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Plain & Valley

April 2024 • Volume 17 Number 4

Covering Southeast Saskatchewan and Southwest Manitoba

At Man-Sask auctioneering competition: Ty Cutler wins Rookie Buckle

BY KEVIN WEEDMARK

Ty Cutler grew up watching his dad auctioneer, and must have learned well, as he took home the Rookie Buckle from the Man-Sask Auctioneering Competition in Virden March 22.

Ty's dad, Ward Cutler, was emcee for the awards.

"It was emotional for both of us," Ty says. "He's up there and he explains what the Rookie Buckle is and he says, 'Yeah I know the champion this year,' and all of a sudden I could tell that he's fighting back the tears.

"I didn't think that I was going to win so I wasn't really paying attention and then all of sudden he says, 'The guy from Moosomin, Saskatchewan.'

"Then he said my name and he was trying not to cry. So I went up there and I'm not really a guy to cry much but when I saw him tearing up, then I damn near did too. I had a tough time making my speech just because I was so shocked and then seeing how happy he was. It made me pretty happy too.

Ty says he grew up watching his dad auctioneer.

"I grew up going with my dad to sales all the time, so whenever I was with him I'd beg him not to take me to daycare, and if the sales weren't going to be too big or too long, then he'd let me come with him. So I'd sit up there with him and put my cowboy hat on. I kind of wanted to do it when I was a kid and then I got busy working and never really thought about it for a while.

"Then last February I was at the Wapella Wildlife Supper and Hugh Garrett asked me if I would give him a hand selling. I had never done it before but I was like, 'I could probably help,' so I went up there and made out okay for never doing it. Then all of a sudden people just kept asking me to do these little fundraisers and all of sudden there's this competition coming up and a guy by the name of Rick Wright convinced me to enter, but I had never sold cattle. So I talked to Gene and Rhett Parks at Whitewood Livestock and they let me come and sell a few there. Then I



Sunnette Kamffer photo

Ty Cutler with his father Ward Cutler at the Man-Sask Auctioneering Competition on March 22. Ty grew up watching his dad auctioneer, and won the Rookie Buckle at the competition.

went to that competition and I've been doing it since, just as much as I can."

Ty started selling cattle at Whitewood Livestock in February of last year, and went to his first competition in April. He then went to Auctioneer School in June.

He said he enjoys all the events he auctioneers at.

"I sell cattle in Whitewood, so the guys' feeder cattle and the calves that they raise. They bring them in and I sell them or sometimes they have bred cow sales and I sell the bred cows. Other than that I do wildlife suppers and all sorts of different fundraisers—I've got a ladies' night coming up. The fundraisers are pretty fun usually and always a good time. Hopefully I can start doing some purebred cattle sales because they're a little bit bigger deal, the cattle go for higher prices."

He said auctioneering is a lot of fun.

"The fun part is I like selling things and making people happy, like the owners if it's a cattle sale, or the group if it's a fundraiser. There's not much better than when someone comes up to you and says, 'Thanks for doing such a great job.' When you're selling cattle that's someone's life. They worked all year to get those cattle as good as they were and so that's a big day for them. If you don't market the cow good enough or if you don't care, then you're not going to make them very happy and that's the point of your job, to sell what you're selling for the highest you can get.

"I just like the idea of it and the competitions are fun. The cattle industry is a great industry.

"Sometimes it's just tough learning how to do it. There's good and bad days, and it's tough say, when you don't have a lot of bidders. But I don't have too many things that I don't like about it."

What it takes

Ty says there is a lot to being a good auctioneer.

"You have to be good at talking into a microphone, obviously, and the more confident you are, the better. There's the chant as they call it.

Continued on page 6



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IJACK gives \$500,000 to airport project

BY KEVIN WEEDMARK
Moosomin's Airport Expansion Project has taken a huge step closer to its fundraising goal with a \$500,000 contribution from IJACK.

The \$10.6 million airport expansion has been divided into four quarters for fundraising, with the provincial government, local municipalities, Nutrien, and local businesses each being responsible for one-quarter of the cost, or \$2,650,000.

The province, Nutrien, and municipalities are at or near the target, and the fourth stage of the fundraising campaign focuses on local businesses.

The contribution from IJACK is the largest in the final stage of fundraising. Dan McCarthy of IJACK said he decided to make the contribution after hearing about the benefits of the CT Scanner.

"I knew it was an important project for the community, but after talking with Jeff St. Onge and Dr. Van, I realized just how important it is," he said.

"It's important for health care, and it will lead to a lot of future growth. It's worth investing in."

He said he believes the most important benefit of the airport expansion project will be the impact on the long-term growth of the community.

McCarthy said it feels great to be able to help out the airport project.

"Oh, it's pretty special, for sure," he said. "It feels good to be able to help out and make a difference for



\$500,000 for Moosomin Airport Expansion

IJACK presented a cheque for \$500,000 recently for the Moosomin Airport Expansion project. From left are Graham Mannle, Richie Barry, and Dan McCarthy of IJACK, and Kendra Lawrence, Jeff St. Onge and Dr. Van of the Airport Committee.

something like this."

\$500,000 makes an impact

RM of Moosomin administrator Kendra Lawrence says the contribution from IJACK makes a big difference.

"We've been working on this a long time and getting this contribution brings the finish line a lot closer,"

she said. "It pushes it a lot closer to the end. We're not there yet—there's still lots of work to do, but this brings us closer. The contributions are coming in really good, but you always need that one person to step up and say, 'I believe in the project,' and to think it's really worthwhile. That helps everyone else see the value."

Jeff St. Onge has been

part of the group pushing for the airport expansion since it started. He said the contribution from IJACK means a lot.

"It's been amazing to see how the whole community has got behind this, and every step of the way I've been encouraged to see the support, to see what kind of community this is. But this one—I just don't know what to say. When

you look and you see Dan and Olga's contribution, the value that they put on our community just shines through in something like this. And to have a facility like this in our town will make such a difference for so many people."

What was his reaction when you found out that IJACK was contributing half a million dollars?

"I'm not going to lie, I

had a tear in my eye," said St. Onge. "My feet were off the ground for a second."

Pavement tenders close April 24

A call for tenders has been issued for pavement on the airport expansion. The tender documents call for a completion date of September 15 this year.

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Monday, April 15	9 am - 3 pm	Prairieland Art Group
	7 pm - 9 pm	Open Studio
Wednesday, April 17	7 pm - 9 pm	Macrame Wall Hanging with Chelsea Doane
Friday, April 19	6:30 pm - 8 pm	Adult & Teen Alcohol ink with Lyla Smart
Saturday, April 20	10 am - 11:30 am	Kids' Alcohol ink with Lyla Smart
Sunday, April 21	1 pm - 5 pm	Open Studio
Monday, April 22	7 pm - 9 pm	Board meeting
Tuesday, April 23	6:30 pm - 8:30 pm	Drawing 101 with Devon Taylor
Wednesday, April 24	6:30 pm - 8:30 pm	HER Girls Club
Friday, April 26	6 pm - 8 pm	Pasta Making with the Overands
Saturday, April 27	10 am - 5 pm	Linocut Printmaking Workshop with Jolene Shepherd
Sunday, April 28	10 am - 5 pm	Linocut Printmaking Workshop with Jolene Shepherd
Monday, April 29	7 pm - 9 pm	Open Studio
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Following meeting at SARM:

Highways Minister promises work on Hwy 8

BY KEVIN WEEDMARK
Saskatchewan Highways Minister Lori Carr told Plain & Valley that work will be completed this summer of resurfacing the mine road from Rocanville to the Nutrien Rocanville mine site, a large patching program will take place on Highway 8 between Moosomin and Rocanville, and work will begin on design for resurfacing that section.

Plain & Valley spoke with Carr following a meeting she had with Moosomin MLA Steven Bonk, RM of Moosomin Reeve David Moffatt and RM of Rocanville Reeve Melissa Ruhland to discuss the state of the highway.

"Steven Bonk has been talking to me about this section of road for quite some time here and he was aware that both of those municipalities were in town for SARM so he said, 'Do you think it would

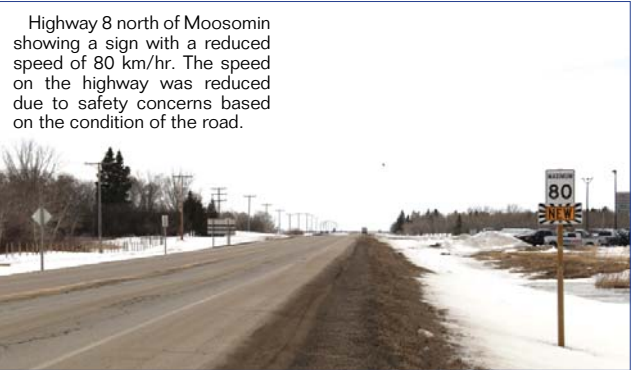
be possible that we could get together and meet with them face-to-face?' I said, 'We sure can,' and the next day we had a meeting," Carr said.

"I think the meeting was really respectful. The community just put forward the issues that they see with the road and then we had the opportunity to respond with what work is coming and what's taking place on there right now."

"They brought up the condition of the road, the amount of traffic that it has, the economic corridor that it is to the mine—just all of the things that make that road so important to all of the communities around there."

Carr said she understands the local concerns. "Their concerns are all very valid and I completely understand where they're coming from," she said.

Continued on page 15



Highway 8 north of Moosomin showing a sign with a reduced speed of 80 km/hr. The speed on the highway was reduced due to safety concerns based on the condition of the road.



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Rural and Remote Health Minister Tim McLeod: 'We've identified a path forward to have a CT Scanner in Moosomin'

BY ASHLEY BOCHEK AND KEVIN WEEDMARK

Saskatchewan Rural and Remote Health Minister Tim McLeod told Plain & Valley that the government has found a path forward to have a CT Scanner in Moosomin.

McLeod and Moosomin MLA Steven Bonk met with community representatives the day before the provincial budget, and spoke with Plain & Valley following the budget in Regina.

"I was really excited to have that meeting with the community and MLA Steven Bonk. We were happy to find a place where we've identified a path forward to have a CT scanner in Moosomin," said McLeod.

He said he believes the local reps at the meeting were excited about the scanner proposal.

"The mood at the meeting was generally excitement and we certainly are happy to continue to work with the community," he said. "There's a fairly generous community and foundation there. They've done a lot of great work. We've done pretty well to come to a point where we've identified a path forward for this project."

He said the ministry and the community will work together on coming up with a framework agreement for the CT Scanner.

McLeod said a lot of details still had to be worked out.

"At this point what we're doing is we're working together with the community and the ministry to establish a framework and we're still working on those details. It's still being worked on as we speak. We're happy to continue to work together with the community and the foundation to build that framework that allows us a path forward."

The CT Scanner would be community or privately owned, and SHA would pay for the scans.

"It's something that we're actively working on right now but we could expect it in a few weeks—we're starting to see a clearer picture of the framework."

Whether the proprietor would have the right to provide private scans as well as serving the public system is another detail that has yet to be worked out, said McLeod.

"That will be one of the criteria being established within the framework but we certainly anticipate that, yes."

"The location of the CT scanner would be part of the framework and we're still working on that but we're pleased with the conversations that we've had at this point and we're really excited that we've identified a path forward that will result in a CT Scanner for Moosomin."

He said Moosomin didn't meet the criteria for a CT Scanner under current SHA rules, so the government wanted to come up with a framework that would work for Moosomin and could be applied in other communities as well.

"Where Moosomin falls didn't meet the criteria SHA has, so we've had to work together with the community to identify a framework that can be consistently applied, not just for Moosomin, but across Saskatchewan for all communities that fit under the same category as Moosomin. We're working on that framework and hopefully, we'll have something more concrete in the coming weeks."

"We're trying to identify some guidelines and some criteria that can be applied fairly across the province, so that when other communities come forward, then we have a consistent approach. So that if a community like Moosomin is looking for the same type of service, then we've got some type of framework that can be consistently applied for everyone."

He said Estevan will have a similar framework developed, as a local person had offered to purchase an MRI for St. Joseph's Hospital in Estevan, which didn't fit into any program until now.

McLeod said the government has to work on unique solutions for communities like Moosomin, which has some unique aspects to its health care, such as having 14 doc-

tors, far more than any other community its size, being the smallest community in Saskatchewan to offer chemotherapy, but provides it to more patients than larger centres, and offering a medical residency program.

"That's a great question, and it is the reason we're developing the framework," he said. "And there's not an easy answer to that. As you know, it's something we've been working on for some time. It's taken us a while to get to this point, and we are really excited to be able to reach this point, where we can at least communicate to the community that we have found a positive path forward."

The budget includes a \$5.1-million increase to expand capacity for specialized CT and MRI medical imaging services.



McLeod sees way forward to CT Scanner for Moosomin

Saskatchewan Rural and Remote Health Minister Tim McLeod told Plain & Valley reporter Ashley Bochek that he can see a path toward a CT Scanner for Moosomin. Plain & Valley was at the Legislature for the 2024 budget.

Dawn Nagy, CAIB

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At Man-Sask auctioneering competition: Ty Cutler wins Rookie Buckle

Continued from front

That's like your numbers and your filler words mixed all together.

You want to be as clear as possible because if people can't understand you—if you're at \$200 and people think you're saying \$50, well that isn't any good.

"So clarity is a big thing and then you have to be a good bid catcher, so you have to look around and make sure that you don't miss anybody."

Ty says he throws in a bit of humor at some of the fundraisers.

"At the fundraisers, everyone is there to have fun and it's not as serious, so I use a bit of humor. Obviously it's serious for me to raise money but I want everybody to have a good time and I like having fun. If I'm at one of those I kind of change the way I sell—the way I sell at Whitewood is going to be different from the way I sell at a fundraiser because I'll crack some jokes and bug people I know and that kind of thing.

"I think when everyone is having a drink and having a good time, if you make jokes, it kind of loosens everyone up more and makes them want to pay attention.

"That's another big thing I think, you have to draw people in. You want to make sure that everybody is paying attention and you have to communicate with them and make them laugh, especially at a fundraiser, you're going to have more bidders because people are having a good time and they want to be involved."

Competitions are a highlight

Ty says he loves the auctioneering competitions.

"The competitions are really fun and I love going to them because they treat you kind of like you're a rock star. The one that I was just at, that's the Man-Sask and it's just Manitoba and Saskatchewan people. It's really good, I really like it and it's a fun warm up.

"Then there's the Canadian one in May and it's a little bit bigger, it's a couple-day deal. You have to do a video interview to introduce yourself and then they have a big competition with up to 35 guys. Afterwards you've got banquet suppers and you go on tours and things like that.

"So those are really fun but one thing is that they're a little stressful. It's nice once you're done because it's a lot more pressure when you've got six judges watching you and you've got all your buddies and other great auctioneers there watching you. So it's pretty stressful but those are probably the funnest things I've gone to.

"At the Man-Sask competition you're selling cattle but then at the end they do kind of a little fundraiser and everybody gets a black box item its called. A company donates the items—so let's say that the Spectator got a Yeti cooler and donated it. So you kind of have job and you're supposed to know a bit about it, so I'd look it up and see what the Spectator does and maybe phone you and ask if



Ty Cutler with the Rookie Buckle from the Man-Sask Auctioneering Competition on March 22.

there's anything you wanted me to say. Then you get up there and do that and say thanks to the World-Spectator for donating this cooler, they're the local newspaper in town etc. So they draw your name for that and you've got that assigned too so you have to do a little bit of homework at night.

"Then all of the guys go and they sell maybe seven or eight drafts of cattle—and you give an opening speech before you start because you're judged on a lot of stuff, not just how you sound but obviously that's a big part of it. You're judged on how you sound, you're also judged on the kind of marker you are, and are you trying hard for the producer to sell their cattle and are you communicating with the people?"

"So you do the opening speech and you want to thank the people that have helped you, your sponsors and everyone putting the event on, then you sell your seven or eight drafts of cattle and once you're done that then you do your black box item.

"At this deal they brought seven or eight guys back for a second go around—the top seven—and I was lucky enough to make that. I drew number one in the top seven so I went and in the second round I did pretty good but

I don't think I did as good as the first round. I was just trying a little too hard maybe but I still did pretty good."

Winning the Rookie Buckle and heading to national competition

Ty did well enough to win the Rookie Buckle.

"If you've been selling cattle for under five years you're considered a rookie, so it's not just necessarily young guys. It could be a 50-year-old man that just started," he says. "There were six rookies there and I was lucky enough to be the top one. There were some pretty good rookies too. Some of the guys would've been in their fifth year, so it's their last year as a rookie.

He will be going to the national competition in Ontario in May. "That's going to be a big one and I'm pretty excited. That one will be a little tougher because it's all of Canada, so there will be a lot of good guys there. It should be fun," says Ty.

He is hoping to make a career out of auctioneering.

"I work at Prairie Livestock and every Tuesday or Saturday I go to Whitewood and sell cattle. Gene Parks sells about half the cattle and I'll sell the other half. I'll see where it goes. I don't know if I'll ever be able to do it full time or not but it's quite possible and I don't know if I'll choose to do it full time because I might want to do something else too. But I think I'll always keep doing it, for sure, one way or another."

What does he like about auctioneering?

"I kind of always thought auctioneers were cool. I go to a sale and still to this day when I hear a good auctioneer and I'm at a bull sale or a car sale, whatever it is, if they're good, I get chills. I just love hearing it. I just think it's kind of cool. You're running the show when you're the auctioneer and it's a lot of fun. When you're good at it and you have a good day, it feels really good."

Reaching a goal

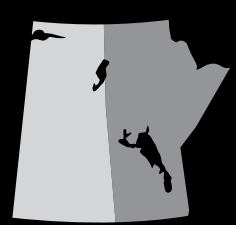
Winning the Rookie Buckle was a goal for Ty.

"It was a big goal of mine. I was pretty honored and it's the Bob Wright Memorial. Rick Wright, he's a big deal with MLMA and Bob was his father. I didn't meet him, he passed before I ever got to know him but he was an auctioneer and he was always helping young guys out, so that's why they decided to do this in his name because he always liked to see the new guys coming up. So it's an honour, really, to have it.

"I have a little note at home where I practice and I taped it to the wall with my goals and that Rookie Buckle was the first goal I wrote down last year when I started.

"There's a rookie award for the next competition at the LMCA, so that will be my next big goal. My next goal after that would probably to win this whole competition, the Man-Sask. That's my next two goals, and then I'll just try to keep improving."

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Megan Kelly pursuing her love of music

Kelly released her first song, Next Step Girl, as a singer/songwriter attending college in Alberta

BY ASHLEY BOCHEK

Megan Kelly is achieving some musical milestones this month with the release of her first single, Next Step Girl, and the upcoming release of her first EP, Reflect.

Kelly, who grew up in Rocanville, is attending Prairie College in Three Hills, Alberta enrolled in a Singer/Songwriter program.

The interview follows:

How important is music to you and how big of a role does it play in your life—both growing up and now?

Wow. It has been my whole life there is no denying it. From growing up in a super musical family of generations of music it has been in my life ever since before I was born with grandma Delta and grandpa Terrance doing shows together, through to my Uncle Anthony and my dad Blake, and my Uncle Brian and all my other uncles doing music, and just passing it down to me.

It is something that has been a massive influence in my life and the talent that my cousins have, Olivia who plays the fiddle, and the voices they all have, it has always been something I have looked up to and strived for, especially the talent from the multiple generations of my family, which is really cool.

You grew up in a very musical family. Did that make it easier for you to follow this path?

Easier and harder in a way. Also coming to school where nobody knows my family is definitely a change. Everybody has their expectations and lots of the times those expectations are great, and I find it fun to break the expectations.

I grew up watching the girls take piano lessons and I begged my mom for piano lessons when I was four years old and no other piano teacher would take me other than the lovely Marilyn Hickie.

Being able to grow up in it, surrounded by music, made it easier. My family is so encouraging, and I appreciate it so much. The love is so real.

Just being able to constantly be around that, and around people who believe in you and are constantly encouraging you, is very refreshing and I take it for granted too often.

When did you start writing songs?

I started writing songs about grade 10 or 11 to get



Grace Deptuck photo

Rocanville's Megan Kelly

out of English projects in high school.

Luckily my English teacher, Mrs. Jennifer Kingdon, was willing for me to let my creative juices fly a little bit. That's kind of where I first started.

We had a project on mental health issues that people face, and I wrote mine on anxiety that young adults face and it is a really cringey song to look back on now, but that is how I got started.

I created an outlet, or a way for me to process things in life.

Did you always think of music as something you could dedicate your life to and make a career out of?

Not always, no. It kind of just sort of happened this year. Originally when I was younger, I wanted to do a lot of different jobs as a lot of kids do growing up, but my family obviously does music on the side and it was never a main source of income per se.

I just kind of assumed that I would just do it for fun too, but with a lot of encouragement and being

a little more educated about the industry taking my program here, I came to realize that I could make music my career.

I originally wanted to take over the family farm when I was younger, but now it has kind of grown into not seeing, myself truly love what I do in anything else. We'll see where this goes, there are no expectations and there are a lot of people that have discouraged me in taking this route, but it'll be a journey and I am willing to tread that path and see where it goes, Lord knows.

Walk me through the process of writing a song. Does the music come first, do the lyrics come first, how does it all come together?

My inspiration kind of changes with every song. I think songwriters in general, when people ask that question, it really depends. For lots of people lyrics come first, but for me they both morph into one—the musical aspect and the lyrics. I always have a long list

of lyric ideas that I would love to use in a song one day and I go through that and pick and choose what I want, so I guess lyrics do come first and then it just goes into one. You get out the guitar, the piano and figure it all out from there.

How excited are you to be attending college to study singing/songwriting? And where are you going to school?

I am in Three Hills, Alberta which is in between Calgary and Edmonton. I am about 40 minutes from Drumheller. Prairie College is a Christian based college that offers this singing and songwriting program. It is a two-year program that strives to help young songwriters to learn about songwriting techniques, the music business, about arrangement and composing, and marketing, it kind of gives a massive overview of all things music.

I like to call it our thesis statement, like masters programs have thesis statements and we kind of have our version of a thesis statement which is recording, producing, and writing our own Extended Play (EP), which is a smaller version of an album. I come out with five songs that I have written, and I've worked with a producer in Calgary that we are connected with through the college, and we get to do that as our final project.

Not only do we get to produce music, but we are graded on it, so we get to plan a whole show which is April 25. We plan and prep a whole show with musicians, stage directors and stage production. It is a big thing, we also sell our CDs at this showcase that we have produced.

What are the next steps for pursuing this career?

I am trying my best to just be able to pursue music

with everything I have.

I am always trying to write, so being able to come out with some more music in the future would be ideal for sure and I am booking gigs this summer for weddings, fundraisers, or celebrations of any kind.

I am doing some shows in Moosomin, I just got booked for the Kinettes Fundraiser in May for their little coffee house event.

I booked my first hometown show in Rocanville at the Rocanville Hall on May 20 to release my EP to my hometown because they are my roots and the reason why I got here, so just to get to do that is exciting.

That is what I want to do as a musician, to bring the creative arts to small towns that don't get artists who come through often and just bring joy to these small towns that don't have a lot of community events.

Continued on page 12

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Firefighter curling championships a huge success

BY RYAN KIEDROWSKI

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

After a whirlwind 10 days of top-notch curling, the dust is starting to settle in Moosomin. For the first time in the history of the Canadian Firefighters Curling Championships, the big event was held outside of a city. Moosomin certainly pulled out all the stops for the national curling event, something organizers, participants and observers alike have been calling a huge success.

"We were a little bit hesitant in a small town—we've never done it in such a small town," noted Canadian Fire Fighters Curling Association president Dean Thulin. "I thought it turned out really good, everything was run to perfection."

"All the feedback that I heard, everyone said it was excellent and they were really impressed with Moosomin's ability to host such a big event," said Town of Moosomin Economic Development Officer Casey McCormac. "I don't know if it could be done in every smaller community, but I definitely think Moosomin has the volunteers and workers that could do this."

The small town hospitality certainly paid off from a logistics standpoint as well.

"It's nice in a small town where nothing's more than five minutes apart; buildings or hotels or anything like that," said Moosomin's Recreation Director, Mike Schween. "We're able to get people shipped here and there and wherever pretty quickly. In bigger centres, it's a little more of a challenge I'm sure. We're able to do different events in different venues over a pretty quick amount of time."

Planning to host the event began with a bid process back in 2018, delayed due to Covid, then revisited in 2021.

"The most important thing was just getting the people here and just having them enjoy our town," said Dale Nixon, one of the main event organizers. "We got nothing but good reviews from everybody and a lot of them admitted they weren't sure what they were coming to when they were coming to Moosomin, but when they left, I got a lot of real high reviews on all our facilities."

The annual championships rotate



Sask wins Canadian Firefighters Curling Championships

Saskatchewan won the gold medal at the Canadian Firefighters Curling Championships in Moosomin. Alberta won silver and Ontario took the bronze.

around the country with Saskatchewan set to host again in 2025.

"It does take a lot of planning. But you know, we'd probably look at it down the road," Nixon said when asked if organizers would consider putting in a bid to host again. "A big shout out to all the fire departments in the Moosomin area for their help, all the volunteers, and especially the host committee. Without them, this thing doesn't happen."

Held since 1959, the Canadian Firefighters Curling Championships—also dubbed "The Fire Brier"—has hit the \$1 million

mark this year in support of muscular dystrophy, raising \$53,000 this year alone.

Local groups will also benefit from fundraising efforts of hosting the Hydrant Championship, including the Moosomin Curling Club, recreation facilities, the Moosomin Fire Department and the CT scanner initiative. Organizers are still counting up those dollars with exact amounts expected in the coming weeks.

Team Sask hurries hard

The curling event is not only a great unifier of firefighters across Canada, but also

holds the honour of being the only event of its kind, according to Thulin.

"This is the only national sporting competition in this country for firefighters," he said.

A total of 11 teams from across the nation descended upon Moosomin to compete in draws from March 16-23. As the final draws of the tournament were slated, it became apparent this would be a western Canada battle between Team Alberta and Team Saskatchewan.

Continued on page 11



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Volunteer with Little Dresses group: Wawota's Suzanne Eisler to receive Saskatchewan Volunteer Medal

BY ASHLEY BOCHEK

Ten years ago, Suzanne Eisler started a volunteer group called Little Dresses, who gather at the Free Methodist Church in Wawota every week. The group sews dresses and boys shorts to be given to African children.

Now she is being recognized for that volunteer work—she is one of the recipients of the Saskatchewan Volunteer Medal. She will receive this award later this month at Government House in Regina.

Suzanne says she never expected this award and is honoured to be recognized for her work with Little Dresses.

"I was tearful when I was told I would be getting this award," she says. "I never expected it. I hadn't even heard about it, so I was honoured when I found out. I felt all those emotions. They phoned me to see if I would accept it. I knew for about two months that I was chosen, but I couldn't say anything to anybody until they announced it. I guess they wanted to see if I would accept it because some people say no thank you and I said, 'oh yes I would'."

Little Dresses volunteers nominated Suzanne Eisler for the award.

"I had no idea about it all," she says. "It was done right under my nose. A lady from the Little Dresses put together the nomination and they all helped her."

Suzanne says the group has succeeded for 10 years because volunteers have kept supporting it all that time.

"People just showed up," she said. "People would show up, material and thread would show up. It is just what we do. The first day, 21 people showed up and I didn't think anyone would show up. Now we are down to about 12 volunteers. We have lost some from moving away or passing away."

"It is senior people about 60 and older who meet to do the Little Dresses. We will go as long as we can. That is all we can say. When I first heard about this idea, Oxbow had a similar group and theirs folded up so then they sent us their supplies. That was a long time ago, but that is all you can do is just hope to keep going. If nobody wanted to do it anymore, we would have no choice but to stop it."

She said she was surprised by the volunteer award.



Sunnette Kamffer photo

Volunteer medal winner

Suzanne Eisler of Wawota sews little dresses to be distributed to children in developing countries. Eisler will be honored with a Saskatchewan Volunteer Medal, which will be presented at Government House later this month.

"I didn't even know anything about it, and I certainly didn't start this for an award. I just wanted to do my part in helping volunteer."

"Volunteering is important because little towns depend on volunteers. You have to do something in your life to help other people. We have made over 10,000 dresses and I think around 3,000 shorts and they have all gone to children who need them."

"We have never ever paid for transportation. They have all gone with people who are travelling especially before COVID. Now, it has really dropped down. Also now, if we don't have anyone going, we can send them to

Saskatoon. They load containers there for stuff to be sent to Africa. I don't know the details about that one—someone else looks after that."

She said she is looking forward to the awards ceremony where she will receive her medal.

"I know the award ceremony is at Government House on April 16. They have a reception after too, but that is about all I know."

"I am absolutely looking forward to the award ceremony. There are 10 of us from around the province getting volunteer medals. Three members of my family will be coming with me as well, it'll be nice."

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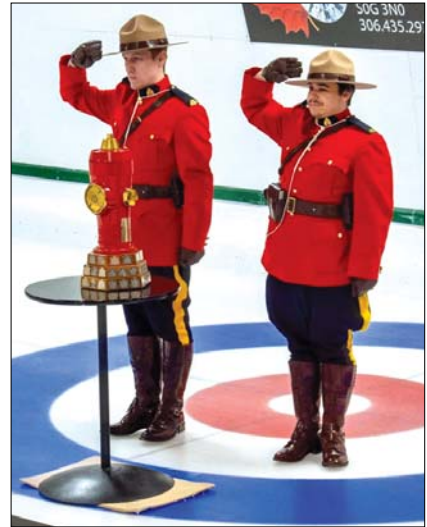
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Above: Teams lined up during the opening ceremonies on Friday, March 15.



Right: RCMP saluting with the trophy during the opening ceremonies on March 15.

Firefighter curling championships a huge success

Continued from page 8

In the first round of final contention, Alberta took a 9-3 win in seven ends, but Team Saskatchewan (comprised of firefighters from Saskatoon, Swift Current and the Co-op Ethanol Complex fire departments) would prove the ultimate victors, with a huge 11-1 score in four ends and a gold medal. Alberta's silver medal crew hailed from the Edmonton Fire Department while the bronze medalist, Team Southern Ontario, was made of members from the Brampton Fire Department.

"The curling is very competitive," Thulin said. "Through the years, we've had a lot of Brier participants and champions."

The level of skill out on the ice was something McCormac was also impressed with.

"You can tell that these guys are all friends and the camaraderie to see between them was just super fun to watch," she said.

The event certainly drew curious fans of the sport—a testament to how strong curling in general features in Moosomin.

"Moosomin's got quite a strong curling community so for the draws, pretty much all the seating was full," Schwan said. "I think the curlers appreciated that, too. We're more than happy with the attendance and the socials were well attended as well. So I think everything really went well."

Next year's championships will remain in the west as Edmonton will host the 63rd edition, but Moosomin's hosting success will certainly be a hard act to follow.



A photo of all of the teams at the start of the event.



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Megan Kelly pursuing her love of music

Continued from page 7
Your first single is "Next Step Girl." Tell me about that song and where it came from.

It's actually crazy how this song came to be. I wrote it in the basement of my auntie and uncle's house in Medicine Hat while I was out for Thanksgiving Dinner. Much to my mother's dismay I didn't spend as much time with them as I probably should have and was writing a song instead.

It was the second last song that I added on my album and it's kind of just encompasses the idea of growing up, noticing the change of emotions and our attitude toward life and how we are so full of wonder as kids and don't have a whole lot to worry about, and just being able to live life freely and having a tender heart in it.

Then, once we grow up, the demands start to get a little more extensive and people are counting on me for my time and they're wanting to get information out of me, and it is exhausting, and I am tired all of the time.

Just looking back on that time of younger me now and thinking 'wow, she isn't around as much as I thought she would be now that I have grown up a little'.

It is a strong reminder of my roots because my fam-



In the studio recording Megan Kelly's first EP. She is studying at college to become a singer/songwriter.



tegrate all those different genres, but I don't think I can answer that question quite yet.

What would you tell others who are thinking of pursuing music as a career?

Well, I think the only way to go is up, as the good old Buster Moon from the movie Sing would say. That was always kind of my thought behind it.

There are a lot of people that will tell you that you can't do it and it just might be too steep of a hill to climb, but if you are truly committed and if you truly love it, you will never work a day in your life as people like to say.

You just have to go all in and just be able to fully trust your work and trust your talent.

You might think you've put a lot of work into something and nothing comes out of it, but you never know what's at the end of the tunnel.

ily actually plays on it. The biggest thing about this EP is that my dad, Blake, my Uncle Anthony, and my Uncle Brian, are all studio musicians on this whole album and it is very prevalent especially in "Next Step Girl" with my Uncle Anthony who played the mandolin and guitar, and my Uncle Brian played bass, and then all three of them did background vocals and are very prevalent in the background vocals in that song especially.

So, just being able to play with them and record with them and go to the studio with them is something I had always dreamed of.

Even before I was accepted into the program I said, 'I want my family on the EP, no questions asked'. Just being able to do that and talk about my

childhood, where I grew up, and my family, having them on that is very very special to me.

When will the rest of the album come out?

My EP will be coming out on April 25 or at least the last week of April hopefully.

How would you describe your genre, or do

you write in different genres?

That is a hard question. I am in the middle of trying to figure that out honestly.

This EP is a mix of a lot of different genres. Of course, it has that country bluegrass aspect that I grew up with, but when I started kind of branching out into my own and listening to my own music, I got a real love for R&B and there are

aspects of that integrated into it.

My professor, Denise Baptista, is a fantastic jazz musician.

I wrote a song for my grandma called "She" that some people have heard, but not a whole lot and that is definitely a jazz piece. It pulled me out of my comfort zone a lot, but it is a big tribute to her.

So, yes I'm able to in-



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Brent Butt performs in Maryfield

Well-known Saskatchewan comedian Brent Butt performed to a sold-out crowd at the Maryfield Auditorium on March 15. The show, called "Comedy Night in the Middle of Nowhere," was a fundraiser for the auditorium, with tickets selling out in less than a day once the show was announced.

Above is Brent Butt performing on the stage at the Maryfield Auditorium. At left is the crowd packing the seats at the historic theatre.

Kevin Weedmark photos



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Cenotaph replicas a fundraiser for centennial

BY KEVIN WEEDMARK

3D printed miniature replicas of Moosomin's cenotaph are being sold by the Cenotaph 100 committee to raise money to help cover costs of the June 8 centennial celebration.

They are being sold for \$100 each. Brian Beckett of the Moosomin Legion and the Cenotaph 100 committee said he is happy with how the 3D printed replicas came out.

"I think it's pretty amazing, myself," he said. The miniatures are being produced by Joe and Riley St. Onge on their 3D printer.

"We've got an order in right now with them for 10, but we can have them make as many as we get orders for," says Beckett. "It's pretty costly for them to do this. It takes pretty near a whole day for them to make one. So right now we're getting them to make 10 and then we'll take orders and they'll make them as we go, then we'll call the customers and say they're ready or we'll ship them out—whatever we need to do."

Currently three have been made. One is at the World-Spectator office, one at the town office, and one at the Legion. People can take a look at the samples at those locations and order them if they want. There is an order form with the sample at the World-Spectator office, or people can order by emailing b.s.beckett@sasktel.net

Beckett says the group is hoping to raise up to \$2,500 with the miniatures.

"If we were to sell 50 units, you know we'd be in that area of \$2,000-\$2,500 profit. It's hard to tell how many people are going to be interested. Not everybody is going to look at it like me and go, 'Whoa, that is amazing,' but I think some people will see it and think it would be good to have and a good way to support the Cenotaph Centennial. It's pretty amazing work when you think of it."

Beckett says plans are going well for the celebration.

"I just heard from the pipe band and they're coming. The only iffy part still is the PPCLI depending on whether they have maneuvers or anything like that, but they swear up and down that they'll have someone here."

Riley St Onge said a lot of work went into the design of the 13-inch miniatures.

"We started with pictures on the stature," he said. "There are 3D apps on your phone that can do 3D scanning and that's what we did for the statue."

Once we had the measurements for these I just actually went to a CAD program and designed it that way.

"We used different nozzles. For finer detail you use a smaller nozzle size to get that level of detail for the text."

Riley says he enjoys the design part of 3D printing the most.

"Designing it can be fun, but unfun at times, but it's nice to sharpen your skills."

"The crazy part is it starts with an idea that's just in your head and ends up being something real."

"When the committee was starting to plan the 100th anniversary, this idea came up," said Laurel St. Onge. "Of course I'm a member of the Legion, so we talked about it kind of at home and Joe was interested. Then Joe and Riley went and took pictures and started working on it."

"We had a selfie stick and we were on a ladder to get the 3D capture—360 degrees," says Riley. "The 3D scanner would have you take like 200 hundred pictures all around it and then the app sends it off to their servers and they compile it and give you a 3D render of the photos basically."

"They had all the measurements and then next time we went to Rocanville where Riley is, he had this all designed," says Laurel.

"There's been a lot of iteration," says Riley.

"There have been tweaks, a few tweaks, to make the belt stand out more and different things like that. His ears didn't get captured on the first ones but my dad went into the program and fixed it up a bit."

"We went back a few times to get better captures of the statue and do more measurements."

Riley says filaments are chosen based on the color of each piece of the product.

"You buy the filaments based on what you want. The base is a marble filament which came out perfect and the granite is a galaxy filament which does the granite look well enough."

"We print the marble base separately, the granite separately, the statue separately, and for the nameplates it does the gray and then the black on top, then we glue them into place."

It takes 15-18 hours to create each replica.

Laurel St. Onge said she's happy her family has been able to help with the Cenotaph centennial.

"I think they appreciate them, and it gives Riley and Joe some experience too and some practice. It's kind of a win-win and it's community—it's local."



Right: One of the 3D printed Moosomin Cenotaph replicas created by Joe and Riley St. Onge. The replicas are being sold for \$100 as a fundraiser for the Moosomin Cenotaph centennial celebration.

Following meeting at SARM:

Highways Minister promises work on Hwy 8

Continued from page 4

"The on-road construction is expected to begin in 2024, so this summer. There will be a major improvement on Highway 8 northeast of Rocanville to the Nutrien potash mine, which is locally known as the mine road. This is a 14.6 km long project which is estimated to cost approximately \$15.1 million. That's an investment that the Government of Saskatchewan is making."

"Then of course there's the other section of road that goes all the way back into Moosomin and right now the speed limit has been reduced to 80 km/hr because there are some sections that are in very rough condition. We've had, as you will fully be aware of, a very strange winter with freeze/thaw, freeze/thaw. For roads, that's not a good mix for them, but as soon as it gets warm enough and we're able to get out there, there will be some significant patching work done on that to help keep that road maintained for this year."

She said design work on resurfacing the Moosomin to Rocanville section will begin soon.

"The design work will be started this year for the remainder of the section of that road that comes back down to Moosomin."

"It all comes down to the budget cycles and of course we have plans for a bunch of different roads already in the mix—so roads that the design has already been done on. We do want to get it done as soon as we can, just because of the nature of that road, the amount of traffic and the importance to the community, and that is what Steven Bonk has been advocating for."

She said a lot of work goes into deciding on the top priorities for road work.

"Everybody's road is important to them, there's no question about that, but it really does come down to safety, traffic numbers and how many people actually travel that road, the nature of the road, the type of traffic that's on that road—is it heavy equipment? Are they bigger semis? That kind of stuff. So all of those factors come into play and of course the condition of the existing road."

She said economic factors also come into play.

"Economic growth is definitely a consideration that needs to be taken into account. The province of Saskatchewan at this point in time is really blessed with economic growth and it's not just in the Moosomin area—it is hap-

pening right across this province. So a lot of factors go into play but economics definitely do also. With growth it's great, but there are these other things that come into play with growth."

She said the province continues to spend significant dollars on highway improvements.

"Over the past few years we've had some really big projects and of course over Covid we did some stimulus funding to keep people working so we had a little bit extra, but overall the Ministry of Highways' capital budget stays fairly consistent. Last year, because of inflation, it did get a top-up to help cover some of those factors and of course we do have a budget coming out next week that will indicate what happens next year."

Carr heard about the state of Highway 8 between Moosomin and Rocanville from Kyle Toffan, the deputy minister of Highways, who was on that road recently.

"My Deputy Minister Kyle Toffan, his children are in hockey and so he was on that road two weeks ago. So he got to see firsthand exactly what the condition is. He has the same consensus as the community, that it needs some work."

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Esterhazy Town Council

Esterhazy receives more funding for new hospital

BY RYAN KIEDROWSKI
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

The new St. Anthony's Hospital in Esterhazy will once again see an extra quarter million dollars coming their way, thanks to what the provincial government has touted as "the largest investment ever" in health care capital. Up some \$180 million over last year, a total of \$516.8 million will go to support ongoing projects across Saskatchewan. "We have another \$250,000 for planning dollars," said Melville-Saltcoats MLA Warren Kaeding of the Esterhazy commitment. "So that's huge."

The announcement reassures the importance of a new facility in the community, even if the project is still in development.

"What that basically says to us is that it's money that allows them to go to the next level in terms of their planning stages, which is to make the site selection as well as continue on with the needs assessments," said Esterhazy Mayor Grant Forster. "We know that it's good news for us."

The community has been fundraising for over 15 years on the new hospital project, with an estimated \$11 million worth of cash and commitments to date.

"In the last two [provincial] budgets, we've got a total of \$500,000—that's money that they've committed to us," Forster said.

In the town council meeting on March 27, CAO Tammy MacDonald mentioned receiving such an amount back to back is rare. Now that the project is in the second phase of development, future meetings with SHA are imminent.

"They did say they were going to call to have a meeting with us after the budget was released," she told council.



St. Anthony's Hospital in Esterhazy.

Moosomin starts planning for Communities in Bloom



Mike Schwean spoke about how significant the Moosomin Legion is to the community.

BY JOEY LIGHT

After winning its population category for Saskatchewan in Communities in Bloom last year, Moosomin is starting to plan for Communities in Bloom for 2024.

Angela Thorn, the vice-chair of this year's committee, said she's hoping to build on last year's success.

Last year was the first time in many

years that Moosomin had entered the competition.

"I thought last year was great, being as I wasn't working with the town, I seemed to hear a lot from other community members and noticing stuff around town. Hearing all the excitement, people seem to embrace it and really got behind it. Hopefully we can grow that bigger every year."

Community members getting involved

Thorn said the important part of Communities in Bloom is getting the whole community behind the effort.

"I definitely noticed more people around town starting gardens and planting flowers, I think it's just something that grew and something for people to focus on. I think it just brought people together, wanting to make their part of the town look better."

Program made a difference last year

She said she heard lots of comments about how good the town looked last summer.

She said there are a few things the committee would like to do differently this year, including getting more young people involved.

"If we can get some young people interested and who want to feel some community pride and want to help out that would be super!"

She said that part of the impact of Communities in Bloom is that once the community starts looking better, people are more motivated to keep it looking good.

"Trying to encourage people to even just

pick up some garbage they may see and helping around the community. I know the school has a day they go out and pick up garbage around town, it would be great to encourage that more."

She said there are lots of reasons Communities in Bloom is important for Moosomin.

"It's important for our community and our tourism. The better we make our town the more people will come and they'll spend money and keep our local business economy going. I think we just need to figure out a way to bring people in off the highway and out to the golf course and places like that. I think the better kept our town is the more community involvement we have for people to feel proud and having that pride for our community, the more it will just flourish and people will want to come. If we want to keep our growing I think it's important to have a lot of community involvement and have people who want to make a difference with our town."

Thorn said she was happy with how many people got into the spirit of Communities in Bloom and planted purple flowers for last year's theme. This year the theme colour will be orange.

The Communities in Bloom committee had its first meeting on March 27 to discuss new ideas and plans for this summer.

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Moosomin Visual Arts Centre launches after-school art program

BY RYAN KIEDROWSKI
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

A new after-school program is sure to get the creative juices flowing for kids in and around Moosomin. Starting April 8, the Moosomin Visual Arts Centre will begin programming weekday afternoon for students ages 7 to 12.

"Art is known to create more creative problem solvers, so that's awesome for anything you choose to do in your life, too. People who practice art are happier people, usually," said Krista Crellin, MVAC chair. "We just want to give the kids that are interested in art an opportunity to create in a safe space. We obviously love art, and I think it's important to the growth of our kids and community."

The task at hand is to diverge from the 'cut and paste' methodology, instead fostering creativity and the chance to explore what form of expression youth most align with.

"We hope to deepen their un-

derstanding of design elements and composition and all the different materials that we have available to them," Crellin explained. "Just really give them a chance to explore their creativity far more than what they would get in school."

Crellin anticipates space for 10 students each day under the guidance of retired teacher Melissa Magnusson.

"She's a creative person, too, so I think they'll have a lot of fun with her," Crellin said.

While programs such as this may seem grassroots, exposure to artistic freedom at a young age can propel one's mind, creating learning skills often drawn upon later in life.

"Hopefully, they find an area of art that really interests them and continue to practice throughout their lives," remarked Crellin when asked about what the intended take away is for the students. "That's why we hope to engage them in all these different opportunities, to try different materials and different techniques

so they find what they love.

"We want to encourage kids young to love the arts, and hopefully they stick to it," she continued. "We want to see them throughout their lives coming to the Art Centre and practicing."

The Moosomin Visual Arts Centre has been a busy place since officially opening in February at 701 Ellice Street. The class calendar is chock-full with open studio time available as well. Crellin noted the painting and youth drawing classes seem to be a big hit with locals.

"They sell out immediately, it seems," she said. "So there are kids that are interested in art!"

The Moosomin Visual Arts Centre is always welcoming new faces from all places around the region—those interested in signing up for a class or perhaps people with a penchant to share their knowledge as a teacher.

For those interested in getting involved in the arts centre or signing up for the after school program, they can visit moosominvac.com for more information.



The Moosomin Visual Arts Centre has started an after school program for children ages 7-12.

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Good Question Saskatchewan looking for your ideas and questions

BY KEVIN WEEDMARK

CBC Saskatchewan has launched a new podcast called "Good Question Saskatchewan." The podcast takes people's questions about anything in Saskatchewan—from weather to food to geography, to history and culture—and tries to answer them.

There's just one thing that's needed to keep the podcast rolling: Questions.

Podcast producer Nichole Huck and host Leisha Grebinski are on the hunt for questions for the new show.

"Nationally CBC is wanting to do more local podcasts. We have this format called 'Good Question Saskatchewan.' There's a similar one in Montreal and there's one in PEI as well, and the whole goal is, in some communities, to be a little bit more responsive to whatever the community wants us to be looking into," explains Huck.

"I think as journalists we have ideas of what we think people are interested in and you get a show every day to do that with too, but this is a little bit more fun because it gives us the opportunity to just be reactive to whatever they actually want. That is why I wanted to reach out to you because right now probably some of our CBC listeners know about the podcast and are submitting questions but I'd like to get a wider range of questions from a wider part of the province because it'll just make it richer.

"We just thought that there's a real gap in Saskatchewan podcasts right now. There are a few specific to politics or very specific to agriculture or things like that, but there is nothing like this right now as of yet. So we thought that we'd find out if this was something that there's an appetite for here."

"I think that this podcast allows us to tap into the spirit of Saskatchewan," adds Grebinski. "Of course we do that on the radio. It's something that I think we've always felt like we had the opportunity to do. With this format we get to play around a little bit more and instead of following the news of the day, which we both care deeply about, we get to better understand people and places.

"So we're just tapping into the spirit of Saskatchewan and rather than more stories that feed into polarization or conversations that only take place on social media, we get to just see one another as people who love Saskatchewan."

Huck says the podcast can also be helpful to people who are not from Saskatchewan, but who are new to the province or planning to move here, or to people from the province who are feeling homesick and live elsewhere.

"Thinking about how many people are new to the province also, I kind of see this as building a little bit of a toolkit or a beginner's guide to Saskatchewan," says Huck. "Like if you are thinking about moving here, or if you just moved here, or if you moved away and are feeling homesick, this can help."

"My buddy who moved to Toronto was listening to it because he was feeling homesick and there was that Regina pizza episode and it just made him feel connected again."

Continued on page 26



"Good Question Saskatchewan" host Leisha Grebinski.



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Plain & Valley

APRIL 2024 • Page 21

Covering Southeast Saskatchewan and Southwest Manitoba



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

Soil conditions good leading into seeding Area producers gearing up for a busy season

BY RYAN KIEDROWSKI
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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

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

With some areas of Saskatchewan still poised for drought conditions, the southeast may be the envy of

those closer to the Alberta border.

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

Right now, she foresees a decent growing season and perhaps a wetter year ahead.

"I think we're going to have a good growing season. We've had above-normal temperatures for the winter, and I'm a believer in averages. So we might have to recoup that somewhere along the way, but March is looking pretty normal," Schatz Leeds remarked. "To me, this feels like a regular March, so that might be a good sign that we're going to continue with more normal weather. There are some predictions that we're going to have a wet in-season, a wet summer, which is always a positive, too.

As long as the farmers don't have drowned-out areas, that usually means there's really good crop potential, and maybe we'll see some fungicide usage needed."

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

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

Continued on page 36

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School and community engage youth in farming

BY EMILY LEESON
FCC

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

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

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

Learning that reflects agricultural heritage

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

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

That year, the school had nine students graduate, most of whom were heading towards further studies



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

in agriculture. But when he asked them what path within agriculture they were specifically interested in, many were unaware of the variety of different routes they could pursue.

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

A simple idea leads to business investment

Without a background in agriculture himself, Van

Lagen was nonetheless up for the challenge. "I've definitely learned a lot in the last few years," he says with a laugh.

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

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

The answer was yes.

community assist with different aspects of the farm and Van Lagen says there's a real sense of ownership being built. The community is re-invested in the school and the students are taking the reins of their own education.

Students in grades seven

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

Continued on page 37

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10 ways to drought-proof canola

BY **MARISSA ROBITAILE BALOG**
 Farmers can't control the weather but they can control their weather preparedness. Can farmers actually "drought-proof" the crop? No. A long drought will result in significant yield drop no matter what. The following steps can however give canola a better chance at moderate success when dry conditions occur.

1. Leave tall stubble. Research from the Prairies shows that, in dry conditions, moisture from snow trapped in stubble increases until stubble is about 12" tall.

2. Seed between the stubble rows. This works in tandem with tall stubble. Precision seeding tools that work between the rows of tall stubble will result in fewer complications from the tall stubble. Farms get the moisture gain from the snow trap without the issues of poor seed placement. A combine that achieves uniform residue spread also helps.

3. Choose weather-tolerant cultivars. Cultivars that yield consistently well in a broad range of conditions may provide an advantage when drought conditions occur. Ask around to see which cultivars performed best in recent dry seasons.

4. Select fields with low herbicide carryover risk. Canola is extremely sensitive to Group 2 herbicide carryover. Areas with moisture accumulation through the previous June, July and August of 4" or less will be at highest risk of herbicide carryover. That risk will be even higher in areas with multiple dry years in a row. Residual herbicides need moist soils and warm temperatures for breakdown to occur within the expected time frame.

5. Provide balanced nutrition. Crops with access to an adequate supply of all necessary nutrients will have lower stress and increased health. Recent research from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada shows that adequate sulphur can improve results in drought conditions.

6. Use very low rates of seed-placed fertilizer. Even a small amount of fertilizer can damage seed and seedlings in dry conditions. Higher seed-bed utilization can increase the spread between seed and fertilizer, and lower the risk from seed-placed fertilizer, but these high disturbance openers also dry out the soil.

7. Consider a split fertilizer application. The simplest approach is to apply fertilizer at the time of seeding using rates based on the usual yield expectation. An alternative is to fertilize for low-moisture

yield targets, then add an in-crop application if moisture and yield outlook improve.

8. Achieve the recommended plant stand. The recommended range is five to eight plants per square foot. Emergence rate may be lower than anticipated in dry conditions and farmers will need enough seed to achieve the five-plant minimum.

9. Seed at around 1" depth. When seeding early into dry soils, seed around 1" - even if seed is not placed in moisture. Rain, when it does come, can provide the moisture needed for germination and emergence. Seeding deep to chase moisture can result in lower vigour, delayed emergence, uneven stands and more flea beetle

susceptibility. If seeding to reach moisture, place seed at the top of the moisture and pack well to prevent further moisture loss.

10. Keep other stress to a minimum. Remove weed competition. Weeds take up moisture and nutrients while the crop struggles to establish. For flea beetles, the action threshold of 25 per cent leaf area loss could be lowered with a thinner, dryer stand.

For more, including valuable links, read the full article in the Plant Establishment section at canolawatch.org/fundamentals.

Marissa Robitaille Balog is an agronomy specialist with the Canola Council of Canada in Southern Alberta. Email robitaillem@canolacouncil.org.



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Government of Canada and Saskatchewan announce 2024 Crop Insurance Program enhancements

BY SAMANTHA EDEL

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

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

"It is important to ensure Business Risk Management Programs are comprehensive and provide relevant, reliable coverage for the diverse operations of our Saskatchewan producers," Marit said. "We recognize weather conditions brought significant challenges in recent years

and these programs are a producer's first line of defense. I encourage all producers to take a proactive approach to tailor their coverage to further manage and mitigate their risk."

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

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

SCIC's existing Weather-Based Programs include Forage Rainfall Insurance, the Corn Rainfall Insurance, and Corn Heat Unit Insurance. The rainfall insurance programs provide protection in the event seasonal precipitation is below the long-term average, adjusted for extreme heat. The Corn Heat Unit Insurance Program insures against a shortage of heat units over the growing season. A selection of program options allows producers to tailor coverage to their needs.

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

Continued on page 38



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Good Question Saskatchewan looking for your questions

Continued from page 18
 "And it's always through that lens of 'What does this tell you about the culture of this place?' And it's fascinating, I think that if you weren't from here, I think you'd have a really good sense of the place and hopefully by the end, when we're done with this podcast, you'll have a really good sense of Saskatchewan, and that's why we need more stories from different parts of the province as well."

The podcast is brand new, launching at the end of January.

"We have five or six episodes so far and they'll be dropped weekly on Tuesdays," says Grebinski.

"I want to give you another example of something we're working on right now that is a story as old as time—the ongoing conversation about daylight saving time and how we don't bring forward or roll our clocks back. We've told that story over the years, but it's kind of funny how, for me as someone who's lived here my whole life, I actually couldn't really tell you why."

"So I'm still finding that there's so much to discover about Saskatchewan that you think you know, but do you really know? And they're great conversation starters just about this place."

"Thinking about that story as one that's been told over and over—I mean Brad Wall campaigned saying 'I'm getting rid of it' in 2007, and we talked about a referendum in 2011 and it didn't happen. But today in 2024, following a year where we saw unprecedented growth in Saskatchewan and so many people moving to Saskatchewan from outside of the country, how does that affect people today?"

"So I talked to a guy who will be on a future podcast about this. He's from India, he works at the university (of Saskatchewan), he connects researchers from all around

the globe, he's at VIDO, so a high profile place where a lot of stuff happens. He's lining up meetings in Australia, and he's trying to reach his parents back home. You wouldn't think an hour would mean much but it throws his life off for a bit. So he's representative of a whole lot of people here who may not have been here that long and are like 'Why don't we follow the rest of the country?'"

"We're going to tell you on Good Question Saskatchewan."

"And another one is bunnyhugs. I will tell you why we call it a bunnyhug because I've done research and Nichole and I found some people who could talk about it and that's just for fun."

"So the podcast is a little explainer about the culture of this place, and hopefully when people listen they feel a sense of belonging and a sense of understanding even if they're just a tourist and they're like, 'What's cool about this place?' They are these little bite-sized stories about Saskatchewan."

What are some of the questions that have been tackled so far on some of the episodes?

"Nichole has mentioned Regina style pizza. That was our first episode and, wow, if we weren't sure what would resonate with people, Regina pizza sure did," says Grebinski.

"Because it's not just about the pizza," adds Huck. "It's about the storytelling in the podcast."

"The one character that I got to go meet at Tumblers, the guy who owns Tumblers in Regina, he is just an amazing character. He is so passionate about pizza that he keeps his recipe locked up. Not just his recipe but his spices, and he takes his garbage to an undisclosed location so there's not any business spying. He's just like next level, and I think that people just really resonated with this guy and his passion for this pizza—I mean you love it or hate it,



"Good Question Saskatchewan" producer Nichole Huck.

right?"

"It's the Greeks that we give credit to because if you go to The Tower restaurant in Estevan, you can get that same style of pizza, but it's the storytelling in it that makes it fun. I think that we're always trying to be a little bit surprising in the storytelling. There's always a little element that makes you go, 'Huh.'"

"Kevin, probably every newcomer you talk to who's moved to your part of the province has asked you about winter, right? Like, 'What am I supposed to do in winter? What do other people do in winter?' So we tackled that because it's such a common question that people get, and 'How are we supposed to dress?'"

"It's not just about the list on how to do it. It's about people who came from hot countries and they thought they were going to die at the start of winter. These are the things that made them able to settle and not only accept winter, but embrace winter and become people who love winter. Leisha went and met this new Ghanaian student who's first job was at an ice skating rink and she had to Google what inclement weather was before she started. So it's just that storytelling that makes it special."

"We did one on cold plunging which is a thing right now," says Grebinski. "It's a bit of a fad and you see a lot of it on social media. People are selling these plunge pools, there's people jumping into lakes when it's cold and sharing it on Instagram, but Nichole was thinking about how she was seeing people in Saskatchewan doing it."

"So we took this kind of craze around cold plunging and applied it to life in Saskatchewan and put a critical lens on it because we're still journalists and wanted to know more. Like what are the benefits and what are the risks? How does this apply to life in Saskatchewan?"

"We found people who do it for the emotional benefits, and so I loved that episode because it was a surprising take. And we're all scrolling, we all see lots of things online, but then to bring it back home to a place like Saskatchewan, you learn about the people, you learn about how it applies here, and there were just a lot of layers to that story that I don't think you can find anywhere else."

"One of the questions I asked of someone who works outside—he has a pile company and spends most of his winter outside and takes a cold shower in the morning," adds Huck. "He's like, 'Is there something to this? Why does taking a cold shower actually feel better for me to go and be able to work outside for the rest of the day after that?' So he was a bit of a surprising person asking the question, and I think that we were able to think about it in bigger terms too. If people are doing this for resilience, then what does it say about us Saskatchewan people who are always putting ourselves in uncomfortable situations? Does that just build resilience around our area and we as Saskatchewan people?"

"So I think it's really fun and I'm hopeful that it's something that people who are taking a road trip in Saskatchewan can just put on in the car with their family. Or if you're driving to work or wherever, you can just put it on and learn something, have something conversational to talk about with people. It's like fun facts about this place that help you understand other people in it."

Grebinski says they try to find different ways to answer the various questions, with a heavy focus

on storytelling from real Saskatchewan people.

"Experts are part of it, but I think the examples that we just shared really just demonstrate to me that it's about the people. So sure we can find people who know a bit about layering up in winter, and so yes, they are experts, but really the heart of that story was that person's own personal experience and her own sense of adventure in moving here and taking a job that she knew nothing about."

"So yes, there's always someone to call on who has expertise in whatever topic it is that we're pursuing, but I really think what I've learned over the past few episodes—and I think Nichole would agree—it's about our neighbors. It's the people who are around us."

"I think we've always known this because both Nichole and I have worked at CBC a long time and we're privileged to talk to people all the time, but there's something special about this."

Questions for the podcast can be emailed to goodquestionsask@cbc.ca

As part of the interview for this story, Nichole and Leisha asked Kevin for some ideas for questions for the podcast. Read his column next week for the questions he has.

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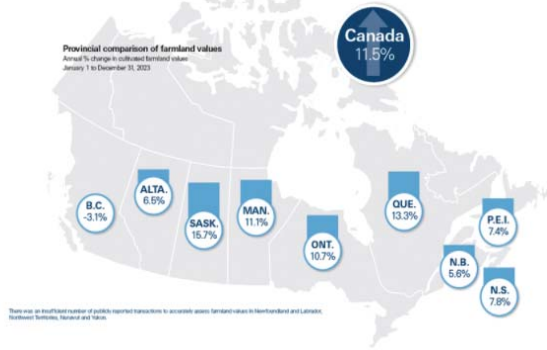


Figure 1: Average cultivated farmland value changes for 2023.

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

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

2023 upward trends in farmland values suggest a resilient market

**BY CORBIN CHAU
FCC DATA ANALYST, VALUATIONS**

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

Provincial trends

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

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

For the first time in recent years, we are publishing a provincial decline with British Columbia recording an average decrease of 3.1%. This province is where we find the highest per acre values in the country, and the largest decreases in values were observed in regions of the province with the highest per acre value.

Cash on hand stimulates growth

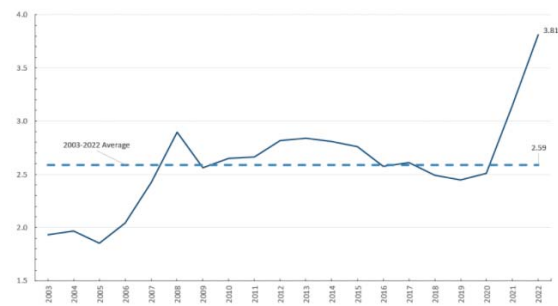
Statistics Canada reports that total field crop receipts recorded the strongest

growth between 2022 and 2023 in Saskatchewan (6.1%) and Manitoba (4.4%) (Table 1). The largest appreciation reported between 2021 and 2022 was in Quebec and Ontario at 28.9% and 27.3%, respectively. These four provinces led the country in farmland value appreciation in 2023. This positive correlation between receipts and land value appreciation suggests that liquidities lead to stronger purchasing power and higher demand for farmland.

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

Looking forward to 2024

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



Sources: Statistics Canada, FCC Calculations

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

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Budget delivers record investment in agriculture

Saskatchewan's 2024-25 Budget released March 20 supports Saskatchewan's agriculture industry through investments in programming for producers and agri-businesses, funding for agricultural research and enhancements to crop insurance. The Ministry of Agriculture budget is \$570.6 million, a \$22.4 million increase from the previous year.

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

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

Crop Insurance premiums and coverage levels are both down from 2023, largely due to an average decrease in insured commodity prices. The average multi-peril coverage level is \$389 per acre and average premium is \$12.71 per acre. Producers' coverage and premium are individu-

alized to their operation, reflecting each producer's production records and claim history.

Introduced for the 2024 Crop Insurance Program, Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation's (SCIC) weather-based programs now provide options to insure intercropped and additional mixed feed crops. All weather-based programs are enhanced through an added 38 weather stations to SCIC's existing network, bringing the total to 224 stations across the province.

The budget invests \$89.4 million for a second year of strategic initiatives under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, including the Irrigation Development and Irrigation Efficiency programs, to help develop new irrigated acres and support improved energy and water efficiency of existing systems. Saskatchewan has developed more than 55,000 new irrigated acres in the last four years, well on the way to the Growth Plan target of 85,000 acres.

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

technologies.

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

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



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Key international export markets see significant agri-food volume increases

Algeria, Indonesia and Morocco, three of Saskatchewan's key international markets, saw significant increases in provincial agri-food exports in 2023 over the previous year.

"The increase in exports to important international markets like Algeria, Indonesia and Morocco are yet another example of our agriculture sector's resiliency and dedication to providing reliable, high-quality agri-food products worldwide," Agriculture Minister David Marit said. "Numbers like these showcase the success we are seeing through our presence in world markets and building key relationships with our partners across the globe."

Exports to Algeria had the third-highest increase in volume among Saskatchewan's top markets at 1,232,110 tonnes, or over 69 per cent. Algeria is Saskatchewan's fourth-leading market in volume

with the top export commodities being durum and lentils.

Indonesia's export numbers had a similar rise with an over 62 per cent increase in volume. Indonesia rose to Saskatchewan's sixth-leading agri-food market in 2023. The top commodity Saskatchewan exports to Indonesia is non-durum wheat.

Morocco had solid growth in volume with a 22 per cent increase reaching 745,339 tonnes. Morocco is currently Saskatchewan's eighth-leading export partner, with durum and lentils being the top commodities.

Saskatchewan has already surpassed its 2030 Growth Plan target of \$20 billion in agri-food exports with total shipments of \$20.2 billion for 2023. Overall, the total volume of Saskatchewan's agri-food exports increased over 26 per cent over the previous year.





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Birkbeck safely out of Haiti

Tanya Birkbeck flew out of Haiti just before the airport was closed by gang violence

BY KEVIN WEEDMARK

Tanya Birkbeck, who works with the World Food Organization in Haiti and who grew up in Welwyn, Sask. is safely out of Haiti.

Shortly after Birkbeck told her story to World-Spectator journalist Ashley Bocek, explaining the important work she does with the World Food Organization in the country, Haiti exploded into major unrest with criminal gangs attacking the airport in Port-au-Prince.

On Monday, March 11, the day the interview was published in the World-Spectator Birkbeck stopped by the World-Spectator office to let everyone know she is safe, and to provide an update before flying to Uganda.

She was home visiting her family in Welwyn, on a planned break from her duties in Haiti.

Birkbeck says she wishes she was still in Haiti, and the only reason she is no longer there is timing, with the airport attacks starting only two days after she left for a scheduled break.

"I'm a consultant, so that means that once a year I have to take a month break—it's mandatory. It was just timing. It was a complete coincidence that my contract break was due and so I left," she says. "Actually everything was totally normal at the airport when I left and then two days later was the first attempt of attacks at the airports. So I was watching that and was thinking, 'okay we don't really know where this is going to go' at that point, but the situation has continued to degrade since then.

"So basically, if I hadn't left when I did, I would still be stuck there. The staff, everybody who was still there in Port-au-Prince at that time, is stuck there. They're sheltering in place and they're doing okay.

"I'm in constant contact with them and for a lot of people who are outside of the country right now it's a wait-and-see situation to see when people can go back or if they'll go back to work maybe in the north of the country in Cap Haitien where there's another international airport that's accessible at this point. So some members of our team including our country director have gone to Cap Haitien. We have a field office there, so they're functioning out of there and the staff in Port-au-Prince are sheltering in place. Everybody seems to be doing okay and they seem to be coping."

Birkbeck says she is worried about her colleagues.

"Of course I'm worried about them. It's not an easy situation and one of the most difficult parts of it is that you just don't what's going to happen," she says. "You can't plan when you're going to leave—you have to be ready to go at any point but it could be two days, it could be two weeks, it could be two months. You don't



Tanya Birkbeck and World-Spectator editor Kevin Weedmark at the World-Spectator office.

really know how long it's going to be. So for a lot of people that have been in similar situations, I know that uncertainty can be really, really difficult. And the other thing that's really hard, honestly, is that you really worry about your family at home—about them worrying about you. For my colleagues there, that's what they've told me. They're like, 'We're doing fine. We're coping.'

"They're really busy because the communications team is getting tons of media requests right now. Everybody wants to know what's going on in Haiti. So I'm sure that they're overwhelmed with work and you know, you just put your nose down and you do what you have to do, but then you're really worried about your family at home and how they're perceiving it and what they are getting from the news.

"You see the chaos on the street, and you worry about people there, but we're not wandering through the streets. The only time we ever leave is in an armoured car and right now nobody is going to those areas. That's not what my colleagues are experiencing, but they are experiencing a lot of uncertainty right now."

Birkbeck says it's not surprising that the security situation in Haiti has degraded so much, and security officials had predicted the current breakdown.

"We've known for quite some time. Our security team is analyzing the situation all the time and the security team is a very key part of the organization. We don't do anything without doing a thorough security assessment before we move out on any

mission within the country. So the security team is looking at it and it's something that they predicted would happen—it was just a question of when. So what's happening right now is not a surprise to me. Of course I'm saddened to see what's happening. I'm saddened to see that there are people being killed on the street. I don't know what the path is out of this but it's not a total surprise."

Is Birkbeck hopeful that there is some way forward for Haiti that will get the country past this difficult time?

"I think you always have to have hope," she says. "I couldn't do the kind of work that I'm doing if you don't feel that there's a path out somehow. Despite the huge challenges right now in logistics and security, WFP is still managing to provide hot meals for thousands of people who are displaced within Port-au-Prince. This is thanks to the network of local organizations that we work with. So every week, for the past couple of months, we've been seeing thousands of

people being displaced within the capital and then in this most recent stint of violence, that's been magnified. There's even more. So we've continued to be able to deliver hot meals and that's a stop gap. A hot meal is not a sustainable relief solution but it's something that can provide people with the food that they need in an immediate sense.

"Also in rural areas we continue to work with farmers, we continue to work with farmers' co-ops and we continue to work with schools so that we continue to provide school meals when it's possible to the schools that are open. So even though the situation is extremely challenging, it's not exactly the same situation across the country that it is in the capital. So in some areas movement is possible and being able to continue to support farmers, support local markets and provide meals is something that we can continue to do.

Continued on page 32



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Birkbeck safely out of Haiti

Tanya Birkbeck flew out of Haiti just before the airport was closed by gang violence

Continued from page 31

"I think that really the hope for the country just in terms of food security—which is the domain that I specifically work in—I think that the key is definitely to work with the farmers. People have this image of WFP bringing in bags of rice and beans from outside of the country and it's true that it is a part of what we do, as Haiti is a country that's dependant on food imports, but the real way to not only assure the food security of the country but to also protect the country from the effects of these shocks of—it could be of violence or it could be an extreme weather event—the way to protect the country from that is to have local production and to have locally accessible food.

"So if the road is blocked from Port-au-Prince and a city outside of the capital, there's still a source of food. So I think that's something that will resonate with a lot of people here. To have a strong local economy is really the key to helping the whole country. A humanitarian response is really important because if you don't have food and you have people who are starving, that creates greater unrest.

"So we need to have a humanitarian response and we need to have work with the local farmers, but there does need to be a security solution as well, particularly in Port-au-Prince. That's not my place to say what that might be, but the security situation does have to improve."

Birkbeck says she is happy for her family's sake that she is safely out of Haiti, but says, professionally and personally, she wishes she was there.

"In this particular moment I happen to be staying with my mom and dad, and for the sake of my mom and dad, I'm glad I'm here, because it's really difficult to know that your family members are at home and watching this on TV," she says, "But professionally and personally I wish that I was there because I know that whenever you're in a moment of crisis like this, communication is super important. For our organization in particular, it's really important for us, not only to make sure that the world knows what's happening in Haiti right now but to also say, 'Despite what's happening we are able to continue. We still have a path forward in terms of improving the food security of this country.'"

"So I wish that I was there to help my



Tanya Birkbeck interviewing women in Haiti who have started small businesses thanks to cash transfers administered by the World Food Program.

(Photo: WFP/Jonathan Dumont)

team, honestly. Personally I can't wait to go back, but at the same time I've learned over the years that there are situations like this that are completely out of our control and so there's nothing that I can do to get back faster. When the time comes and there's the logistical capacity for me to do so, I know that the organization will make it happen, and for now I just have to sit tight and just support them however I can just over Whatsapp basically."

Birkbeck says there are small ways she can help from outside the country.

"I can provide emotional support. I can ask 'Do you need to talk?' If they ever need words of encouragement or, for my colleagues that are there, if they want to bounce ideas off of me, of course I'm always available for that," she says. "I've been taking an awful lot of media requests. Even this morning my Whatsapp is flashing—CNN wants to talk, BBC wants to talk—so of course I'm passing those on to my colleagues and making sure that all of the communication that I'm getting is passed on. Other than that it's a bit difficult—just offer emotional support and help support them if they have any questions."

Birkbeck says it's not up to her to decide what happens next in terms of getting back

to Haiti.

"It's not my call. It's completely out of my hands," she says. "It's something which, in the case of a crisis, there's a crisis management team within the WFP but also

within the UN as a whole. So these are decisions that are being made on another level from me and even sometimes outside of the organization itself, so there has to be an establishment of it being safe and it also has to be cost effective if you're moving a lot of people—a logistical line to go back into the country. So sometimes the people who are there just have to sit tight and the people who are outside also have to sit tight and just be patient."

With a month of leave, Birkbeck was planning to travel to Uganda and South Sudan for her holiday.

"Because I have so many contacts and so many friends there," she says. "I know a young lady there and she has actually studied journalism. I met her at a radio station in South Sudan and she was in a difficult situation, to be married against her will and without her consent.

"So we did a crowd-funder maybe five or six years ago now, I topped it up, and we were able to send her to university in Uganda and she's graduated with a Journalism degree.

"So she's back in South Sudan now and she's working at a marketing company and I'm enormously proud of her. I love her like a daughter. So, I want to go back and see her and see how she's doing."

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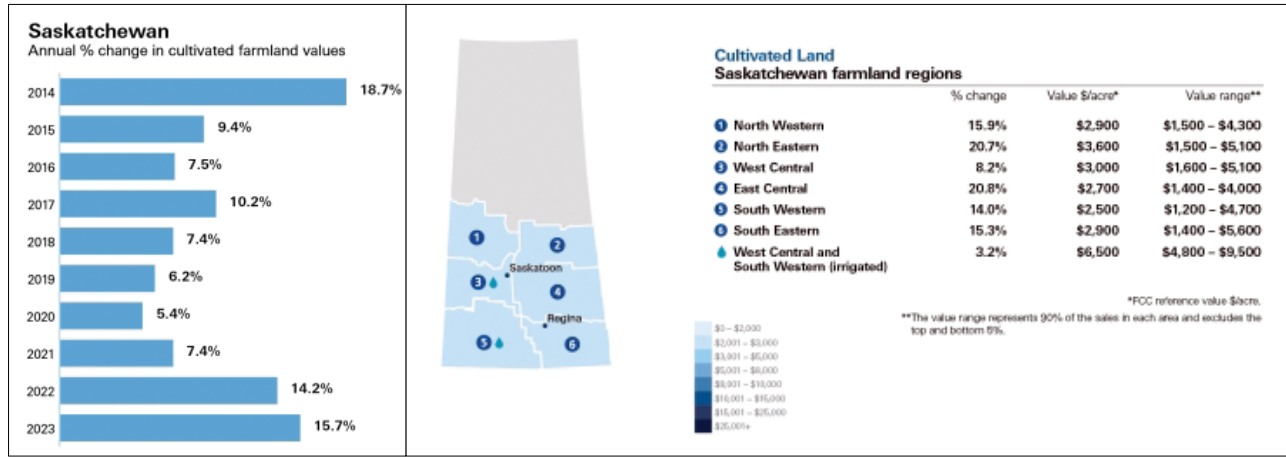
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Sask leads increase in farmland values at 15.7 per cent, Manitoba up 11.1 per cent

BY RYAN KIEDROWSKI

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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

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

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

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

the highest farmland values on average.

"The good news is that farmland value increases reflect a positive outlook for the demand of agriculture commodities and the quality food we produce in Canada," Gervais said. "Producers have a long track record of making strategic investments in land. These long-term investments in food production have spurred growth and create a bright future for Canada's agriculture and food industry."

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

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

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

"But on the flip side are young farmers

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

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

"We came into the year with headwinds—the interest rates climb dramatically, compared to historic and then we had weather issues, lack of moisture, we had commodity prices dropping, and we still had increases in land values," Gurney said. "So looking into 2024, who knows where we're going because we're still kind of in that same boat right at the moment."

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

"The one thing I've learned over the years is farmers are a very resilient bunch of peo-

ple," Gurney said.

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

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

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

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



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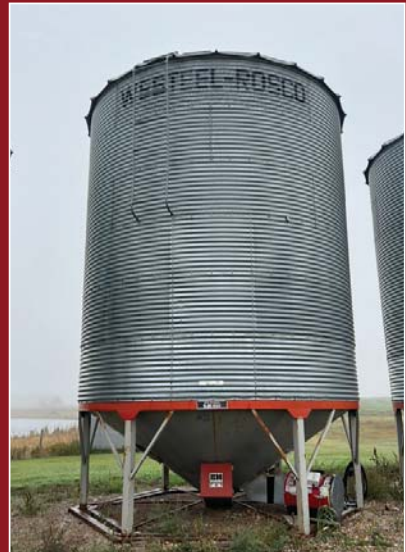


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Where water meets the field

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

BY JOANNE PAULSON

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

No?

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

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

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

Making the irrigation decision

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lloyd-Smith and his team will also engage producers through interviews, focus groups and a large-scale survey, to gather information "and also some of the behavioural factors that may influence the decision whether to irrigate or not."

The research will also look at the policy side, he said. "What sort of management changes or water allocation rules could be or should be implemented?"

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

"As an economist, I'm interested in different water market allocation systems and water pricing systems that can ensure there's enough water to go around as well as facilitate water being allocated to areas or producers or sectors that value it the highest," Lloyd-Smith said.

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

Also on the irrigation front, the College of AgBio is offering a new micro-credential sustainable irrigation pro-



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

Saving livestock from sulfate

Dr. Greg Penner (PhD), a professor in the Department

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

Continued on page 43

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Soil conditions good leading into seeding

Continued from page 21

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"In a perfect world, if Mother Nature



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

Kevin Weedmark photo

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

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

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

Of course, once crops are planted, those lucrative 'timely rains' are the next ingre-

ing farmers and ranchers, our rural communities and the overall economy," said Ian Boxall, APAS president. "The recent increase in frequency and severity of drought events underscores the pressing need for immediate action to better prepare for these challenges."

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

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

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

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

Getting ready to seed

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

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

Continued on page 39



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School and community engage youth in farming

Continued from page 23
Farming fosters community

"When the students come to school in the morning, the first thing they do is chores and then we have breakfast ready for the whole school. Then we go about a regular school day," says Van Lagen. "We do have a block each day, where students can work on the farm – whether it's doing chores, building something or working with an animal, whatever it may be," he adds.

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

students reseed.

Business management in the everyday

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

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

Decision-making is based on the best evidence available to them at the

time. "Students find out the prices associated with the different ways of selling, as well as the costs associated with the different ways of selling and then make decisions," Van Lagen says. "They do the analysis and decide."

Incentives motivate

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

The farm continues to evolve as the students express their interests and ambitions: the upper elementary students are learning about pollinators, so beehives and honey production are now in the

works. There's also interest in investigating the feasibility of raising pheasants for a local pheasant hunt – though those details haven't entirely been worked out yet. The students still have some numbers to run through.

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

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



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Government of Canada and Saskatchewan announce 2024 Crop Insurance Program enhancements

Continued from page 25

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

For 2024, SCIC is pleased to announce an additional 38 weather stations to supplement its existing network. All weather-based programs are enhanced by this increased weather station density province-wide. With 224 weather stations across the province, most land is located within 30 kilometres of at least one weather station. One weather station can be selected for each insured land location. This allows producers to insure each of their land locations with relevant coverage.

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

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

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

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

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



producers must select insured crops and coverage levels or make additional changes by this date. Producers can speak to their local SCIC office to make any changes or coverage will remain the same as the previous year.

SCIC offers a full suite of programs that can work together to ensure you have every angle covered.

These include Crop Insurance, AgriStability, Wildlife Damage Compensation and Prevention Program and Livestock Price Insurance. We encourage producers to review their options and find the right coverage for their operation. For more information, contact a local SCIC office, call 1-888-935-0000 or visit

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

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Soil conditions good leading into seeding

Continued from page 36

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

There's a short window where off-season work can take place, and it's often a race to get everything completed on the checklist before factors such as road bans come into effect.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Challenges facing producers

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

"Our biggest concern right now is that wheat market," said John Van Eaton, who farms near Maryfield. "We're probably like a lot of other producers, we're looking at other crops we can substitute for wheat. There is a theory that when everyone's running away from the fire, you

should run towards it, but I'm not sure how fast we're going to run towards the fire."

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

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

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

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

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

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

'So what are you seeding this year?'

Given what the weather and the world is doing, the general consensus between producers was to continue with those tried and true crops that continually perform.

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

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

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

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

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

"Canola is back into a profitable position; the cereal grains are going to be a little tighter," noted Warkentin.

"The crush capacity that the domestic crush market has, has been about one dollar a bushel over the export market, so the more capacity we can get in Saskatchewan, the better. Pretty much all our canola production has been going into the domestic crush market."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

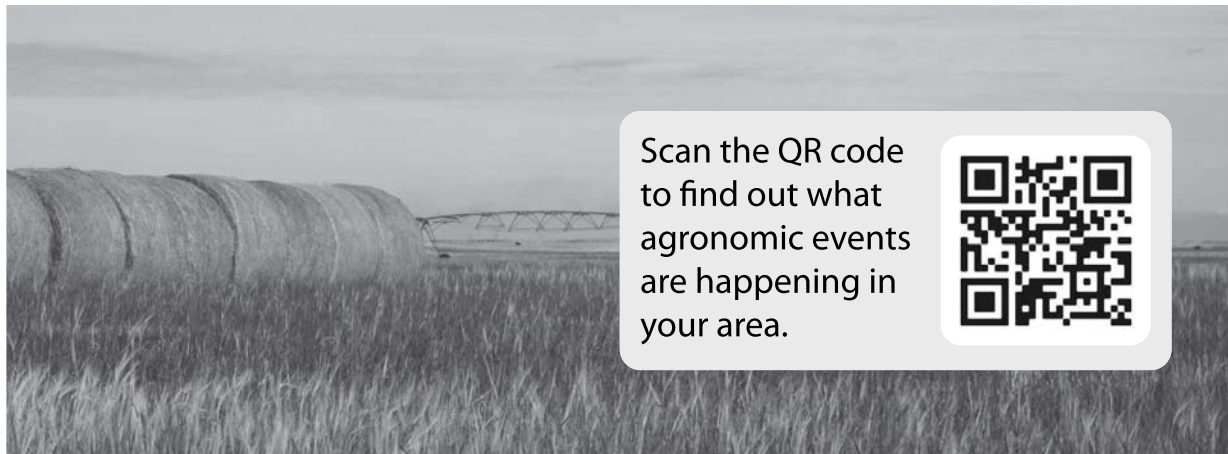
He's also in favour of staying with stability going into seeding, but will be tweaking his wheat choices.

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

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

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

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



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Government supports irrigation development in Saskatchewan



An irrigation system.

BY JAMIE SHANKS, AGRICULTURE

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

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

"This announcement reaffirms the government's commitment to supporting irrigation within Saskatchewan," Agriculture Minister David Marit said. "More than 55,000 acres of irrigation were developed

between 2020 and 2023, and this investment will help keep this infrastructure working and help our producers for years to come. These funding agreements will also help us reach our Growth Plan target of 45 million metric tonnes of crop produced by 2030."

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

"This support from the provincial government will go a long way to ensuring the continued success of irrigation projects

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

The Government of Saskatchewan is committed to creating more irrigated acres and supports irrigation in the province through the Irrigation Rehabilitation Program, the Irrigation Development Program and the Irrigation Efficiency Program.

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

- South Saskatchewan Irrigation District, to receive up to \$9.5 million over five years.
- Riverhurst Irrigation District, to receive up to \$3.8 million over five years.
- Moon Lake Irrigation District, to receive up to \$159,005 over five years.

- Grainland Lake District, to receive up to \$441,180 over five years.
- Miry Creek Irrigation District, to receive up to \$153,710 over five years.
- The Miry Creek Irrigation District will also receive a one-time payment of \$1.3 million from the ministry to repair the water intake portion of their

pumping system as part of the asset transfer agreement.

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

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Innovative new crop protection developed with USask research

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



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

Two USask scientists were instrumental in developing an innovative, biological crop protection that will be used by growers for the first time this spring. Professors emeritus Dr. Vladimir Vujanovic (PhD) and Dr. James Germida (PhD) with the College of Agriculture and Biore-sources worked with USask to patent and license their invention based on the recent discovery of using microbes for protecting crops

and promoting growth at the seed stage. Germida and Vujanovic's research into biological-based defences for crops has led to the creation of a new bionematicide—a pesticide created from biological sources for battling plant parasitic nematodes and protecting crops. "Living micro-organisms can target an insect or a microbial pathogen in a number of different ways," Germida said. "With bio-

logicals, because they become associated with the plant and the plant's microbiome, they become a member of that community during the life cycle of the host plant... The biological is there and ready to react." Building on the academic research started at USask, scientists at Indigo Ag have developed and launched a new bionematicide product to support growers and protect their crops. Indigo Ag's biotransic®

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

Z15 is applied to crop seeds before they are planted and works to fend off problematic nematodes and reduce their ability to reproduce. "Despite the fact that there are several nematicide products available—both synthetic and biological—soybean cyst nematodes continue to spread geographically, and the economic losses are increasing.

Soybean cyst nematodes alone cause an estimated \$1.5 billion in crop losses in the U.S. Farmers need new products that are effective in combating these pests. biotransic® Z15 combines multiple defense and protective actions, providing an effective new choice for farmers," said Georg Gores, global head of biologicals for Indigo Ag. *Continued on Page 43*

Daryl Harrison

Member of the Legislative Assembly
Cannington Constituency



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

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

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

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

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

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

And so we were well settled and ready to tackle our first week home and perhaps accomplish much when we realized we had arrived home on the first weekend of the Brier and so I absolutely did nothing but watch curling! I have to say though, it's a good thing the Brier has come to an end. My nerves are absolutely shot. Wow!

The Lighter Side of Life...
DOWN ON THE FARM
by douna beutler
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There was some serious good curling happening all week long and while I totally felt the pain of those who didn't get a much-needed win, I have to say the calibre of curling we saw was really quite remarkable.

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

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

our hopes were dashed.

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

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

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

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

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



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Where water meets the field

Continued from page 35

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



"Cattle can lose vision; they start to stargaze or head press. It's a symptom of the challenges happening in the brain, and if it's too severe, death can occur," he said.

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

It would be preferable, of course, to remove sulfate from the water; but that is difficult.

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

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

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

"When cattle are consuming high-sulfate water antagonistic effects occur between minerals in water and trace minerals in the diet. In these cases, even though we're providing a diet that might be expected to meet requirements, sulfate interacts with the minerals and makes them unavailable. What we thought was adequate no longer is."

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

Innovative new crop protection developed with USask research

Continued from Page 41

Vujanovic said his research focuses on micro-organisms that have the potential to increase the vitality of seeds. He stressed the value of using naturally occurring biologicals to defend crops and said research into beneficial plant micro-organisms continues to bear fruit as new biological protections are discovered.

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

"It is so critical that we should not just continue to combine our traditional with modern approaches in science . . . we have to discover integrative scientific strategies to meet sustainable agriculture standards that are more safe, secure, and more efficient," Vujanovic said.

According to Germida, using microbial inoculants is a solution that has existed for many decades. But researchers continue to find new organisms with new applica-

tions, and Germida said that can lead to the possibility of new and better products like biottrinsic® Z15.

"Some of the newer technologies are focused on organisms that are yet to be discovered, and their benefits are yet to be identified," Germida said. "Anything that we can do to increase food production and protect plants . . . is just a real benefit for society."

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

"The role of academia is to ensure the future," he said.

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

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