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CANOLA digest

MARCH 2016 Outlook

How to weather-proof canola

Agronomy tips to limit loss from frost, heat and more. PAGE 16

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CANOLA digest

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HOW TO WEATHER-PROOF CANOLA

Crop yield has a lot to do with weather — rainfall, temperature, frost and hail are the biggies. By taking agronomic steps to reduce weather-related risk, you can help your canola achieve higher yields under stress.

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The Editor's Desk

Jay Whetter

Play ball

I listened to the Freakonomics podcast called "How to be less terrible at predicting the future" three times. It was that good.

I kept coming back for Philip Tetlock's discussion on probabilities. Tetlock, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, says people can train themselves to more accurately predict events. "Foresight is real," he says. "It is the product of particular ways of thinking, of gathering information, of updating beliefs. These habits of thought can be learned and cultivated by any intelligent, thoughtful, determined person."

More accurate predictions, Tetlock argues, depend on careful analysis of probabilities. As in, what is most likely to happen based on the body of evidence?

While listening to Tetlock, I made a connection between predictions and our best management practices (BMPs) for canola production. BMPs are predictions of what is most likely to improve yield or profitability based on past experience and scientific evidence. By applying probabilities to all our BMPs, we can limit overconfidence in their result.

BMPs are not black and white, even though they may be stated as such: "Seed early and get higher yields."

Yes, field research shows that seeding canola by early to mid May usually results in higher yields. But in 2015, later-seeded crops yielded better for many growers, creating doubt in the early-seeding BMP when presented as a black and white choice. Adding probabilities — seeding early in May produces higher yields 70 percent of the time — shows that, yes, late-seeded crops will yield higher some years, but early seeding is still the odds-on preferred practice.

Baseball is managed by probabilities. When the Blue Jays are down in a game, manager John Gibbons will often take out Justin Smoak at first base and replace him with Chris Colabello, who is defensively weaker. Why? Because, while Colabello may make more errors, his batting average is 100 points higher than Smoak's. When the Blue Jays need runs, probability favours Colabello to get on base. Is Colabello going to get the base hit or RBI the Blue Jays need? Not always. The probability is still only slightly less than one in three, but Smoak's is worse. So the manager puts Colabello in the game. He makes the best decision based on what research and past results suggest.

In canola production, we don't yet have the body of statistics and probabilities for most BMPs, but growers could make better decisions if we did. For example, if growers knew that practice X provided a yield increase sufficient to justify the investment only 25 percent of the time, they may prefer to put the same money into practice Y with a higher probability of yield increase.

Neither situation guarantees success, but probabilities will refine decisions and, more importantly, explain how the right decision doesn't always produce the desired result. The lower-probability result can happen, but that doesn't mean the BMP is wrong. Understanding of probabilities will help fight the dogma of coffee-shop talk and one-field testimonials. With probability-driven decisions, growers can put together a winning record based on well-managed singles and doubles rather than hoping for walk-off home runs in the ninth.

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EDITORIAL OFFICE

Editor
Jay Whetter
Canola Council of Canada
400 – 167 Lombard Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3B 0T6
(807) 468-4006
Email: whetterj@canolacouncil.org

Publisher
Canola Council of Canada
400 – 167 Lombard Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3B 0T6
(204) 982-2100 Fax: (204) 942-1841

Production
Amanda Howard
(403) 410-7656
Email: amanda.howard@adfarmonline.com

ALBERTA Canola PRODUCERS COMMISSION

ACPC OFFICE
Ward Toma
Alberta Canola Producers Commission
14560 – 116 Avenue NW
Edmonton, AB T5M 3E9
(780) 454-0844 Fax: (780) 451-6933
Email: ward@albertacanola.com

Manitoba Canola Growers

MCGA OFFICE
Bill Ross
Manitoba Canola Growers Association
400 – 167 Lombard Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3B 0T6
(204) 982-2120 Fax: (204) 942-1841
Email: rossb@mcgacanola.org

SaskCanola

SaskCanola OFFICE
Janice Tranberg
SaskCanola
212 – 111 Research Drive
Saskatoon, SK S7N 3R2
(306) 975-0262 Fax: (306) 975-0136
Email: jtranberg@saskcanola.com

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1024 – 17 Avenue S.E.
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Robert Samletzki
(403) 296-1346
Toll free: 1-888-296-1987
Email: robert@wtrmedia.com

Linda Samletzki
(403) 296-1349
Toll free: 1-888-296-1987
Email: linda@wtrmedia.com

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This article, based on an interview with FCC chief agriculture economist J.P. Gervais on January 12, explains how strong global demand for vegetable oils, China, the weather and the lower Canadian dollar will help canola markets in 2016.

By Richard Kamchen

Canola 2016 fortunes look bright

J.P. Gervais

The new calendar year is already looking promising for Western Canadian canola producers' bottom lines.

"Demand is still strong and the Canadian dollar is low. These factors are projecting profit margins to be positive," says J.P. Gervais, Farm Credit Canada's chief agricultural economist.

Gervais says reports of a slowdown in China may be exaggerated, in that the country's GDP and import demand will continue to climb.

"I wouldn't be surprised if we see something between six and 6.5 percent," Gervais says of China's projected GDP growth in 2016. That's down from seven percent more recently and 10 percent in 2010.

"There's a shift in China with a movement toward more of a consumer economy instead of a producer-oriented economy," he says. "There's less investment and more challenges on the export side for them, so that's the reason we see GDP numbers still growing, but at a lower rate."

The more significant factor for canola, though, is disposable income, and that continues to rise.

"What matters for us is the disposable income of Chinese consumers — especially those in urban regions — which is still growing at a rate that exceeds Chinese GDP," Gervais says.

China is still on pace to match, if not exceed, 2014 Canadian canola imports in 2015. But while demand remains robust, its level of expansion may decelerate compared to previous years.

"The growth in oilseed imports could slow down. They're still going to import more, but I think the years of fast-growing imports perhaps are behind us," says Gervais. "But when it comes to consumer spending, we know that consumers at that stage of development focus a lot on additional proteins and a Western-style diet, which I think is all positive for canola."

As for Mexico and Japan, two other major markets for Canadian canola, Gervais sees the outlook for the Mexican economy as good and Japan as steady.

"Overall I think export markets for canola are not in bad shape. I really don't see a problem in terms of strength of demand," Gervais says. "The only problem we could see down the road is if we get a really good crop that the market might not be able to take all in."

The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) remains up in the air and there's not even any guarantee member countries will ratify it in 2016. But overall, if the deal goes through, it will benefit canola, Gervais says.

One issue canola faces is tariff escalation, namely the fact that the more a commodity is processed, the higher taxes it faces. The elimination of tariff escalation would potentially allow the Canadian canola industry to benefit from more domestic value-added processing.

"Of course, countries that are part of TPP will enjoy similar access to markets, like Japan, or smaller markets like Malaysia or Vietnam. But overall we would project it to be very positive for the canola sector," says Gervais.

Other currencies are falling, too

The low Canadian dollar is, overall, a positive factor for canola, but Gervais warns against pinning greater export hopes on the weak loonie. He gives the example of 2011-12, a year when the Canadian dollar was strong, yet Canada exported one of its largest shares of domestic production.

Third-country effects also need to be taken into account. Typically when people see a low dollar, they think only in terms of the U.S./Canada exchange rate, but Gervais points out that Brazil's currency lost even more value than the loonie against the U.S. greenback.

"The canola sector has some pretty ambitious targets, and the Canadian dollar is not necessarily a panacea when it comes to exploiting trade flows. When you look at trade past performances, over and over again what we find is that the Canadian dollar is not the most important factor," says Gervais. "If you want to be successful in export markets, productivity is the number one thing to focus on. I would say that applies to the canola industry as with any other export sector."

Acres

Canola competes against other commodities for area, and pulse acres in 2016 could take off. But Gervais

believes pulses are much more likely to cut into cereals over canola.

"If you look at the way the market is pricing all these crops, margins are higher for canola than they are for wheat," he says, predicting wheat and other cereals will lose acres to lentils, whose plantings may even reach five million acres in 2016. "The market is holding up when it comes to canola, which leads me to think we're going to get canola acres that are roughly similar to or even slightly higher than what we got last year."

Canola could find additional support from global weather events, which might continue to weigh on competitors' production.

In 2015, the strongest El Niño event in almost two decades brought drought to Malaysia and Indonesia, which make up about 85 percent of world palm oil supplies. With canola mostly driven off global vegetable oil markets, palm oil production challenges supported values.

Prices could be similarly bolstered if La Niña follows in El Niño's wake. "When La Niña follows an El Niño weather pattern, there is a likelihood that we could see a really big dry bias in weather in the U.S. Midwest," says Gervais. "Our competitors, whether in Brazil or the U.S., could face some growing challenges in 2016 that would support our profit margins."

Farmers in both those countries are struggling more than their Canadian counterparts, Gervais adds.

"The U.S. net farm income is going to be down 38 percent in 2015. Those financial issues that producers are experiencing are going to lead to a slight decline in acres in the U.S.," he says. "I wouldn't be surprised to see fewer soybean acres in 2016."

In Brazil, the economy is struggling and interest rates are high. The recession there is making credit harder to get, which will challenge Brazil's farmers.

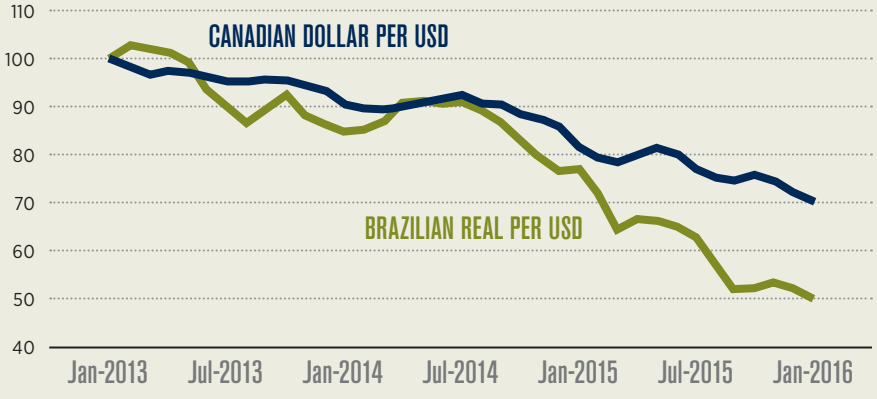
"Their currency has dropped, so that makes them quite a bit more competitive, but it's going to be interesting to see whether or not they are able to be as successful as in previous years, given that the entire country is facing a lot of pressure from an economic standpoint."

Richard Kamchen is an agriculture freelance writer based in Winnipeg.

"The Canadian dollar is not necessarily a panacea when it comes to exploiting trade flows. If you want to be successful in export markets, productivity is the number one thing to focus on."

—J.P. Gervais

Exchange rate index



Market demand for specialty oil, biodiesel and non-GMO canola oil is hard to predict, but Richardson's Peter Entz says Canada's canola industry will quickly adapt to whatever trend picks up.

By Richard Kamchen

Canola oil industry ready for anything

Conventional canola markets will continue to lead the way, but the canola industry's advantage is in how quickly and relatively easily farmers can adapt to changing trends.

"From a farmer perspective, if the market asks for more biodiesel, more specialty oil, more non-GM oil or if the market just wants to continue with commodity conventional oil, nothing really prevents them from growing canola for any of these markets," says Peter Entz, assistant vice president, Seed and Traits, at Richardson International.

As a processor and an exporter, Richardson is bullish about the traditional commodity oil market as it offers a healthy oil alternative to the market. "We see strong global demand for healthy canola oil, and that market is the biggest today and it'll likely remain the biggest for a while," says Entz.

Biodiesel, which also uses traditional oil, has great potential but demand is less certain. "Biofuels are always intriguing because demand can be strongly influenced by government legislation," Entz says. "If a government puts a big program on it, these markets can double or triple in size virtually overnight."

The specialty oil market is a third major avenue for canola and includes two profiles: mid-oleic/low-linolenic and high-oleic/low-linolenic.

Richardson has been contracting for specialty oils since 1997, and Entz sees a lot of upside in this market. But much of that depends on the size of the premium that end-use customers pay. Current values, he says, limit the market at around its current size. "If we can bring that premium down a bit somehow, there is room for some upward movement with that specialty oil profile."

Growers in the specialty market need to buy specific seed with a special oil trait and also meet the specification defined by a particular sale. But, if they fail to meet that spec, they still have a robust conventional market to sell into, which isn't an advantage common to other crops.

Growers won't be too harshly punished for not hitting spec. "That's important. There still remains a high degree of flexibility for the grower," Entz says.

A small non-GMO program also exists, with the U.S. the main customer. For specialty oil and non-GMO markets to grow, they might have to pay more to farmers to entice them to expand those acres. But the canola advantage is that growing for different markets doesn't require major upheaval.

"So many times when farmers are asked to make cropping changes, it requires different equipment, different storage, or different marketing programs. The beauty here is it's pretty seamless for the farmer to go between any four of these canola markets," says Entz. "It's a real advantage to the market in general — this flexibility growers have and the flexibility they can exercise every spring in terms of choosing what they want to grow and subsequently market."

In that sense, if any particular market takes off, farmers and the industry can run with it.

Farmers have demonstrated they like growing canola, and Entz believes they should feel comfortable that, from a marketing perspective, it's a very sustainable crop on their farm. It always finds a home somewhere, setting it apart from many other crops.

"There's still strong support from plant breeders, who are always kicking out bigger, better, stronger, faster products for farmers to grow," says Entz. "That's what makes canola such a good news story. There is involvement by the whole industry: seed developers, farmers and processors, and everyone works very closely together. I'm not sure you could say that with every commodity." ●

Richard Kamchen is an agriculture freelance writer based in Winnipeg.

"So many times when farmers are asked to make cropping changes, it requires different equipment, different storage, or different marketing programs. The beauty here is it's pretty seamless for the farmer to go between any four of these canola markets."

—Peter Entz

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East Coast researchers test canola in potato rotations

New research projects in Eastern Canada give farmers the skills — and the confidence — to better integrate canola into their potato rotations.

By Treena Hein

East Coast trials are seeing how canola and other crops (background) will fit into a rotation with potatoes (foreground). Canola could provide potato growers with a rotation crop that improves overall farm profitability.

A few years ago, canola was making moderate acreage inroads in Eastern Canada, but those inroads took a U-turn due to several significant factors. From 2013 to 2015, canola acres in New Brunswick plummeted from 10,000 to 2,000. Over the same time period, P.E.I. canola acres sank from 1,100 to less than 700, and Quebec acres fell to 25,000. Nova Scotia currently has no commercial canola production.

A slump in forward contract prices has hurt canola prospects in Eastern Canada. In addition, some east coast potato growers are nervous about planting canola after reports that potato crops following canola achieve lower yields. But are these reports accurate?

New canola research will help answer this canola-potato question and find ways to improve canola's economic prospects in the region. The P.E.I.-based Eastern Canada Oilseed Development Alliance (ECODA) spearheads a large five-year initiative with funding from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and industry partners. All projects finished year two of field trials in 2015.

One project involves variety evaluation, seeding dates and rates for winter canola. Early results show little promise for some varieties, but ECODA project manager Jan Holmes says other varieties will be tested going forward to find ones that fare better over the Eastern Canadian winter. Another ECODA project has crop scientists measuring the response of various hybrids to nitrogen, sulphur and boron.

Potatoes love canola?

Two other major ECODA projects are focused on canola and potato cropping systems. Aaron Mills, research scientist at AAFC's Charlottetown Research and Development Centre in P.E.I., leads one of the projects. "Very little is known about the influence canola has on potato quality and yield," he says. "In P.E.I., there is a legislated three-year rotation that all potato growers must follow. In the past, the value of the potato crop was enough to cover the other two non-potato years, but with production margins tightening on all crops, producers are interested in making consistent profits every year."

The objective of Mills' study is to evaluate the effects of canola and soybean on potato yield and quality during a three-year rotation. "The project is extensive and we are looking at several factors that have not been previously evaluated," he says. "In addition to the regular suite of agronomic measurements that include yield and quality of all crops, we're also measuring changes in labile carbon and nematode and microbial communities in the soil."

With regards to microbes, Mills and his team will find out whether particular crops or different management strategies affect microbial groups such as bacteria, fungi and mycorrhizae — all of which have an impact on soil health. The nematode community profile data will also provide a picture of how the soil is functioning under different rotations.

"Labile carbon has been shown in certain recent rotation studies to be a good predictor of crop vigour and yield, so we are measuring that as well. It's a

> **"Canola can potentially provide (potato growers) with the biggest monetary return next to potatoes."**
>
> —Andre Gagnon

relatively inexpensive test that can be run in the spring," Mills says. "If we nail down measurements of a suite of things that correspond with changes to crop yield and quality, we can pass on good information to growers to use when making management decisions."

Mills also wants to see how canola in the rotation might contribute to the control of wireworm, currently one of the biggest pest problems for potato growers. "Growers are attempting to mitigate the damage wireworm causes through the use of biofumigant crops, which includes the brassica (cabbage) family. Canola is a brassica crop, and contains low levels of biofumigatory isothiocyanates, so we will find out whether this affects pest populations. Basically, we place baited traps in all of the rotational plots and count the number of larvae in them."

Quebec rotation studies

Andre Gagnon, an independent researcher with a firm called Progest based in Sainte-Croix, Quebec, is also conducting ECODA canola and potato rotation research. As in the Maritimes, Quebec potato growers need rotation crops with higher returns.

"Ten to 15 years ago, many potato growers here were doing two or three years of potato, if not more, then another crop, and then repeating the pattern," Gagnon explains. "Today, about 75 percent of growers are still doing potatoes every second year, and this is not long enough to break disease cycles. But potatoes provide better profits, so it continues."

The other 25 percent is split in two, with about half doing two years of rotation other than potatoes and half doing two years potatoes and one year of something else. "Canola can potentially provide them with the biggest monetary return next to potatoes," Gagnon says. Canola biomass can also help increase soil organic matter.

Gagnon and his team are studying 18 different rotation patterns, including different lengths of rotation and different rotational combinations, such as canola planted after or before potatoes. "Each year, the yield and quality of all crops are assessed and, at the end, a comparative economic analysis will be done," he says.

Gagnon expects that in a three-year rotation with one year of potatoes and two years of other crops, the revenue will be lower than if potatoes were planted for two years, but potato quality and quantity improvement just might make up the difference. Disease control will also be improved.

Look for an update on this research in *Canola Digest* once final results are published. ●

Treena Hein is an award-winning science writer and educational resource consultant. For more on the Eastern Canada Oilseed Development Alliance, visit www.ecodainc.ca.

U.S. canola acreage has bounced back to what it was in 2012, with Oklahoma in second place behind North Dakota.

By Treena Hein

Southern states show promise for canola

Canola acreage in the United States has held fairly steady over the past five years, with harvested acres in 2015 at 1.7 million. Acres were at that same level in 2012, but then dropped to 1.3 million in 2013 and climbed back up to 1.6 million in 2014. The U.S. is a net importer of both canola meal and oil, all from Canada.

The top canola-producing state by a long shot is North Dakota, with 1.4 million acres of spring canola harvested in 2015 and a little less in 2014. Dale Thorenson says most of that is in the northern half of the state, which is an extension of the Canadian canola region that has very suitable growing conditions. "North Dakota would produce more canola, but for the fact that so many other crops can also be grown in the state," says the assistant director of the U.S. Canola Association.

The state with the second-highest canola cultivation is Oklahoma, with 125,000 acres grown last year and 155,000 in 2014, followed by Montana, where farmers harvested 78,000 acres last year.

Thorenson says Oklahoma could become the leading producer of winter canola. "There is currently a monoculture wheat-on-wheat rotation in most of the state, and the Southern Great Plains — southern Kansas to northern Texas — currently grows 20 million acres of wheat every year," he says. "Getting just 10 percent of the area to include winter canola in the rotation would boost winter canola acreage to about two million."

United States harvested canola acreage

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	Harvested acres (thousands)				
North Dakota	930	1,500	915	1,200	1,400
Oklahoma	93	105	149	155	125
Montana	37	50	69	61	78
Washington	24	15	36	47	34
Idaho	12	37	43	34	28
Minnesota	20	30	17	14	22
Oregon	6	7	12	10	1.7
Other	1.2	21	24	45	38
TOTAL	**1,100**	**1,700**	**1,300**	**1,600**	**1,700**

Source: USDA. Columns may not add up due to rounding.

"We're trying to get the word out that if producers add winter canola to a monoculture winter wheat rotation, they will clean up their ground and get 15 percent higher wheat yields the following year plus a higher-quality sample versus wheat-on-wheat."

—Dale Thorenson

Getting to that level will require effort, however, due to the current lower U.S. price for canola in addition to the drought over the past two years. Wheat prices have declined as well, but Thorenson explains that growers tend to go back to what they know during tough times. "We're trying to get the word out that if producers add winter canola to a monoculture winter wheat rotation, they will clean up their ground and get 15 percent higher wheat yields the following year plus a higher-quality sample versus wheat-on-wheat."

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The cash advance program administered by CCGA is made available to Canadian farmers through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Advance Payments Program.

Jonathon Sammons hit 5,199 lb./ac., or 104 bu./ac., in the Ontario Canola Challenge for 2015.

By Carrie James

Ontario canola grower breaks 100 bu./ac. barrier

Jonathon Sammons, who farms about 100 km northwest of Toronto, won the Ontario Canola Challenge 2015 with a yield of 104 bu./ac. on his selected one acre.

Ontario is proud that one of its growers has tipped the 5,000 lb./ac. mark — and tipped it significantly! Producer Jonathon Sammons of Shelburne brought in an outstanding yield of 5,199 lb./ac. (104 bu./ac.) making him the first place winner in Ontario Canola Growers' annual Ontario Canola Challenge.

Sammons attributes his high-yielding canola crop to exceptional seasonal weather with well-timed rains, a high germination rate and strong plant emergence and establishment. Basically, his canola plants got off to a strong start and flourished. Another yield contributor was high soil fertility. He planted the crop into a field that had been in hay for five years.

"The weather was excellent for canola this year. That combined with the high organic matter in the pasture soil resulted in a phenomenally healthy and high-yielding crop," he says.

Growers enter the Ontario Canola Challenge in July, and declare one field for competition. It has to be at least 10 acres. The yield score is based on results from one acre within that field. Yield must be recorded by weigh wagon and verified by a supporting agronomist.

Sammons' crop was planted on May 11 with InVigor 5440 treated with Prosper. His seeding rate was 5 lb./ac. He used a conventional 30-foot Sunflower drill, going into ground that had been disked and cultivated. Fertilizer included 85 lb./ac. of starter and another 350 lb./ac. broadcast.

In strong contrast to recent years in Ontario, flea beetle and swede midge pressure was minimal in 2015. Sammons did make one application of Ripcord for insect control along with his Liberty Link herbicide. At 30 percent flower, he had a helicopter apply Proline. The crop was straight cut using a draper head.

Sammons is a strong believer in the value of crop rotation and the role canola plays in that rotation. "I always include canola in my rotation. It fits in well as the first crop I harvest so I can plant winter wheat early and get it off to a good start before winter," he says. "Using Liberty Link canola also means I can vary my chemistries, which is important to discourage glyphosate weed resistance. As long as I maintain a four-year rotation, and the canola plants are not too stressed by temperature or moisture extremes, I seem to be able to stay ahead of major insect problems."

The Ontario Canola Challenge recognizes six farmers with outstanding yields. The first place winner receives a $2,000 cash prize, second place wins $1,000, third is $750 and fourth, fifth and sixth receive $500 each. Plus all winners can strut proudly in a handsome "Canola Challenge Winner" jacket.

Sammons' inner circle and greatest fans include his wife, Jessalynn, daughter Jenna (8) and son Jacob (3). ●

Carrie James is general manager of Ontario Canola Growers.

Ontario Canola Challenge 2015 — Winners

Place	Name	Yield	Hometown
1	Jonathon Sammons	5,199 lbs/ac (104 bu./ac.)	Shelburne
2	Rob Wyville	4,674 lb./ac. (95 bu./ac.)	Markdale
3	Brian and Jon Wiley	4,244 lb./ac. (85 bu./ac.)	Meaford
4	Bill Ceasar	4,175 lb./ac. (84 bu./ac.)	Lion's Head
5	Don and Jeff Curry	4,149 lb./ac. (83 bu./ac.)	Owen Sound
6	Carl Brubacher	3,943 lb./ac. (79 bu./ac.)	Lion's Head

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SASKATCHEWAN FIELD YIELDS 111 BU./AC. IN 2015

Florian Hagmann of Birch Hills, SK, harvested a 111 bu./ac. canola crop in 2015 as part of a Pioneer Hi-Bred yield challenge.

Fertilizer was, as expected, a big input in this high-yielding field. The field received 102 lb./ac. of nitrogen (N), 36 of phosphorus (P), 14 of potassium (K) and 25 of sulphur (S) at the time of seeding, and then five in-crop top-ups. The total rates of in-crop fertilizer were 14 lb./ac. of N, three lb./ac. of P, two of K and one of S. Total fertilizer cost was $270 per acre. The field also had an estimated 60 lb./ac. of N from mineralization.

Canola Digest will look into high-yielding canola results through 2016 for an article next winter on "unlocking canola's genetic potential for yield." Contact *Canola Digest* editor Jay Whetter at whetterj@canolacouncil.org if you want to participate in the article or have high-yield questions the article should address. ●

Washington and Idaho are in fourth and fifth spots, with 34,000 and 28,000 acres harvested respectively in 2015. Acreage has declined in the Pacific Northwest the past couple of years (again due to lower prices and drought), with Oregon hit the hardest, going from 10,000 acres in 2014 to less than 2,000 in 2015. Minnesota, whose canola acreage peaked in 2000 at 140,000, harvested 22,000 acres in 2015 compare to 13,500 in 2014.

In terms of markets, canola oil consumption in the U.S. is increasing. Thorenson says more companies are using canola for frying because its greater stability means less trans fat. As for canola meal, he believes U.S. consumption will likely continue at current or higher levels because it is a preferred component in the feed ration on American dairy farms. ●

Treena Hein is an award-winning science writer and educational resource consultant.

Crop yield has a lot to do with weather — rainfall, temperature, frost and hail are the biggies. By taking agronomic steps to reduce weather-related risk, you can help your canola achieve higher yields under stress.

By Jay Whetter

How to weather-proof canola

Rory Gregoire's canola got off to a reasonably good start in 2015 under the circumstances. Frost and low moisture during the first weeks of the season made it a rough start for most fields in the North Battleford area, where he farms with his dad, cousin and uncle, but their canola was in good shape when the weather improved and the season turned around.

"You wouldn't know the crop was under stress at all in June. Then the rains came and it took off," Gregoire says.

So how did they weather-proof their canola?

The keys, Gregoire says, are targeting an adequate plant population, seeding early but not too early, and managing residue.

"We pay attention to thousand seed weight and set a seeding rate that will achieve 10 plants per square foot," he says. "We also seed slow enough — 4 to 4.2 mph — for better seed placement."

Their 2015 canola crop was close to that target, he adds. This provides a buffer against losses from hail and frost, where losing a couple of plants per square foot to these weather threats can still leave enough of a stand to produce a decent yield. A denser stand also tends to flower earlier and more evenly, and mature earlier – two important factors in weatherproofing.

The Gregoires also added Lumiderm to their seed treatments to protect canola seedlings from cutworms. They lost most of a canola field to cutworms in 2012, and taking steps to protect canola from early insect pressure does provide added stability for the plant population.

The Gregoires were seeding canola by May 13 in 2015, but their normal start date for canola is often closer to May 20. "We don't aim to be the first growers seeding," he says. "We usually seed pulses, then wheat, flax and canola."

The general recommendation for canola on the Prairies is to seed in May, ideally early to mid May. This timing strikes the best balance between reducing weather risk and producing the highest yield, based on historical averages. In this slot, the spring frost risk is lower, the crop usually avoids the hottest periods of summer, and the crop matures before fall frost risk is elevated.

Residue management is important to provide a uniform seedbed so canola emerges faster, achieves its target stand, flowers earlier and matures earlier. "With clumps of straw, you're not giving plants the chance to come through," Gregoire says.

Other important factors for general weather-proofing are variety selection and soil health. Varieties that yield well consistently in a broad range of conditions are likely to have more resilience to various weather stresses. Healthy fertile soil has higher moisture-holding capacity, and plants with ample nutrition are more resilient.

A final line of protection is crop insurance. Crop insurance programs are government subsidized to reduce costs to growers, providing economic protection again weather-related yield risk.

The following sections look at specific weather scenarios and what growers can do to minimize their impact on yield.

Cold spring soils

Seeding early has proven to increase yield, but seeding too early into cold soils can greatly reduce stand establishment. Canola seed can germinate in soils as cool as 2° Celsius, but germination rates will be lower and spread out over a couple of weeks.

Agronomy tips:

— Seed shallow. Canola grows slowly in cool soil, so seeding shallow will reduce stress and time to emergence.
— Seed-placed phosphorus can help get the crop moving early and more evenly under cool soil conditions.
— Consider waiting, especially if seeding into cold soils in April. By mid May, soil temperature becomes a lower priority. Seeding into warmer soils (8 to 10° Celsius) will improve seed survival and result in more seed emerging at the same time. By mid May, yield benefits of early seeding trump soil temperature.

Late spring frost

Spring frost can thin a stand significantly. There were 1,623,086 acres reseeded in Western Canada in 2015 (805,755 in Manitoba, 770,365 in Saskatchewan and 46,966 in Alberta). Frost was a leading reason.

Later seeding greatly reduces the risk of spring frost, but it increases the risk of summer heat loss to flowers and the risk of fall frost. On average, canola yield is lower for later seeded crops.

Agronomy tips:

— Look at the historic record of last spring frosts for your area. This will help you determine whether late April, early May or mid May is the best time to start seeding.

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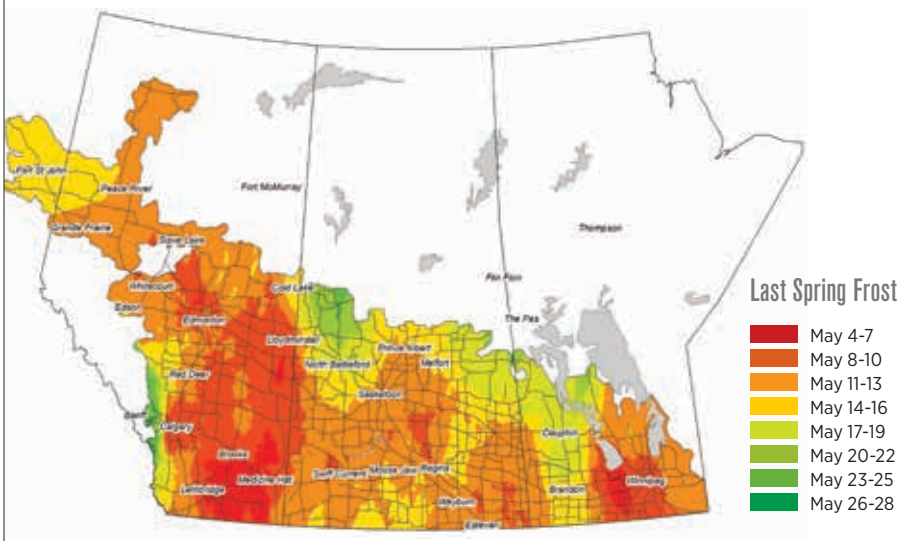
Heavy frost can devastate young canola plants, as shown in this photo from 2015, but wait a couple of days to see if new life emerges (inset) before making a reseeding decision.

Average last spring frost occurence (-2°C)

10 year average (2006-2015)



Produced using weather data collected from Weather INnovations Consulting and Environment Canada networks.

FIVE GENERAL WEATHER-PROOFING STEPS

1. Find varieties that yield well consistently in a broad range of conditions.

2. Seed in May, and ideally early to mid May. This timing strikes the best balance to reduce weather risk, based on historical averages.

3. Achieve a plant stand of seven to 10 plants per square foot. This provides a buffer if a few plants are lost to weather stress.

4. Take steps to maintain good soil health. This improves soil moisture holding capacity. Healthy plants with ample nutrition from a balanced and even aggressive fertilizer program are more resilient to stress.

5. Use crop insurance. Crop insurance programs are government subsidized to reduce costs to growers, providing economic protection again weather-related risk to yield.

FIVE SIMPLE TIPS TO GET YOUR CANOLA READY FOR EXPORT

- Use pesticides at the correct rate, timing and pre-harvest interval
- Do not use unregistered pesticides or those with unacceptable residues
- Always follow the canola storage recommendations
- Grow blackleg resistant varieties and use practices that reduce infection
- Do not grow de-registered varieties

Learn more at www.keepingitclean.ca/canola

Keep it Clean!

This important message brought to you by: canolacouncil OF CANADA

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— Canola that emerges in cooler conditions may be more tolerant of frost. These canola plants are acclimatized — or "hardened" — to cool conditions. Canola that establishes during hot days and nights and then experiences a sharp temperature drop to frost conditions is often more susceptible.
— Take time to assess the level of frost damage. Dead cotyledons do not necessarily mean a dead plant. If the hypocotyl is green and healthy days after the frost, the plant has likely survived and will soon put out a first leaf. Two or more surviving plants per square foot often yield more than a reseeded crop.
— Dark black soil absorbs more heat than residue-covered soil, so the frost risk can be higher in zero-tillage situations. However the overall benefits of zero tillage, including soil health, lower machinery and labour costs, and improved soil moisture retention, outweigh the negatives for most operations.

Excess moisture

Wet soils cause an oxygen deficiency, which reduces root respiration and growth. Root failure reduces nutrient uptake, and plants will eventually die unless drowned areas dry out quickly. A few days in waterlogged soil can be enough to kill canola plants, and yield loss is certain.

From 2010 to 2014, excess moisture accounted for 56 percent of crop establishment claims and 72 percent of post-harvest claims for canola in Saskatchewan. In Manitoba, excess moisture accounted for 37.5 percent of canola yield loss claims from 1969 to 2014.

Agronomy tips:

— In a late spring with wet conditions, broadcast seeding may actually provide better seed placement if the alternative is "mudding in" seed with a drill. For more, go to www.canolawatch.org and search for the article "Broadcast seeding canola tips".
— Heavy rains can increase nitrogen and sulphur leaching in lighter soils, and increase denitrification in heavier soils. If the crop recovers and soils are firm enough to drive on, a top-dress application of nitrogen and sulphur may help its yield potential.

A few days of standing water can be enough to kill canola plants. Standing water can also leach away soil nutrients. Don't top-dress fertilizer until the soil surface can support the machinery and the crop has started to recover.

Drought

Drought is a big weather factor in the history of Prairie agriculture. In 2010, Mohammad Khakbazan with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) in Brandon looked at the yield effects from extreme weather on the Canadian Prairies from 1901 to 2009. In 1988, an extreme drought year, Khakbazan's work showed that 23 percent of canola yield losses in Manitoba and Saskatchewan that year were due to the drought. From 2001 to 2003, 21 percent of canola yield loss claims in Saskatchewan and eight percent in Alberta were due to drought.

Establishing a crop in dry soil conditions was a big challenge in 2015, especially when very little rain fell in the first six to eight weeks of the growing season. The lesson learned in 2015 is that helping a crop hang on through these conditions can provide a big return on those efforts when rains return.

Agronomy tips:

— Avoid tillage. Tillage dries out the top layer of soil and increases the potential for seedbed erosion in dry conditions.

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A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO RISK

Corey Lesk from McGill University was lead investigator in a study called "Influence of extreme weather disasters on global crop production," published in *Nature* in January. They studied wheat yields around the world from 1964 to 2007 and found, interestingly, that when drought occurred, it tended to cause higher yield losses in North America, Europe and Australasia — 20 percent — compared to the global average of around 10 percent.

Lesk says they don't have firm evidence as to why, but he has three possible explanations. (1) Cereal production in richer countries tends to occur at around the same time using similar genetics and practices, which means when drought and extreme heat occur at a critical time, they tend to have wide-spread effects. (2) Fair-weather yields are much higher in more technically-advanced countries, and this study looked at percentage drops. (3) Richer countries offer crop insurance and farmers in richer countries don't directly depend on their crops for food, which changes the risk dynamic.

"The optimal strategy may be to maximize yields rather than minimize the risk of weather-related crop damage," Lesk says. In short, North American, European and Australasian farmers are in a position to take higher risks, which would be true for canola as well as cereals.

The steps outlined in the pages of this *Canola Digest* article will help growers maintain productivity while reducing their risk of yield loss under adverse weather conditions. ●

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— When seeding early into dry soils, seed shallow — even if seed is not placed in moisture. There is still time to wait for a rain.
— When seeding later into dry soils, seeding deeper than recommended to hit moisture will hasten germination and crop establishment. When seeding to reach moisture, place seed at the top of the moisture and pack well to prevent further moisture loss.
— Consider soil conditions. Growers may get away with deeper seeding — at 1" instead of ½" — in lighter soils.
— Keep other stresses to a minimum. Spraying for flea beetles if thresholds are met and keeping weed competition down while the crop struggles to establish will help the crop survive and greatly improve results when moisture returns.

Summer heat

In 2010, Randy Kutcher, an AAFC research scientist at that time, analyzed the weather and yield data for 1967 to 2001 from 20 crop districts in Saskatchewan. He found that the number of days with highs of at least 31° Celsius during the first 14 days of flowering had the highest impact on canola yield.

Hot days cause canola plants to abort flowers. No flower means no pod and no yield. Even with a few days of heat, it can take a week for hormone balance and regular pod formation to return. The result is a long series of blanks on the stem where pods would normally form.

Agronomy tips:

— Seed early. An early-established crop is more likely to avoid the hottest days of summer.
— On the Prairies, there is unlikely to be an economic benefit from boron applied as a heat rescue treatment.

Mid-season moisture

Moisture through the middle of the season provides a great boost to yield potential but it also greatly increases the risk of significant yield loss from sclerotinia stem rot. Moisture before flowering promotes the emergence of apothecia that release sclerotinia spores into the canola. Continued moisture through flowering will allow these spores to continue their lifecycle and infect canola.

Rishi Burlakoti, research lead and plant pathologist with Weather INnovations Consulting in Guelph, ON, says high rainfall occurred during flowering time in 1999, 2000, 2004 and 2009 in Saskatchewan, and sclerotinia stem rot was found in the majority of the fields in the provincial survey. "Heavy infection with sclerotinia stem rot can cause yield losses up to 50 percent," Burlakoti says.

Agronomy tips:

— Apply fungicide. If moisture is present before and during flowering, fungicide is likely to provide a return on investment. For more, go to www.canolawatch.org and search for articles on sclerotinia stem rot management.

Hail

Hail caused 81 percent of loss claims for canola in Alberta in 2014, which is why almost all Alberta farmers with crop insurance also take the hail endorsement. In that same year, hail accounted for only 6.3 percent of crop insurance loss claims for canola in Saskatchewan and 5.3 percent for canola in Manitoba.

Agronomy tips:

— A plant stand of seven to 10 plants per square foot allows for some plant loss to early season hail while still maintaining full yield potential. Crop regrowth is possible, and recovery

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Hot days can cause canola plants to abort flowers, which will result in blanks up the stem. Seeding earlier reduces the risk that canola will flower during peak summer heat.

Average weekly maximum temperature

		JUN 1-7	JUN 8-14	JUN 15-21	JUN 22-28	JUN 29-JUL 5	JUL 6-12	JUL 13-19	JUL 20-26	JUL 27-AUG 2	AUG 3-9	AUG 10-16	AUG 17-23	AUG 24-31
Prince Albert, SK	Normal	20.6	20.8	22.4	22.2	23.2	23.6	23.9	25.2	24.9	25.0	23.7	23.5	22.2
	Average	20.9	19.4	21.3	23.5	25.1	23.7	24.1	25.1	24.4	23.9	23.9	22.7	22.8
	2015	23.6	21.6	21.2	27.1	24.2	25.6	25.1	26.2	23.2	21.6	26.6	20.5	25.1
	2014	18.2	18.3	17.6	23.0	23.2	23.8	23.9	22.9	25.3	26.1	26.9	22.3	21.2
	2013	22.3	18.2	19.4	22.3	27.6	24.0	22.5	20.6	21.0	22.0	26.2	25.7	25.4
	2012	23.1	19.2	19.3	23.7	24.9	29.1	24.1	25.0	26.6	24.4	21.4	25.6	23.7
	2011	17.9	22.4	19.7	21.8	25.4	23.6	25.9	21.1	24.9	23.8	25.1	23.3	23.7
	2010	20.1	18.2	23.5	23.2	23.7	23.1	22.2	24.7	26.4	25.2	22.4	20.3	20.1
	2009	15.4	20.6	26.1	23.5	22.6	19.1	22.7	26.2	20.8	21.8	21.6	21.6	22.6
	2008	22.2	18.5	23.5	24.9	27.1	19.2	23.0	26.3	24.7	25.1	25.5	24.9	22.6
	2007	22.4	20.9	20.6	20.2	25.5	23.5	26.7	28.9	28.3	24.5	19.4	18.3	19.6
	2006	24.3	16.5	22.4	25.5	26.5	26.1	25.2	29.5	23.2	24.6	23.5	24.2	23.8
Lethbridge, AB	Normal	19.8	20.1	21.8	22.7	23.5	24.7	24.9	26.2	26.3	25.9	24.7	24.5	23.4
	Average	20.8	20.0	20.6	24.3	26.1	26.4	26.3	27.0	27.4	26.5	26.0	26.2	25.9
	2015	23.9	25.4	22.4	29.2	26.6	29.0	24.2	27.8	29.0	28.3	28.9	22.7	28.3
	2014	20.6	20.0	16.8	22.1	26.1	26.6	27.9	23.5	29.6	27.0	28.3	20.2	23.4
	2013	21.5	19.2	20.8	22.9	28.3	24.3	24.9	26.8	21.5	23.1	28.7	29.2	29.2
	2012	21.1	19.7	19.9	21.8	24.2	29.9	26.7	26.3	28.2	30.3	26.4	30.5	26.7
	2011	18.0	18.9	19.1	23.3	25.0	25.5	26.8	23.3	27.9	26.2	25.9	26.8	26.5
	2010	19.3	19.8	16.7	25.9	22.7	26.4	24.0	25.4	26.0	25.4	23.5	24.0	22.1
	2009	16.3	21.6	24.3	22.5	23.0	22.7	23.7	27.5	26.1	20.3	21.0	27.2	28.5
	2008	17.6	16.4	24.2	24.5	27.4	24.3	24.7	25.6	25.4	27.3	26.4	28.1	21.9
	2007	24.7	21.2	22.4	24.2	29.2	26.9	32.4	32.3	32.4	27.9	26.2	24.0	26.2
	2006	25.1	18.1	19.7	26.6	28.6	28.6	27.3	31.3	27.6	29.2	24.7	29.4	26.1

An early established crop is more likely to avoid the hottest days of summer.
Source: Weather INovations Consulting


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can be quite high when hail occurs in the first half of the season.

— If a lot of leaf mass has been knocked off the plant, the nutrients in these leaves are unlikely to mineralize this crop year. So if crop recovery is strong, an in-crop nitrogen application can replace the nitrogen already taken up in this lost leaf mass. Results will be better if nitrogen supply was already low to moderate. Keep in mind that added nitrogen can also extend maturity.

— Canola hailed on at the 4- to 6-leaf stage can get more blackleg infection through damaged tissue. Fungicide might help, but only if you were considering using it in the first place.

— Hail cannot cause sclerotinia stem rot and there is no evidence that this pathogen will enter plants directly through a hail wound, but hail at flowering can extend the flowering period, which extends the susceptible period for sclerotinia.

— Call your hail insurance provider.

Early fall frost

Frost that occurs before canola seeds have dried down to below 20 percent moisture and have cleared their chlorophyll will lead to yield and quality losses.

Frost stops the chlorophyll-clearing process in canola seed permanently. High green counts are likely in fields that are not fully mature when heavy frost hits.

Agronomy tips:

— Seed earlier and at higher seeding rates. With more plants per square foot, a canola crop will mature more evenly and earlier.

— Choose varieties with days to maturity that match the typical growing season.

— Don't be too hasty to swath. Swathing right after a light frost will probably lead to lower yield and quality than a crop left to mature completely.

Check in the afternoon after a frost for wilting to make sure frost damage was not heavier than expected. For more, go to www.canolawatch.org and search for articles on frost and swath timing.

Wind

Seedlings and harvest-ready crop are at greatest risk from wind damage. High winds can blow seeds and seedlings right out of the ground, especially if topsoil is dry. High winds can cause swaths to roll, and can increase shattering losses from canola left standing for straight combining.

Agronomy tips:

— Standing stubble will protect seedlings from wind damage.

— Wind can also delay weed control, which can have a large impact on yield. Because early spraying is so important, using a low-drift nozzle is better than waiting longer for a relatively calm day suitable for a finer spray.

— To reduce potential losses from swaths blowing, swath parallel to the typical prevailing winds in the area; cut plants as high as possible, just below the lowest pod; and roll the swath so the edges are nestled into the stubble.

— Crop left standing for straight combining tends to be a lower risk for wind loss if the crop is thick and well-knitted. Some varieties are also better than others, especially those with pod shatter reduction traits. ●

Jay Whetter is the editor of Canola Digest.

CANOLA WATCH GIVES YOU TIMELY WEATHER MANAGEMENT TIPS

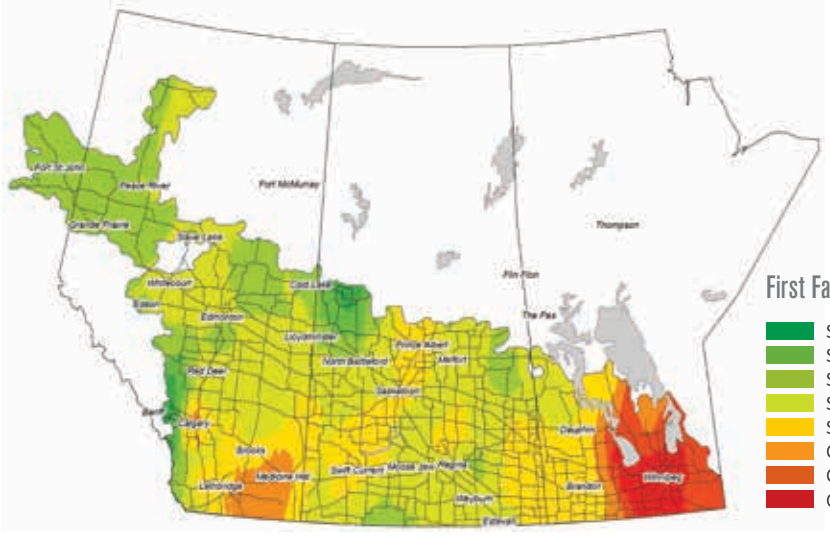
Canola Watch, the agronomy email from the Canola Council of Canada, gives you weather tips all season long. Here is a small sample of article topics we sent our readers in 2015:

- Is it too early to seed?
- Seeding into moisture. How low to go?
- Help for the reseeding decision — scenarios
- Managing canola after a June hailstorm
- Frost: Take a patient approach to swathing

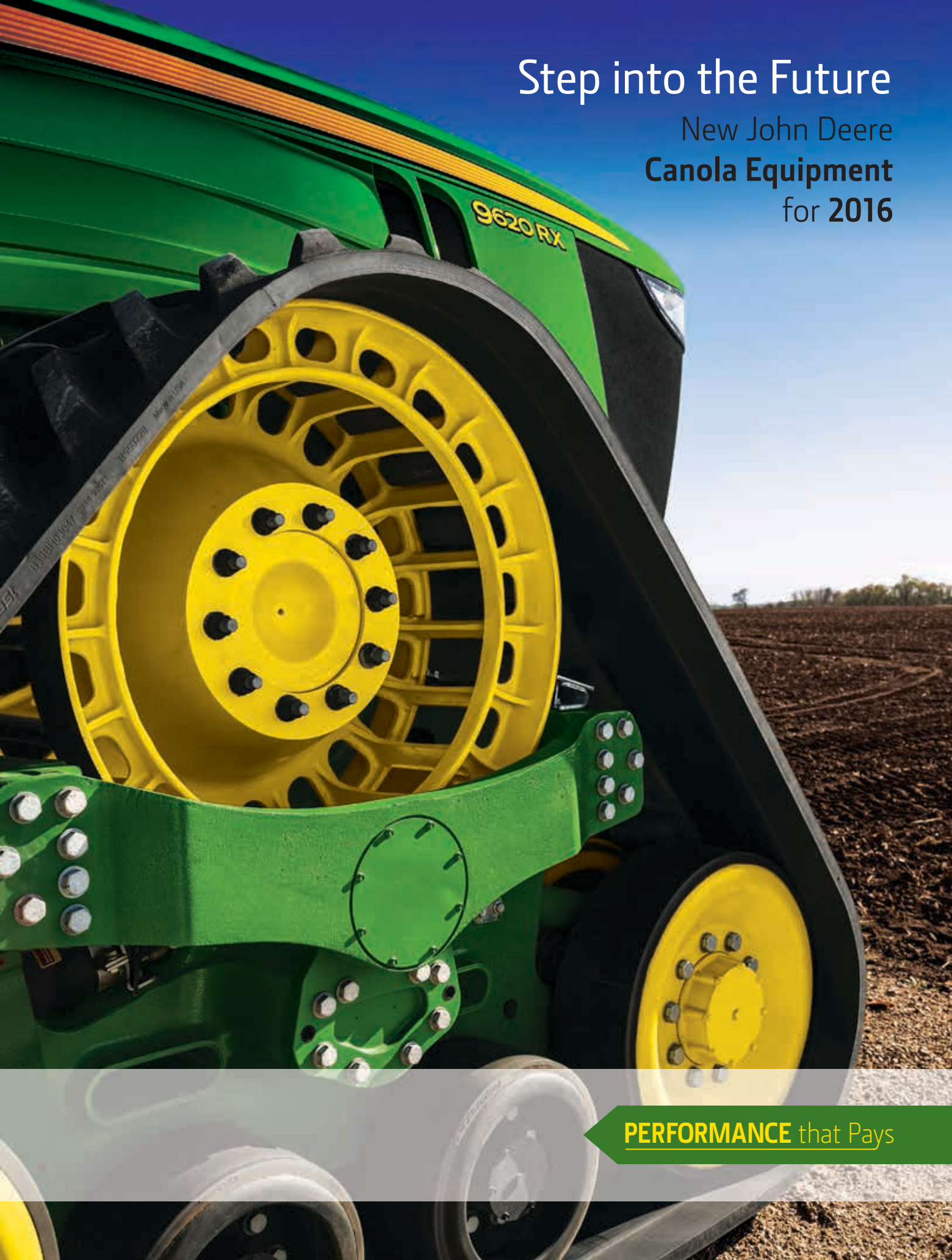
You can search for these articles at **www.canolawatch.org**. While there, sign up to receive the free Canola Watch agronomy newsletter. ●

Average first fall frost occurence (-2°C)

10-year average (2006-2015)



Produced using weather data collected from Weather INnovations Consulting and Environment Canada networks.



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But the tractor is just one part of the equation. We also offer some of the most superior seeding tools in the market, like the **1870 Air Drill** and **1910 Air Cart**. The 1870 is perfect for precise separation of seed and fertilizer with pinpoint depth control. The result: even emergence and maximum yield. As for the 1910, it's available with 250 to 550-bu. carts. When equipped with SectionCommand™, you'll enjoy the input savings that come from reduced skips and overlaps, thanks to less seed and fertilizer waste. Not to mention you'll have greater crop maturity at harvest. For tomorrow's buyers or yesterday's, SectionCommand is offered on new equipment or as a field conversion attachment for hydraulic drive carts.

There probably isn't a better option to care for the health of your canola than the **R4045 Sprayer**. Featuring wide, 120-foot booms (36 meters) and a large, 1,200-gallon tank (4,500 litre), you can cover more acres in fewer passes. For optimal performance, the SprayStar™ rate control system delivers your desired application rate as your operating

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W155 Windrower

S-Series Combines

Learn more about The Canola 100 Agri-Prize and find out how you can win a complete set of John Deere equipment if you're the first farmer to crack 100 bushel canola. Visit www.AGRIPRIZE.com for official rules and details.

speed changes and can deliver prescription rates based on your defined management zone. Add a boost of uptime to your efforts with two key valuable systems: Load Command™ provides speedier load times and automatic disengage once the sprayer tank is full; Direct Injection lets you change rates and products on-the-go without stopping to mix.

You've done the work to get your canola to full growth; now it's time to get the full potential out of your field. We have a couple of options to help. First, for farmers who prefer to swath, go with the new **W155 Windrower**. The W155 allows full-width use of the platform with speeds up to 12 mph (19 km/h) to cut more crop in less time. Not only does the W155 have higher horsepower than its W150 predecessor, it delivers faster acceleration without stalling. And a new integrated AutoTrac option helps to reduce any operator fatigue.

For the straight-cutters among you, you're sure to appreciate the **2016 S-Series Combines**. They feature the entirely new Dyna-Flo™ Plus cleaning system. In limited shoe conditions, your total combine capacity in canola is heightened by 13%, providing 1.5 more acres harvested per hour. Equally as important, you get a 28% reduction in tailings volume. Add to that our new Active Terrain Adjustment option ... it adjusts the settings of the Dyna-Flo Plus shoe when working slopes. So if you have rolling terrain, this is a must. Active Terrain Adjustment ensures your combine maintains ground speed and minimizes grain loss whether you're going uphill or downhill. And don't forget our 2015 offering, the tough small grains package, which provides canola growers 20% more throughput. Add it all up and what you have is the most canola-focused combine ever engineered. Enjoy.

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Having a full suite of canola equipment is about more than just the equipment you put into your field. It's also about the tools you use in the cab and in your office. Of course, we have a whole host of tech solutions to get you through the crop cycle.

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By now you're familiar with **AutoTrac**, but here's a refresher: with this hands-free guidance tool, we take the pressure off manual performance and put it in the hands of our assisted steering technology. Serving as both a convenience and cost of ownership solution, AutoTrac can reduce input costs, lower fuel usage, and improve your overall operation.

Check out **Machine Sync**, our innovative machine-to-machine communication and logistics tool for increased productivity in the field. It simplifies unloading on-the-go by automating the position of the grain cart relative to the combine. And during seeding operations, coverage maps and guidance lines can be shared between tractors increasing productivity when running multiple seeders in the same field.

Then there's **Harvest Mobile**. It works directly from your iPad in your combine cab to deliver in-depth info on field performance by visualizing mapping layers such as ground speed, wet and dry yield, and average moisture. You can see exactly what's going on in your field. And it displays machine settings, like rotor speed, fan speed, and more. Harvest Mobile also enables Interactive Combine Adjustment (ICA). ICA simplifies machine controls to help the operator go from novice to know-it-all in far less time.

JOHN DEERE

Be safe! Keep all people out of bins and trucks when grain is moving in and out of them. A new demonstration unit sponsored by the provincial grower association shows how fast entrapment can happen and why prevention is so important.

By Jay Whetter

Canola groups sponsor grain entrapment demo

Big grain carts and augers can move more than 10 bushels per second.

"Think about how quickly a person standing on the surface of grain that starts to move would be drawn down into the grain with that type of unloading rate," says Glen Blahey, agricultural health and safety specialist with the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (CASA). "Then think about where they'll end up."

Being trapped to the knees will require some struggle to get out, and with grain moving in or out at bushels per second, the situation gets worse fast. A trapped person barely has time to call for help — if help is even there.

With trucks, bins and augers bigger than ever, the risk of dangerous entrapment is too high to test. That is why SaskCanola, Alberta Canola Producers Commission (ACPC) and Manitoba Canola Growers Association (MCGA) are contributing $30,000 each to CASA to support its mobile grain entrapment demonstration unit.

The travelling unit will have small bins and augers mounted on a trailer. It will use mannequins to show how fast entrapment can occur and how best to remove a trapped person. The unit will be used for three purposes:

1. Entrapment awareness at tradeshows and other events.

2. First responder training. It can take 300 pounds of pull to remove a person entrapped to the waist. "If you just tried to pull them out you would be inflicting significant injury by the pulling process," says Blahey. "Technically when a person is trapped in grain, the victim is never pulled out. A coffer dam is constructed around them and the grain is removed from inside the dam and then the person is extracted from the coffer dam."

3. Employee training, hazard awareness and on-site emergency response planning on individual farms.

It can take 300 pounds of force to pull out a person trapped to the waist. This is very hard on the person's arms, which is why first responders will put a dam around the person and dig out most of the grain before lifting them out.

The goal is to show people the risks from moving grain and practical skills to manage an entrapment situation.

"We need to change the culture of farm safety," says Roberta Galbraith, member relations coordinator with MCGA. "Many farmers were very young when they first started working on the farm, operating equipment and working with cattle. It is like a rite of passage in some ways. But we need to change that conversation. We're not hearing from the people disabled or killed as a result of inexperience, and the farm is a much different place than it once was. The rapid speed that grain entrapment can now occur at is just one example."

For more information on the mobile grain entrapment demonstration unit program, please contact CASA at 877-452-2272 or at info@casa-acsa.ca

Jay Whetter is the editor of Canola Digest.

This article, the fourth in a series on agonizing agronomy decisions, looks at if and when to spray for sclerotinia stem rot.

By Taryn Dickson

Stem rot thought

Sclerotinia stem rot is one of the most damaging diseases to canola crops and the fungus — *Sclerotinia sclerotiorum* — required for the disease to occur can be found all over the canola growing areas of Canada.

While growers are familiar with the disease, the decision to spray fungicide to manage sclerotinia stem rot is still difficult. The best way to navigate this agonizing decision is with accurate risk assessment. Consider these factors for each field shortly after first flower to assess your crop's risk of developing the disease, the disease severity, and the potential yield effects.

Disease risk factors

— Moisture in the form of precipitation or high humidity before and during flowering is the major risk factor for sclerotinia stem rot. If the canopy is moist before flowering and precipitation is forecast during flowering, this increases the risk of disease.

— Moist soil conditions will be favourable to germination of sclerotia, and formation of spore-producing apothecia. Over two weeks of near field-capacity moisture leading up to flowering increases the risk of severe infection, while long periods of dry soil during this time will reduce the risk.

— Crop density. A large population of fast growing plants causes the quick closure of a thick canopy. This high density often means high yield and moisture potential, which increases the risk.

— Plant architecture. Is the crop lodged? This will increase risk.

Economic factors

Although an increased risk of disease and disease severity in a field corresponds to an increased probability of a positive economic return on a foliar fungicide application, the potential return on investment should assess: (1) yield potential of the crop, (2) price of the harvested canola, and (3) cost of the fungicide to be applied, including product, time, fuel and machinery use.

Fungicide efficacy factors

If, after assessing the disease risk and economic factors, a fungicide application is required, keep these tips in mind:

— Check fungicide labels for the recommended application timing before spraying. In many cases, if the label suggests 20 to 50 percent bloom, targeting the early end of the range is better. Sample several plants over the field and assess the number of open flowers. This may well be earlier than you expect. If you are already seeing plant symptoms, it is too late to stop this earliest and most costly infection. It generally takes a crop two to four days to move from first flower to 10 percent bloom.

— The objective of the fungicide application is to cover as many petals as possible while ensuring that some chemical also penetrates the canopy to help protect potential infection sites, such as leaf axils and bases.

— Fungicide will not protect petals that emerge after spraying, but some coverage within the canopy may help to restrict infection. Fungicides cannot cure infections that have already penetrated into plant stems, hence the need to apply the fungicide prior to significant petal drop when conditions are conducive to sclerotinia infection.

— Plan for one well-timed application. Early infection causes more yield loss because it has more time to spread and cause stem damage. If risk factors are elevated, aim to hit the optimal window of 20 to 30 percent bloom with one application. Irrigated acres, canola grown for seed or uneven crops may also make a second application worthwhile.

— Always consult your current provincial crop protection guide for a list of registered products and visit www.spraytoswath.ca to check acceptable pre-harvest intervals.

Reducing risk

Growers can take the following measures to reduce the risk of economic loss from sclerotinia stem rot:

— Reduce the number of host plants (including volunteers and host weeds such as stinkweed, hemp-nettle, thistles, shepherd's purse, narrow-leaved hawk's-beard, false ragweed, wild mustard) before and after canola crops, as well as in neighbouring fields (since ascospores can travel hundreds of metres).
— A longer rotation between canola crops — in both the field of concern and neighbouring fields — may reduce the risk in fields that were previously heavily infected.
— Select varieties that resist lodging and have good plant architecture.
— Choose sclerotinia-tolerant varieties, especially if you are less likely to spray even when risk factors suggest it might pay off.
— Always use clean oilseed and pulse seed free of sclerotia bodies
— Adjust harvest practices. Do not swath canola crops with significant incidence of infection if rain is in the immediate forecast, particularly if the crop is not sufficiently mature. Do not swath if the majority of the field is immature. Sclerotinia infected plants will ripen early, so thoroughly assess the crop stage of the entire field. Cut the crop fairly high to allow for better drying. Consider direct combining the infected crop, recognizing that there will be shattering losses from prematurely ripened infected plants.
— See how you did! When spraying, leave an unsprayed check strip. Then compare the amount and severity of infection (before harvest) and the yield (at harvest) between the sprayed and unsprayed check strip, incorporating the cost of fungicide application. Record and assess your results.

Sclerotia from infected stems germinate in the following years to produce apothecia (inset), which release sclerotia spores into the air. Moist conditions in the week or two before flowering mean apothecia will be releasing spores by the time flowering begins.

Taryn Dickson is resource manager with the Canola Council of Canada's crop protection and innovation department.

Meet your Canola Council of Canada Crop Production and Innovation team. Here are the 2016 agronomy goals and contact information for vice president Curtis Rempel, the 10 agronomy specialists and three support staff.

CCC agronomy team shares its 2016 goals

Gregory Sekulic

Agronomy specialist — Peace Region

Specialties: Sustainability, pollinators and beneficials
Email: sekulicg@canolacouncil.org
Cell/text: 780-832-2382
Twitter: @SekulicCCC

Agronomy goal for 2016:

I will encourage better adherence to best practices and pest thresholds, with an eye on giving beneficial insects a place to complete their lifecycle. Shelterbelts, fencelines, uncultivated acres and a small amount of diverse plant species in fields all help promote a healthy population of beneficial insects. Weed management decisions also impact beneficial insects. Spray weeds early for yield and leave what comes later for diversity. These late weeds rarely cause economic loss and provide value to pollinators and beneficials. Agricultural crops are a huge part of the Prairie ecosystem, and growers will find that a healthy ecosystem is a valuable part of integrated pest management.

Dan Orchard

Agronomy specialist — Central Alberta North

Specialty: Clubroot, crop tours
Cell/text: 780-777-9923
Email: orchardd@canolacouncil.org
Twitter: @OrchardCCC

Agronomy goal for 2016:

I will continue to communicate with experts in a quest to develop clubroot management, prevention and communication plans. This will include meetings with the Clubroot Steering Group and other regional groups. My vision is to help the researchers and industry develop improved management techniques, including agronomy, soil remediation and education to combat clubroot. I also plan to ensure growers, agronomists, industry and the general public enjoy a day of learning during the CanolaPalooza II event June 28 in Lacombe, AB. With the help of many others, combined with our learning from last year's event, CanolaPalooza II will hopefully be the tour of the summer.

Keith Gabert

Agronomy specialist — Central Alberta South

Specialty: Insect pests, sclerotinia stem rot, canoLAB
Cell/text: 587-377-0557
Email: gabertk@canolacouncil.org
Twitter: @GabertCCC

Agronomy goal for 2016:

I intend to encourage more scouting in general. For insect thresholds in particular, growers often gain immediate payback and good information from monitoring their fields more closely. We should see the release of a short information video on swede midge that will assist us in monitoring for the spread of this new pest. I'm hoping Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) researcher Hector Carcamo continues his work on improved lygus thresholds, but with a field scale focus. There's still some debate when we actually get "paid" for lygus control. While we have clearly defined thresholds on lygus bugs at specific crop stages, we are still not clear about the yield and economic benefit on a field scale. Anecdotal evidence from the west side of Alberta indicates that the economic threshold might be higher than we think. The Canola Council of Canada's goal of an average 52 bu./ac. yield by 2025 likely applies differently from the traditionally dry eastern side of my territory to the black soils further west, but solid incremental agronomic gains are available and I'd like to apply them across my territory in 2016.

Autumn Barnes

Agronomy specialist — Alberta South

Specialty: Stand establishment
Cell/text: 403-360-0206
Email: barnesa@canolacouncil.org
Twitter: @autumnCCC

Agronomy goal for 2016:

Every year we see varying degrees of wrecks and headaches as a result of poor spring crop establishment. When the spring seeding rush is on, everyone feels pressure to get the next quarter in while the weather is good and equipment is available. In 2016, I would like to see all growers assess and record crop emergence in the spring. When combined with seeding details and yield over time, plant counts can be a huge asset, helping you decide which practices and equipment are increasing or decreasing your profit and/or risk. My other goal for 2016 is to have all growers make incremental gains in plant establishment on their farms. Targeting seven to 10 uniformly spaced canola plants per square foot is ideal, but it might take a few steps to get your operation there consistently. I'd like to see growers start with the blanket five lb./ac. seeding rate, and then bump up the rate if the seed lot is heavy or conditions are poor. Sometimes growers can get away with lower seeding rates and slightly faster speeds when the soil is warm and the seedbed is moist and even, but cutting corners (and seeding rates) when conditions are anything less than optimum is almost always a bad bet.

Shawn Senko

Agronomy specialist — Northeast Saskatchewan

Specialty: Machinery, precision agriculture and data
Cell/text: 306-270-9307
Email: senkos@canolacouncil.org
Twitter: @SenkoCCC

Agronomy goal for 2016:

Growers always have lots of ways to spend money on new technology. But does new technology lead to improved profits? When spending money on technology, have an idea how you'll get a return on that investment. Straight cut header technology is one example. Specialty headers with extending cutterbars have been shown to provide an edge when it comes to straight cutting canola, but is the edge enough to justify replacing an existing header? Research in Western Canada suggests that all headers can work to straight combine canola. Growers may find that other measures such as a uniformly-maturing crop with good standability and pod shatter tolerance are better first steps to success than jumping straight into an investment in header technology.

Warren Ward

Agronomy specialist — Southeast Saskatchewan

Specialty: Fertility
Cell/text: 306-621-0630
Email: wardw@canolacouncil.org
Twitter: @WardCCC

Agronomy goal for 2016:

I see two important messages as growers prepare their fertility programs for 2016. One is to keep safe seed-placed fertility rates in mind, especially given last year's challenging start. Seed-placed fertilizer can be especially damaging to canola seedlings, and the damage is much worse when conditions such as soil moisture, soil type and soil temperature are less than ideal. The other is to re-evaluate total crop nutrient requirements. Canola yield potential is much higher than provincial averages, and fertilizer may be one area holding back yields. Growers have to consider the yield potential for their particular region, but testing a higher rate of nitrogen on a couple of fields could provide some valuable insight.

continued on page 33

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Ian Epp

Agronomy specialist — Northwest Saskatchewan

Specialty: Weeds
Cell/text: 306-371-7913
Email: eppi@canolacouncil.org
Twitter: @EppCCC

Agronomy goal for 2016:

I want to promote the value of identifying the weeds present and taking an economic approach — not an eradication approach — to weed management. In canola production, people are often spraying without properly identifying the species and staging of the weeds present. Look for new weeds or changing weed populations that may suggest a need to alter herbicide programs. Identify patches that should have been controlled. These could be herbicide-resistant weeds. Economic weed management starts with early control, using pre-seed and early in-crop applications as part of an integrated solution. Later in-crop sprays rarely provide an economic benefit as long as early weed competition is removed.

Nicole Philp

Agronomy specialist — Southwest Saskatchewan

Specialty: Ultimate Canola Challenge, genetics and seed, Canola Performance Trials
Cell/text: 306-551-4597
Email: philpn@canolacouncil.org
Twitter: @PhilpCCC

Agronomy goal for 2016:

I believe we can make progress in matching genetics to the particular situation in each field. The combination of clubroot resistance, blackleg resistance, increased sclerotinia tolerance, maturity, height and herbicide system can make a difference to the profitability of canola on a particular field. Thinking through seed decisions based on the needs of individual fields has value for growers.

Justine Cornelsen

Agronomy specialist — Western Manitoba

Specialty: Blackleg
Cell/text: 204-298-4364
Email: cornelsenj@canolacouncil.org
Twitter: @CornelsenCCC

Agronomy goal for 2016:

Yield losses from blackleg are greater than originally thought, silently taking yield while clubroot gets all the attention. One of my goals for 2016 is to begin to move the industry toward labelling resistance genes so growers can make more informed decisions on rotating genetic source resistance to manage the disease. This will help growers select the right resistance for the pathogens present in each field. My other goal is to encourage growers and agronomists to scout fields more closely to understand how blackleg infection levels are changing on their farm. To do this, go into canola fields a week or two before swathing and snip plants at the base on the stem. Visual assessment of these cross sections will show whether blackleg is present and at what severity.

Angela Brackenreed

Agronomy specialist — Eastern Manitoba

Specialty: Harvest and storage, economics
Cell/text: 204-720-6923
Email: brackenreeda@canolacouncil.org
Twitter: @BrackenreedCCC

Agronomy goal for 2016:

Growers can go a long way to capture more bushels by perfecting the things that are largely within their control at harvest. Check the level of loss out the back of the combine to adjust settings accordingly and calibrate the loss monitor. Slowing down can reduce the loss. Changing other settings, such as fan speed and sieve clearance, with changing conditions throughout the day can also make a difference. Storage losses are also too high, with more issues in 2015 than we've seen in a while. Storage losses are completely within our control and we have the tools and knowledge to keep losses at zero.

Curtis Rempel

Vice president, Crop Production and Innovation

Office phone: 204-982-2105
Email: rempelc@canolacouncil.org

Agronomy goal for 2016:

As a department, our goal is to improve canola productivity, profitability and sustainability to help Canada's canola industry work toward its goal of 52 bu./ac. average yields by 2025. For me, the agronomy steps that will have the biggest impact are genetics, stand establishment and fertility.

I encourage growers to start with the right genetics. Use Canola Performance Trial results (www.canolaperformancetrials.ca) and other data points and set a realistic yield potential. Fertilize accordingly so canola can meet that yield potential.

continued on page 35

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Sclerotinia is on the rise in Western Canada due to wetter conditions and tightening host-crop rotations. Fortunately Lance® AG, a new premium fungicide, offers enhanced performance with two active ingredients to control sclerotinia and other late season diseases. It's also the first fungicide to deliver the proven benefits[2] of **AgCelence**® during the critical flowering stage in canola for better management of minor stress.[1] The result is more consistent and increased yield potential.[1] For more information, visit **agsolutions.ca/lanceag** or contact **AgSolutions**® Customer Care at 1-877-371-BASF (2273).

BASF
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[1]All comparisons are to untreated unless otherwise stated. [2]**AgCelence** benefits refer to products that contain the active ingredient pyraclostrobin.

Always read and follow label directions.

continued from page 33

Clint Jurke
Agronomy director

Cell/text: 306-821-2935
Email: jurkec@canolacouncil.org
Twitter: @JurkeCCC

Agronomy goal for 2016:

In the Midwest region on the Saskatchewan-Alberta border around Lloydminster, I see opportunities to increase yield and profitability by increasing fertilizer rates. I will encourage growers to target a fertilizer blend so they can start to capture the yield potential of current canola genetics, which should be around 60 bu./ac. for this region. I will also promote steps to manage clubroot, including using resistant varieties on all acres as clubroot moves further into the area. Verticillium wilt awareness across the Prairies will be a new topic for me in 2016.

Gail Hoskins
Crop production administrator

Office phone: 204-982-2102
Email: hoskinsg@canolacouncil.org

Agronomy goal for 2016:

I coordinate meetings and events, administer research projects and team finances. My goals are to work with the team and grower organizations to fund new research projects that will help growers improve productivity, sustainability and profitability. I will continue to ensure that all our events, including CanolaPalooza II, canoLAB and Canola Discovery Forum, are professionally run and provide top-quality information.

Taryn Dickson
Resource manager

Cell/text: 204-291-6195
Email: dicksont@canolacouncil.org
Twitter: @DicksonCCC

Agronomy goal for 2016:

I will encourage growers to keep in mind that their crop is a global product and they represent Canada when they produce it! Here are five Keep it Clean tips growers can follow to make sure their grain is export ready:

1. Use pesticides at the correct rate, timing and pre-harvest interval. Use the tool at www.spraytoswath.ca.
2. Don't use unregistered pesticides or those with unacceptable residues.
3. Always follow the canola storage recommendations outlined in the Keep it Clean brochure. Go to www.canolacouncil.org and enter "Keep It Clean brochure" in the search box.
4. Grow blackleg-resistant varieties and use practices that reduce infection.
5. Don't grow any de-registered varieties.

For more on the Keep it Clean program, visit www.keepingitclean.ca/canola

For more on the importance of market access, visit www.canolacouncil.org/marketaccess ●

CCC AGRONOMY TOOLS

The Canola Council of Canada agronomy team provides the following tools to help get their messages to growers, agronomist and retailers.

Canola Watch. This free email newsletter comes out weekly through the growing season. It provides timely tips to help growers and agronomists manage what is happening in the field. Sign up at **www.canolawatch.org/signup**

Canola Encyclopedia. This well-organized online resource is a one-stop shop for canola best management practices, providing depth and scientific references. **www.canolacouncil.org/canola-encyclopedia**

Canola Performance Trials. Leading canola varieties are compared in these third-party Prairie-wide trials. Search for yield, maturity, height and lodging results by location, herbicide tolerance system, and season zone. The tool at **www.canolaperformancetrials.ca** has data for 2011 through 2015.

Ultimate Canola Challenge. Find results for input trials across the Prairies for 2013, 2014 and 2015. Also get tips on how to run on-farm trials. **www.canolacouncil.org/crop-production/ultimate-canola-challenge/**

Spray to Swath. This easy to use tool provides pre-harvest intervals for all fungicides and insecticides used on canola. **www.spraytoswath.ca**

Canola Diagnostic Tool. Use this tool in-season to help diagnose problems found in the field. It uses a checklist to help growers and agronomists work through the problem and come up with all possible causes. It then provides tips on how to confirm which cause is most likely and how to manage the situation. **www.canoladiagnostictool.ca** ●

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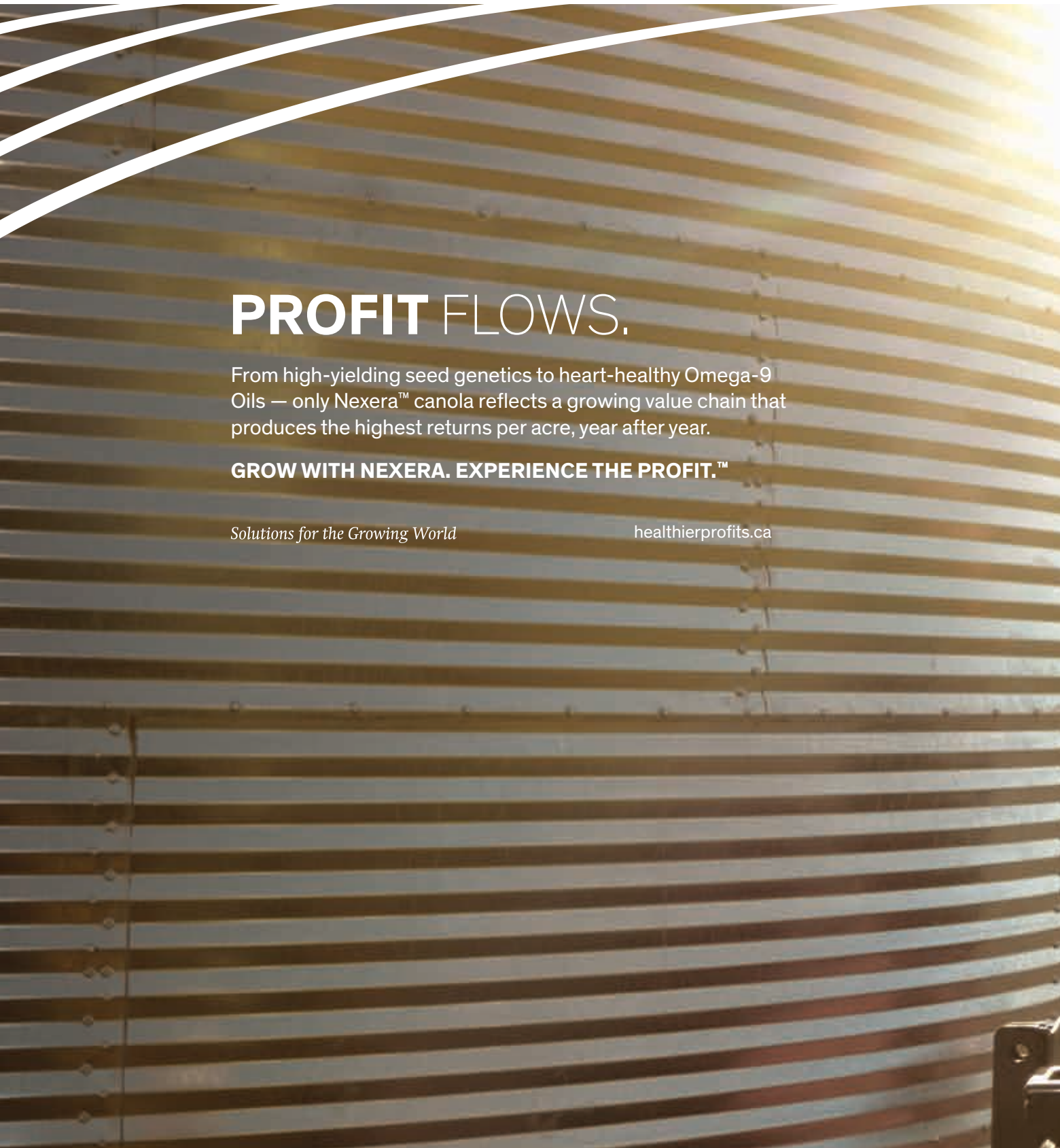

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ALBERTA Canola PRODUCERS COMMISSION

ABreport

2016 Alberta Canola Producers Commission Board of Directors

Front L-R

Greg Sears
Region 2, Sexsmith, AB

Denis Guindon
Region 3, Falher, AB

Daryl Tuck
Region 4, Vegreville, AB

Terry Young
Region 7, Lacombe, AB

Kelly McIntyre
Region 1, Fairview, AB

Back L-R

Dale Uglum
Region 11, Bawlf, AB

Renn Breitkreuz
Region 6, Onoway, AB

John Guelly
Region 5, Westlock, AB

Kevin Serfas
Region 9, Turin, AB

Stuart Holmen
Region 10, Paradise Valley, AB

Steve Marshman
Region 8, Strathmore, AB

Welcome to Two New Directors

The 26th Annual General Meeting of the ACPC was held January 26 at the FarmTech Conference in Edmonton. In the fall, director nominations were held and two new directors were acclaimed. We would like to welcome Kevin Serfas of Turin, AB, replacing Lee Markert in Region 9, and Denis Guindon of Falher, replacing Raymond Blanchette in Region 3. Stay tuned for the Region 12 director appointment.

The new Chair of the board is Greg Sears and Vice Chair is Renn Breitkreuz.

We would like to thank Lee Markert, Marlene Caskey and Raymond Blanchette for their service during their time as directors.

FarmTech™

FarmTech 2016 A Great Success

ACPC thanks the hardworking FarmTech committee for putting together another great event. We enjoy working with our fellow crop commissions to offer this dynamic event to our producers. From weather to agronomy to management to nutrition, the diversity of information presented was vast and everyone walked away having learned many new things. Thanks to our Canola Council of Canada agronomists for helping attendees learn about canola agronomy at the ACPC and CCC shared booth over the three-day event. ●

New Chairman Greg Sears' Welcome

First, thank you to Lee Markert, our past chair, for setting a high standard in professionalism, passion for the industry and leadership. We wish you the best in your future on the farm with your family and in your business.

I would also like to thank past directors Marlene Caskey and Raymond Blanchette for their dedication to this board, and their contributions to this industry and its producers.

I look forward to working with this strong board to positively influence all aspects of the industry that affect our growers and their businesses. It is an exciting time to be with the commission, as we are already working collaboratively with other commissions on issues that are important to our common stakeholders. I appreciate the opportunity to be part of this board as we continue to collaborate and work for the profitability of you — our fellow farmers. ●

Past Chairman Lee Markert's Farewell

My time on the board has been some of the most fulfilling of my professional career to date. I am humbled and honoured to have been able to represent the canola farmers of southwestern Alberta and to sit as your chairman representing all Alberta canola farmers.

I must thank a lot of the people who have supported me during my time on the board. First, Ward Toma and his staff, who are in my opinion some of the best and brightest in the industry in their respective fields. I am continually impressed with their poise in juggling an ever-evolving board of directors while at the same time trail-blazing in an industry that encounters new opportunities and challenges every year.

I also have to thank my family and partners in business: my wife Lindsay and our son Reese, my father Ron, mother Louise and our entire team back home that pick up the slack I leave behind when I'm traveling around working for this industry and its producers.

Finally, I am grateful to my fellow board members, past and present, for all their hard work and passion in everything they do to make this a vibrant and evolving industry. You now have a passionate, engaged leader in Greg Sears and I know ACPC will continue to do great things with him at the helm.

I am a better person, businessman and canola producer for having worked with all of you and had this experience. I have been fortunate to meet some amazing people, experience some incredible things and learn more than I ever imagined thanks to ACPC. I just hope I was able to contribute something meaningful in return. Good luck and continued prosperity to the organization and to the industry. Thank you. ●

SaskCanola

SKreport

LICENSE TO FARM LAUNCHES

On January 15, 2016, SaskCanola launched the thirty-minute documentary *License to Farm*, to highlight the facts behind common misconceptions about agriculture production in Canada. The goal of this documentary is to inspire producers to engage in more conversations about food, build trust with their urban neighbours, and protect their social license to farm.

To view *License to Farm*, please visit **www.licensetofarm.com**. Keep up with this project by following us on social media:

@licensetofarm on Twitter and Instagram

License to Farm on Facebook

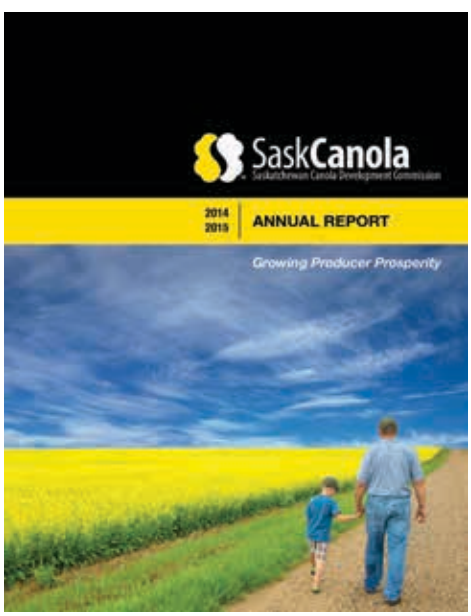
Stay Connected with SaskCanola

Subscribe for producer updates by signing up at **www.saskcanola.com/about/contact.php**

Follow us on Twitter **@SaskCanola**

SaskCanola's 2014-2015 Annual Report is Now Available

Please visit **saskcanola.com/about/annualreports.php** for an electronic copy or contact the SaskCanola office for a hard copy at 1-877-241-7044.



Scholarship recipient Sara Doerksen.

Scholarship recipients at Bean Feed with Keith Downey – Andrew Reddekopp (left), Tor Lokken (right), and Jacqueline Toews (middle).

SaskCanola Awards Dr. Keith Downey Undergraduate Scholarships to University of Saskatchewan Students

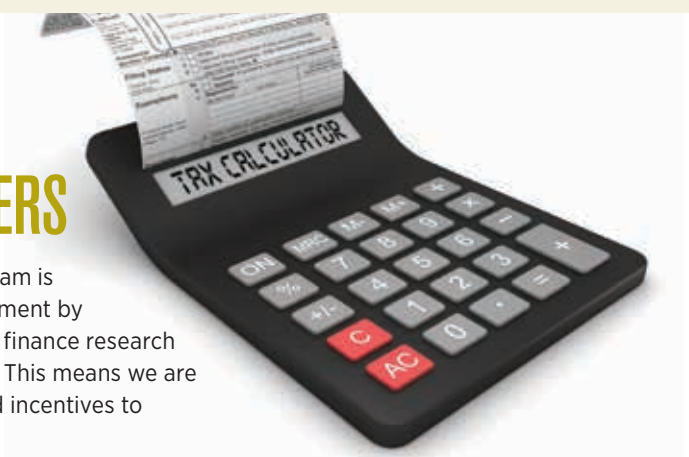
SaskCanola is pleased to announce that we have awarded the Dr. Keith Downey Undergraduate Scholarships, a total value of $8,000, to four undergraduate students from the University of Saskatchewan's College of Agriculture and Bioresources. The awards were announced at the annual Bean Feed event, which took place in November at TCU Place in Saskatoon.

Four deserving recipients received a $2,000 SaskCanola scholarship to support their agricultural studies, including:

- Andrew Reddekopp – 3rd year, BSA in Agronomy – from Hepburn, SK
- Jacqueline Toews – 3rd year, BSA in Crop Science – from Glaslyn, SK
- Sara Doerksen – 4th year, BSA in Agronomy – from Garrick, SK
- Tor Lokken – 4th year, BSc RRM in Resource Science – from Kenaston, SK

"SaskCanola is proud to contribute to the next generation of agricultural leaders," says Janice Tranberg, SaskCanola Executive Director. "This investment will ultimately benefit Saskatchewan farmers when these students become top-notch producers, researchers, and industry professionals." ●

RESEARCH TAX CREDITS FOR SASKATCHEWAN CANOLA PRODUCERS



The Scientific Research and Experimental Development (SR&ED) Program is a federal government program that encourages research and development by providing tax-based incentives. SaskCanola uses levy contributions to finance research and development work that benefits Saskatchewan canola producers. This means we are able to participate in the SR&ED program and distribute the tax-based incentives to producers. For complete details, visit www.saskcanola.com. ●

Mairlyn Smith — MCGA Canola Award of Excellence

By Sandi Knight

The Manitoba Canola Growers Association has awarded Mairlyn Smith the 2016 Canola Award of Excellence. Mairlyn is the first professional home economist to be recognized for her contributions to the canola industry.

Mairlyn has been using and promoting canola oil for decades — for very personal reasons. "My dad was diagnosed with heart disease in the 1970s (at age 50) which started me off being interested in the correlation between healthy eating, healthy lifestyle and heart disease." The diagnosis meant changes in her dad's diet, including lowering saturated fats by using canola oil. He is now healthy at 93.

Pursuing her goal of educating people on health, Mairlyn earned a degree in Home Economics from the University of British Columbia in 1976 before completing her teaching certificate. The acting bug lured her away from education to study dramatic arts in California, then to Toronto where she worked on stage, film and television — including on Second City and as host of Harrowsmith Country Life, which led to a Gemini nomination.

With distinctive style and flair, Mairlyn combines her many talents to educate people across the country about food and nutrition. Her enthusiasm, passion and humour are unparalleled — the learning is never without laughter. She demystifies cooking with ease to make recipes and is an ardent supporter of eating seasonal, locally grown, Canadian food.

As a regular guest expert on the national television show *Cityline*, as well as on *Breakfast Television* in Toronto, she features canola oil in her recipes.

This gifted professional home economist is also a best-selling cookbook author. Her seventh and newest release, *Homegrown: Celebrating the Canadian Foods We Grow, Raise and Produce*, profiles both conventional and cold-pressed canola oil, which, in her opinion, "is the olive oil of Canada". (Cold pressing squeezes oil from seeds without adding heat, creating a stronger aroma and flavour than the conventional light-tasting, neutral-coloured canola oil.)

Ellen Pruden, MCGA's education and promotion manager, notes Mairlyn has been a keynote speaker at multiple events in Manitoba including the Manitoba Farm Women's Conference, Manitoba Ag Days and the MCGA's Leadership Conference. She has been a participant in Canola Connect Harvest Camp and her "Be Well Story" was featured by Canola Eat Well in 2013. "She is an active voice across Canada, supporting Canadian farmers and choosing products like canola oil," Ellen says.

Mairlyn is overwhelmed to receive this award. "It's humbling to be in such great company. I was gob-smacked and then [thought], "well they made a mistake," ... because I'm just doing what I believe in."

Perhaps that is exactly why she does it so well.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Canola Award of Excellence — Past Winners
canolagrowers.com/about-mcga/canola-award-of-excellence/#.VmiLE7grLIU

Mairlyn's Be Well Story
www.youtube.com/watch?v=MqoRuEWzDYk

City Line Episode — "Cold-pressed canola oil is the olive oil of Canada."
www.cityline.ca/2015/11/french-onion-soup-2/

Food Day Canada with Mairlyn Smith — Canola Eat Well
canolaeatwell.com/food-day-canada-home-economist-mairlyn-smith/#.VmxQsEorLIV

Mairlyn Smith
www.mairlynsmith.com

2015 Election of Directors

Manitoba Canola Growers Association (MCGA) has Director elections ever two years. Each director is elected to represent canola growers at the board table for a four-year term.

The 2015 MCGA Election of Directors saw six candidates run for four positions. The successful candidates are as follows:

Clayton Harder
Naro

Bill Nicholson
Shoal Lake

Jacob (Jack) Froese
Winkler

Ron Krahn
Rivers

The vote was conducted using a mail-in preferential voting system that allowed members to rank the candidates in order of preference. Candidates were required to win more than 50 percent of the active votes in any particular count to win one of the four available positions.

The four elected Directors took office following the MCGA Annual General Meeting on February 12, 2016.

Visit **www.canolagrowers.com** for more information.

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What does the outside inspiration and knowledge generated through a high-end peer group do for your business? These three growers explain.

By Jay Whetter

Positive peer pressure

Bryce Pallister
Portage la Prairie, MB

Bryce Pallister is in a peer group of eight farmers spread across the Prairies. The group has had focused discussions on working with employees and partners (business and family), and using technology on the farm. The next meeting will look at marketing strategies.

"We are always looking for ways to be better and I think the peer group is a good platform for sharing ideas as we're not really directly in competition with each other due to the geography and the different crop mixes we have," Pallister says. "There's a mutual benefit to be had from our exchanging of ideas and a comfort level to be open with each other."

The group has three meetings a year, of one to two days each. Some are at a central location. Some are at members' locations. The cost is about $3,000 per year plus travel.

"At the current scale of a typical farm today, with high costs and potential revenues, any idea that can improve your margin will provide a return of many times the initial investment," Pallister says. "Even one small idea per year that gets implemented because of being in a group like this makes it worthwhile."

"Even one small idea per year that gets implemented because of being in a group like this makes it worthwhile."

—Bryce Pallister

Darren Yungmann
St. Gregor, SK

Darren Yungmann helped form a peer group of local young farmers who worked off-farm and wanted to help each other improve their farm practices. That group kept going for about 15 years, meeting every couple of weeks to talk agronomy and marketing. It wound down recently, and now Yungmann is president of his dad's local peer group.

"I love going to meetings and seminars. I believe I get something out of every conversation I have about farming," he says. "When a peer group allows you to rub shoulders with the sharpest growers in the area, you're going to learn something by osmosis."

The group often has guest speakers, including agronomists, accountants and equipment dealers. Stan Jeeves, former SaskCanola director, is a regular presenter on marketing. Yungmann says he gets more out of the presentations when his peers are present. "They provide different questions, different answers and different viewpoints," he says.

"If you have the spark to organize a group, it's not that hard to get together every couple of weeks and talk farming."

—Darren Yungmann

One or two motivated people are enough to get a local peer group going, he says. "If you have the spark to organize a group, it's not that hard to get together every couple of weeks and talk farming."

He recommends having a few guidelines for meetings. With Yungmann's group, each member has a commodity to report on at each meeting. They also have a few rules of conduct. "While the meetings are fairly informal, I do try to keep them focused so everybody can hear what everyone is saying."

Yungmann's groups maintained fairly even membership over the years. Some dropped out and some came in. When someone new asked to join, he ran the name by the group at large to make sure everyone was okay with the new member.

His peers don't open their farm account books and business management isn't a huge part of the program, but members do "share successes and failures pretty honestly," he says.

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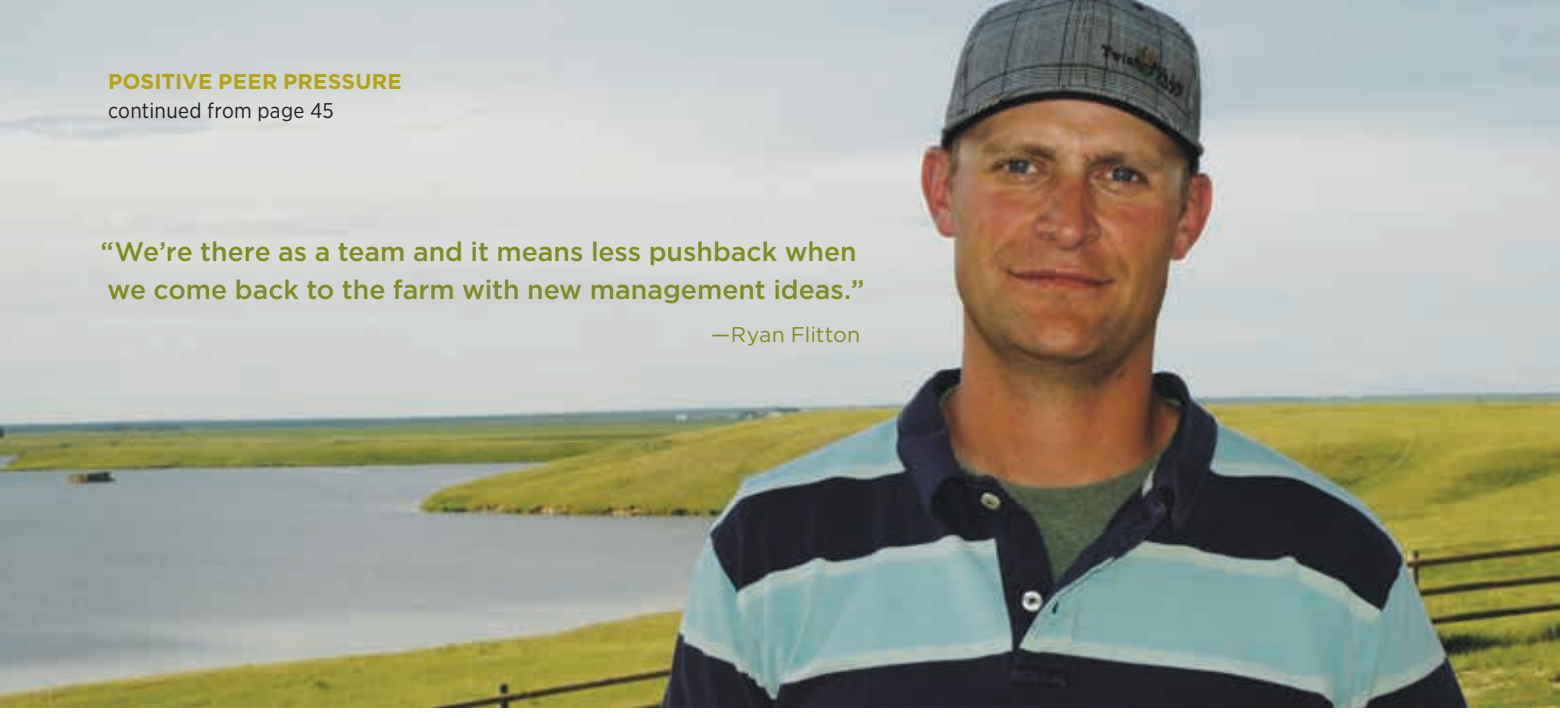

"We're there as a team and it means less pushback when we come back to the farm with new management ideas."

—Ryan Flitton

Ryan Flitton
Vulcan, AB

Ryan Flitton along with his brother and brother-in-law are in a management-oriented peer group organized by Terry Betker of Backswath Management. The group includes nine farms, each about 10,000 acres, from across the Prairies. "There are no competing neighbours," Flitton says.

Flitton's invitation to join the group came about after he attended a course called CTEAM, short for Canada Total Excellence in Agriculture Management. Betker was a speaker. After meeting Betker, Flitton hired him to work with them on farm management. Shortly afterward, Betker asked if they wanted to join his peer group. That was 18 months ago.

The group holds two-day meetings three times per year, once at a neutral location and twice at member farms. Each farm pays a fee to cover Betker's costs, with hotel and travel on top of that. Betker puts together the agenda but members drive the conversation.

The first few meetings covered general management topics while members got comfortable with each other. "We're now sharing employee compensation," Flitton says. "Next we'll be getting into ratios and benchmarks. I'd like to know how we compare to other members of the group when it comes to capital costs per acre and labour costs per acre, for example."

While it does take time for members to become comfortable sharing their finances, it will be these financial comparisons that provide significant value from being in the group, Flitton says.

As part of the peer group program, Flitton and his brother and brother-in-law thought through their goals for the business, and continue to review the goals and their progress toward meeting them. He says it's important that all three decision-makers on the farm are in the group together. "We're there as a team and it means less pushback when we come back to the farm with new management ideas."

For anyone wanting to start or join a peer group, Flitton says the key is to have an organized facilitator and a group of like-minded people you can trust. "Betker is awesome," he says, but you don't necessarily have to pay for an expert facilitator. "It could be a member of the group." ●

Jay Whetter is the editor of Canola Digest.

PEER GROUPS: WHY JOIN? HOW TO FIND ONE?

Terry Betker, who runs Backswath Management, says farmers join peer groups to:

- Strengthen and advance management practices.
- Affirm or challenge how things are being done.
- Gain an element of accountability to ensure that things are getting done.
- Benchmark performance.
- Learn from other farmers' experiences.
- Provide input into, and feedback on, management issues.
- Share management techniques.

Farmers can organize their own group. "But keeping the group active and meaningful can be a challenge, and ensuring they are actually in a group of peers can be a concern," Betker says. "It shouldn't be a 'buddy' group."

Another option is to join a group like Betker's that is organized and facilitated by a third party.

Virtual communities are another option to test and generate ideas, even if they do not have the depth of a formal and facilitated peer group. Tech journalist and strategist Jesse Hirsh spoke at CropSphere in Saskatoon in January. He suggested the idea of creating a "community of learning" through Twitter to learn more about new technology. Use Twitter's search function to find people talking about agriculture and technology. Follow people who have good ideas. Create a hashtag such as #agtechies, for example, to identify your group. "Never deal with technology alone," Hirsh says. "Always have a group to use and attack that technology so you can learn together." ●

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