cases that would benefit from a higher dollar, but in general our customers are better off in a lower-dollar environment."

## Bottom line

Overall, Gervais says when interest rates are in flux, producers need to optimize their financial strategies and understand their financial risks. The best way to accomplish this is by meeting with their financial advisor.



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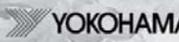
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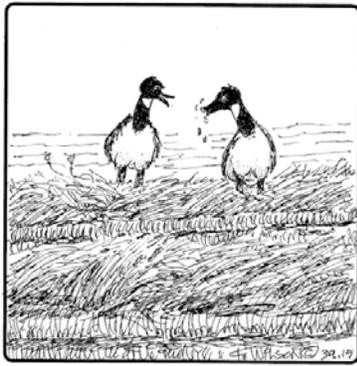
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# Strong industry performance tempers farm asset and debt change

BY OWEN ROBERTS

The value of farm assets in Canadian agriculture is strong, and farm cash receipts – which increased by \$19 billion over the last decade – put the industry in a good position to face higher borrowing costs, says a new report from Farm Credit Canada.

The report, Outlook for Farm Assets and Debt 2017-18, was released Tuesday, just days after the Bank of Canada's second interest rate hike since July, which had been preceded by no interest rate hikes in seven years.

The FCC report bases its outlook on 2016 data. It's bullish on the farm sector in this country, saying Canadian agriculture was financially healthy last year.

That gives it a firm foundation heading into an era of moderately higher interest rates.

"The fundamentals of Canadian agriculture are sound and most farm operations are in good financial position to weather most significant changes in our economy," says J.P. Gervais, FCC's chief agricultural economist.

## Liquidity and solvency

For example, the report notes liquidity – an operation's ability to meet financial obligations without interrupting normal operations – remains strong. It declined slightly in 2016 from the 15-year average, but minimally.

As well, the industry's solvency position is good, with the debt-to-asset ratio a few points below the 15-year average. Total liabilities in Canadian agriculture reached almost \$91 billion in 2016, a 7.5 per cent increase over the previous year. Farm asset values grew too, to nearly \$592 billion, five per cent more than 2015. Farmland made up almost 70 per cent of total farm assets.

The report predicts slowing appreciation in farmland

values because of higher interest rates.

But it also predicts total farm debt outstanding to have a lower rate of growth this year and next year.

## One caution

One caution flag raised in the report is that land, particularly in Alberta and Ontario, has become more expensive, compared to farm cash receipts. However, the authors also note the downward trend in interest rates over the years must be considered when interpreting this ratio. Although land has become more expensive, the cost of borrowing has remained stable.

But overall, the message is clear: it's a good time to be farming.

And, says Mathieu Lipari, program manager at Farm Management Canada, it's also a good time to examine whether you are utilizing all your assets.

With interest rates low, many farms have expanded. Now, even though Canadian farms are in good shape, times are starting to change with higher interest rates and a slowing appreciation of land values, the very foundation of farm assets.

"We can say the industry is strong and doing well, but each producer needs to look at their operation individually," he says. "If a capital expenditure will increase profitability, there's a case to be made to buy it. But although

money is cheap, it doesn't mean assets are."

## Watch debt loads

Brenna Grant, manager at Canfax Research Services, says the agriculture sector's healthy economic status is reflected in the beef sector's ability to rebuild equity over the last several years.

"Producers are now in a position to expand if they choose to," she says.

She notes that land is more expensive compared to farm cash receipts, meaning it takes longer for producers to pay off that initial land investment.

"While producers are in a solid financial position right now, they need to be watching debt loads that have been made possible by leveraging appreciating land values," she says.

Risk will be part of the discussion at Farm Management Canada's annual Agricultural Excellence Conference in Ottawa this November.

## Bottom line

Overall, farm assets in Canadian agriculture are strong, but each farmer has to take a look at their individual operation and assess their own debt loads.



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# Canadian production report review

BY MIKE JUBINVILLE

Statistics Canada released its first farm-surveyed estimates of the season for 2017 Canadian crop production (13,300 farmers surveyed) on Aug. 31.

The agency forecast 2017 Canadian canola production at 18.2 million tonnes, midpoint of pre-report trade estimates. But that number will likely grow with subsequent reports. Backing up that opinion, StatsCan revised up its estimate of the previous year 2016 canola crop by 1.2 million tonnes to 19.6 million tonnes.

This report is seen as neutral to slightly positive for the canola price outlook. After all, anything below 19 million tonnes on the 2017 crop still suggests a trend towards eroding year-end carryout given continued strong demand expectations.

Canola remains a sideways, rangebound market that will be subject to one to two month waves in one direction then the other.

But the supply rationing process does not have to occur all at once, or even right now. Should yield assessments rise in subsequent reports it lessens the need for a dramatic price response. Harvest price pressure typical of September will limit gains for now, despite a still constructive longer term bias.

Canola remains a sideways, rangebound market that will be subject to one to two month waves in one direction then the other.

## Wheat

Perhaps the most dramatic result on the report was for durum. Pre-report ideas pegged the 2017 crop at 4.5 million to 5.3 million tonnes, but StatsCan estimated the crop to be 3.9 million. That compares with last year's crop which was 7.8 million.

This report highlights the depressed opinion that growers expressed throughout southern Alberta and Saskatchewan over their durum crops during the height of the hot/dry period around the end of July.

But PFCanada believes this will be the lowest durum crop



estimate of the year and we are likely to see revisions higher in time. That's not to suggest there were no problems with the durum crop this year. Most certainly there were, but early harvest reports suggest crop results a touch better than initially feared. With such a discounted production forecast though, it should give the market some pause after prices retreated from their summer highs.

StatsCan pegged all-wheat at 25.5 million tonnes, compared to trade estimates of 22.8 million to 27.8 million. Last year the crop came in at 31.7 million tonnes. A large measure of that decline is attributable to durum.

Minneapolis spring wheat futures were and continue to face selling pressure since establishing highs in early July. Traders have been dumping their long spring/short winter wheat futures spread positions, and in the process, shrinking what is still a large spring wheat premium over the other wheats. Harvest results in Western Canada have so far been pretty good in many areas. The Canadian wheat crop estimate will almost certainly rise from this latest StatsCan estimate.

## Oats

StatsCan's oat crop peg at 3.685 million tonnes was above the highest trade ideas, and consequently not a bullish result. We continue to hear good - in some cases exceptional (Manitoba) - yield as harvest continues to roll. Many within the

trade already anticipating higher production ahead of this report, but this number still nipped at Chicago oat futures.

I suspect the best cash oat pricing opportunity is likely four to six months out when another miller reload is needed.

## Pulses

On lentils, the StatsCan number was 2.3 million compared to last year's crop of 3.2 million. The lentil number came in lower than expected, with trade ideas up closer to 2.75 million tonnes.

But it is important to remember that the current market outlook is not driven by Canada supply issues. Rather demand, or the lack thereof for the moment, is the real market driver. I suspect that condition will improve as the marketing year progresses. However, farmers here in the near-term seem ready to push newly harvested supply onto the market rather aggressively, which suggests red lentils are headed for 20 cents sooner than later.

On peas, StatsCan production pegged at 3.8 million tonnes, about midrange with trade expectations, but is probably destined to rise to 4.0 million tonnes or slightly more in time.

Like in lentils, whatever the pea crop size here, that is not the key factor influencing market price. Rather it's the sluggish demand profile of the current offshore market intertwined with aggressive offshore export competition, notably today from the pace of Russian selling.

That said, Canada will have no problem moving a four million tonnes pea crop size this year, but demand isn't as exclusive, nor do importers lug the same urgency to chase as in other years.

## Bottom line

We expect Canadian crop production estimates released by Statistics Canada to increase as the season progresses.

Mike Jubinville of Pro Farmer Canada offers information on commodity markets and marketing strategies. Call 204-654-4290 or visit [www.pfcanada.com](http://www.pfcanada.com) to find out more about his services.



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# Seven ways Canadian Agriculture will stay healthy into 2018

BY MARTHA ROBERTS

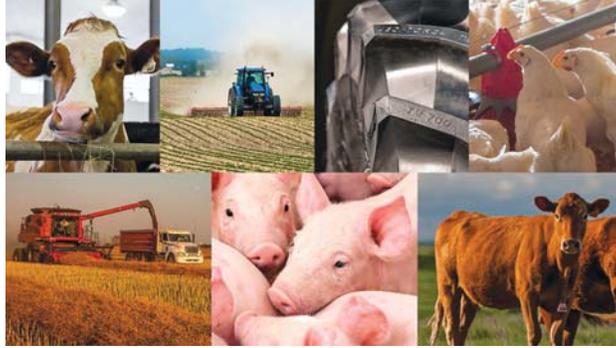
Farm cash receipts across Canada's major ag sectors continue to show strength, a trend that should last until the middle of 2018. With those strong revenues, Canadian ag profitability should also remain positive through the outlook period.

## Seven sectors, Seven positive trends

That growth, measured at the national level for most sectors, will vary, ranging from the low, an expected 2% in average annual revenues gains in Eastern Canada's grains and oilseeds (corn and soy) to the end of 2018, all the way to a high of 12% growth in the hog sector. We forecast cattle receipts to increase 8% and poultry to increase 7% by July 2018. Dairy, whose revenues we forecast to grow 11% in the next 18 months, may surpass our projection, and easily, with recent news about production growth.

There's also good news for the farm equipment sector that experienced slower sales growth of combines and 4WD tractors between 2014 and 2016. Their sales will grow in 2017 and 2018, not likely to the peak reached in 2013, but higher than their most recent levels.

Western grains and oilseed (wheat, canola and lentils) revenues will likely de-



cline over the outlook period, by a modest 2%. Given that the previous two years' receipts were record-breaking, this still bodes well for the sector.

## Farm financials also look to be strong

The general picture of farm financials over the outlook period also looks stable.

FCC Ag Economics expects farm debt levels to grow at a rate that will support needed expansion in Canadian agriculture.

While interest rates are expected to increase slightly, they'll remain historically low, also supporting farm health.

We expect the loonie to average US\$0.78 throughout the second half of 2017.

This is one of the reasons Canadian agri-

culture should continue to outperform the U.S. into 2018, helping to push up receipts here and making Canadian exports more competitive in world markets.

## How did we get here?

Revenue growth in a number of ag sectors has registered some record highs in the last five years.

2015 and 2016 were banner years for grains and oilseeds; the livestock sectors had their highest revenues in 2014, and then a bump in 2017.

For more detail about each of the seven sectors' revenue forecasts, see FCC Ag Economics' economic snapshots series. Also, watch for our newest report, Outlook for Farm Assets and Debt 2017-18, to be released September 12.

*Martha Roberts is a Research Specialist with a focus on economic performance and success factors for agricultural producers and agribusinesses.*

*Martha has 20 years' experience conducting and communicating quantitative and qualitative research results to a number of different audiences.*

*She holds a Master of Sociology degree from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario.*

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# Low protein levels only issue with crop

*Continued from front*

Roy said the only issue that cropped up this harvest was low protein in the spring wheat.

"We are having one little issue with the spring wheat. Protein is very low so we are faced with some fairly high discounts," he said.

"13.5 is the base, and as you drop below 13.5 the discount gets higher and higher. If you get down to below 12 per cent protein it's almost a dollar a bushel. We didn't expect that. With it being dry, usually the protein is pretty good."

Wendy Schatz Leeds, the Lead Agonomist at Sharpe's Soil Services in Moosomin, says protein was low because yields were so much higher than expected.

"Most of the hard red spring wheat I've been hearing is lower protein than what the elevators typically buy," she says. "The standard is 13.5 per cent.

"Everyone is coming in at 12 or 12.5, or just under 13, and that's because they had really, really good yields. Yield and protein work inversely. So when your yields are really high and you don't maybe have enough nitrogen to make up that difference, that's why they are seeing a differ-

ence. They probably yielded 10 bushels higher than they would have fertilized for."

Schatz Leeds says the plants would have taken nitrogen from the soil but more nitrogen would have been needed as fertilizer to make up the difference needed for the higher yields.

"Our theory is the plants grew so well this year, and because there wasn't excessive moisture they were able to root really deep. They probably rooted to three or four feet. There's always nitrogen that sits at those levels. So what happened is that they probably accessed it at the right time. All those things worked together to create that," she says.

She says the growing conditions created high yield, high quality crops, but farmers weren't expecting that and fertilizer levels were too low to address the big yields.

"It's not good for them because the industry wants that 13.5, and because they are not delivering that, most elevators have a discount for that," she says.

Schatz Leeds goes into more detail on low protein levels on page C5 of this age section.

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