

# GROWING Opportunities Newsletter

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Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives

Southwest GO Team

## Budget 2006 — Addressing the changing needs of rural Manitoba

### A message from the Minister

As Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (MAFRI), I am pleased to present the second edition of *Growing Opportunities*, a newsletter that provides information on programs and services of interest to rural and northern communities. The Manitoba government remains committed to working with farm families, producers and industry to build a strong, vibrant and diversified rural economy.

This week many Manitobans will be taking part in Rural Forum 2006. This is just one of dozens of presentations MAFRI offers through the year that help to accelerate community economic development by providing informational and educational programs as well as opportunities to grow, learn and network.

The government's continuing commitment to rural and northern Manitoba is being further demonstrated in Budget 2006. The budget recognizes that agricultural producers faced significant challenges in 2005 and pledges support by pursuing economic development opportunities through the *Growing Opportunities* initiative and other strategic investments.

Last year we doubled our commitment to the Canadian Agricultural Income Stabilization program (CAIS) raising it to \$10 million. As well, over the past two years, Manitoba farmers have received more than \$500 million in production insurance for lost crops – the largest two-year payout on record

in Manitoba. Budget 2006 enhances the province's moisture support program, offering farmers new options to increase their coverage.

*Growing Opportunities* is helping to meet the changing needs of today's agricultural producers and family farms. Business development specialists focused on community economic development are positioned in GO teams, and the government is consulting with rural and northern communities about new ways to create opportunities for increasing economic growth – for example with more jobs, greater slaughter capacity, and ongoing value-added processing.

### Advances in technology and innovation have led to a growing number of products being farmed and finished in Manitoba.

Our government's investment in the expansion of Portage la Prairie's Food Development Centre made it possible for entrepreneurs to utilize the centre's research and development capabilities. Today, Manitoba's own Peak of the Market gourmet soups are produced in Portage. Likewise, St. Agathe is home to Associated Proteins, Manitoba's third oilseed crushing facility is now in full commercial production, using Manitoba canola and creating rural employment opportunities.

There is a growing excitement in rural Manitoba surrounding our government's promotion of alternative clean energies such as wind, ethanol and biodiesel. Farmers can benefit significantly by harvesting the crops needed to manufacture these new sources of power.

Manitoba has had a number of successes in this area. Our first wind farm – a 63 turbine, 99-megawatt, \$210-million project in St. Leon – will be in full production this year, generating \$9 million in land-lease payments to Manitoba farmers over the life of the project. The province continues to support, in partnership with the federal government, Husky Oil's \$145-million investment to expand the ethanol plant in Minnedosa.

Biodiesel production in Manitoba continues to receive substantial attention from the provincial government. Through a partnership with the federal government, Manitoba will deliver \$1.5 million to support the development of smaller, community-based production facilities that supply biodiesel to local and regional markets. More and larger investments are being looked at to increase Manitoba's biodiesel production, which in turn, will boost the profit margins for farmers in rural and northern Manitoba.

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# Animal Identification and Traceability Crucial to Preparedness

Canadian livestock producers exporting to the U.S. and other countries must be able to count on a reliable system of animal and premises identification to maintain access to the international marketplace, and Manitoba's Office of the Chief Veterinarian is working with federal and industry representatives to ensure we have a full chain of traceability.

"A reliable tracing method is required for three basic reasons," says chief veterinary officer Dr. Wayne Lees. "Knowing the numbers and locations of animals in the province allows us to plan strategies for emergency situations; it allows us to respond quickly to emergency disease outbreaks; and it gives us access to important international export markets."

Current U.S. regulations have placed increasing pressure on Canadian exporters to demonstrate an equivalent or superior identification and tracing system to its own for incoming livestock and poultry. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) implemented the National Animal Identification System in 2004 to standardize and expand animal identification programs. Its long-term goal is to allow health officials to identify all livestock and premises that have had direct contact with a disease of concern, within 48 hours of discovery.

## Canada working on a national traceability plan

In Canada, commodity groups are working with the federal and provincial governments to create regulatory support for traceability systems across the country. Consultations are taking

place to develop an integrated strategy. The most advanced example of this integration is modeled by Agri-Traceability Quebec (ATQ), a system being implemented to track all species of food animals throughout their entire lifetime.

## Changes will improve disease outbreak response

In Manitoba, MAFRI has introduced amendments under the provincial *Animal Diseases Act* to help collect information on livestock premises so emergency management, disease control and food safety programs can be delivered. "Emergency response requires the most detail," he says. "Individual animal identification, the movement of the animals affected and the location of the farms they were on must be available instantly when we're confronted with a crisis."

Recent proposed changes to Manitoba's act will support planning for and response to animal disease outbreaks. The proposed act will give inspectors increased powers to stop and inspect animals being transported into Manitoba. This will lead to geographic zoning that can reduce the impact of animal disease outbreaks in other provinces or within our own province. The proposed changes will also allow vital information on livestock numbers and volume to be collected and shared with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and other jurisdictions, as part of an increasingly integrated national animal health system.



## Crop Diagnostic School – 2006 Edition

Farmers, agronomists and everyone involved in field scouting and assessing crop health will want to take advantage of the Crop Diagnostic School sessions slated for this July. The program is designed to help you refine diagnostic skills, recognize potential problems and get current on the latest crop management issues.

The school will be running **July 10** through **July 14** and **July 17** through **July 21**. Sessions are repeated each day. Let us know which day you would like to attend and we will do the rest.

About 500 people annually have been attending the Manitoba Crop Diagnostic School since it began in 1997. The comprehensive hands-on approach to

learning attracts new and repeat participants each year. The course will have you assessing, scouting and identifying while you are developing a non-biased whole-perspective approach towards farming. The school is organized and delivered by specialists from Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives and the University of Manitoba.

This year's in-field sessions will include:

### Disease

- effects of micro-climate on disease
- anthracnose in field peas
- "pushing it" with winter wheat

### Insects

- how to scout for hard-to-find insects
- tips on insect identification
- indoor display to test your knowledge of beneficial insects

### Soil and Water Management

- soil testing, nutrient and moisture management
- using soil properties to identify production risks and yield potential
- nitrogen timing and placement efficiencies
- green manure management and nitrogen yields
- best management practices for phosphorus management

# Developing Vibrant Rural Communities

Community economic development is more than just business expansion. It's about taking stock of the needs and resources in your area and coming up with plans to make the best use of your assets.

Local organizations are absolutely vital to vibrant rural and northern communities in Manitoba, especially community development corporations (CDCs). CDCs are supported by municipal or town councils and are usually run by volunteer boards. They can serve many functions, including: developing business, providing small business loans, supporting entrepreneurs, listing opportunities for development, co-ordinating community initiated projects and managing the Community Works Loan program.

Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (MAFRI) recognizes the skills and motivation of CDC boards. To

support these boards, MAFRI provides local business development specialists to help them create and sustain economic development initiatives.

Business development specialists can support community organizations by:

- assisting in the development of strategic plans
- locating resources for diversification and value added initiatives through programs such as Rural Economic Development Initiatives (REDI), the Young Entrepreneur Program (YEP), Hometown Manitoba, the Rural Entrepreneur Assistance (REA) program and the Community Enterprise Development (CED) Tax Credit program, and others.
- networking with communities to find various resources to help communities achieve their development goals

REGION	BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST		PHONE	EMAIL
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South Interlake	Grant	Carlson	886-2696	grcarlson@gov.mb.ca
Southwest	Cathey	Day	534-0906	cday@gov.mb.ca

## Weeds

- dandelion control
- pre-seed burn off considerations
- glyphosate residues

## Alfalfa

- warm seed with forage
- alfalfa removal

## Crop Management

- canola, flax and sunflower in identity preserved production systems – agronomics related to oil quantity and quality
- pulse crop inoculants and general agronomy
- crop production with reduced inputs
- managing crops for ethanol production

## Attending the workshop will:

- improve your trouble-shooting skills
- enhance your crop management skills
- address interacting factors of nutrients, pests and environmental stress
- provide Continuing Education Units for Certified Crop Advisors

### Comments from the 2005 Crop Diagnostic School

"I like seeing trials of issues I've seen in the field! Well done!"

"Manitoba's Diagnostic School is still more practical and I think a better school, with technical and experimental trials at a higher level than other provinces."

"Great job, over all, lots of talent and expertise keep up good work."

Because the training is hands-on, enrolment is limited to 50 people per day, so don't delay. We also offer companies full-day bookings for 50 or more people.

Workshops are held the University of Manitoba's, Carman Research Station, located 1.6 kilometres west of Carman on Highway 245. Cost is \$160 per person.

**To register, call Marina Chabbert or Monika Menold at 204-745-5660, Crops Knowledge Centre, Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (Carman)**



## Alternative Financing Possible Through OCG Program

The Operating Credit Guarantee (OCG) program, offered by the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation (MASC), provides guarantees to private sector lending institutions on new lines of credit to agricultural producers for operating expenses. The program supports agricultural enterprises that may not be eligible for financing from traditional lending institutions, due to factors such as inexperience or limited equity.

MASC will guarantee operating lines of credit of up to \$450,000 for individuals and single shareholder corporations, and up to \$700,000 for partnerships, corporations and co-operatives. OCG clients are assured reasonable interest payments because the maximum rate is prime plus 1.5 per cent. The program provides a 25 per cent provincial guarantee and is provided co-operatively with Manitoba's private lending institutions.

The OCG is available to Canadian citizens operating a farm or agricultural enterprise, who are at least 18 years of age and live in Manitoba. Potential clients must apply to the participating lender of their choice. Lenders will review applications to see if the program would help clients. If so, the lenders will apply to MASC and supply the required documents.

MASC Senior Vice-President of Planning and Lending, Charlene Kibbins, says the flexibility of the program is the key. OCGs can be of assistance to agricultural producers as well as operators of agricultural enterprises who want to diversify or add value to their operations.

**For more information on OCGs or other MASC lending programs, call MASC's Loan Guarantees Manager at 204-746-7509 or visit us on the web at [masc.mb.ca](http://masc.mb.ca).**

Budget 2006 also provides new resources to pursue a federal partnership to double the number of Manitoba soil survey teams. A new loan program will be established to help farmers make economic and environmental improvements to their farm operations. This program complements existing incentives under the Agricultural Policy Framework.

As you can see, Budget 2006 plans for a busy and successful year in the agriculture and agri-food sector. I encourage rural and northern agricultural communities to continue pursuing innovative ways to grow and diversify. Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (MAFRI) remains committed to work with you and support your efforts in building a strong and vital rural and northern economy.

**Rosann Wowchuk**  
Deputy Premier  
Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives

## Merger Means Higher Quality Service

Merging the Manitoba Crop Insurance Corporation and the Manitoba Agricultural Credit Corporation into the **Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation (MASC)** last fall has resulted in improved service for Manitoba producers.

The new corporation continues to provide producers with the quality insurance and lending services they have come to expect, while improving the efficiency of delivery. The expertise of staff from the two original organizations has been combined to increase MASC's capacity to create and deliver a broader range of services that address current and future farming needs. The merger was relatively seamless and producers are pleased with the level of service from front-line lending and insurance staff.

MASC's insurance services include a wide variety of options:

- **Production Insurance** – Producers can get protection against production losses caused by natural perils. Excess Moisture Insurance is also available, which covers the inability to seed land because of wet conditions.
- **Hail Insurance** – Separate insurance is available for spot loss hail damage. Hail Insurance also covers losses caused by accidental fires.
- **Wildlife Damage Compensation** – This program reduces financial losses from damage caused by migratory waterfowl, big game and livestock predators.

MASC's lending services include the following:

- **Direct Lending** – Producers can get short, intermediate and long-term financing, with competitive interest rates and no prepayment penalties. Producers younger than 40 may qualify for a partial interest rebate for the first five years of a loan.
- **Guarantees** – MASC partners with banks, credit unions and caisses populaires to give agricultural producers and rural entrepreneurs access to credit where it would not otherwise be available due to factors such as insufficient equity or security and unproven projects.

For more information on any of MASC services, contact your local insurance or lending office or visit us on the web at [masc.mb.ca](http://masc.mb.ca).



## Funding Available for Training

Farm families wanting to add income through improved farm practices or add to off-farm income will want to take advantage of the Canadian Agricultural Skills Service (CASS).

The service is making more than \$6.5 million available to Manitoba farmers over the next three years to help them, their spouses or common-law partners cover training, books, tuition, course materials and a few other costs that expand their opportunities for higher income.

The goal is to help farm families improve income options by developing new skills. This will help them find new opportunities in agriculture; increase off-farm income or add value to their own rural businesses.

CASS is being delivered through a partnership between Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives and Manitoba Advanced Education. The program will help eligible farmers complete an assessment of their skills and needs and then create a training plan.

Training options can include on-farm business training such as farm business management, accounting, finance, food safety, sustainable farming practices, value-added processing, farm diversification and human resources management. The service also supports farmers who may choose to take training that will prepare them for other kinds of jobs, such as bus driving, practical nursing, web design and welding.

To be eligible for CASS, you, your spouse or common-law partner must have been out of school for two years; must not be receiving Employment Insurance benefits; and must meet one of the following criteria:

- You are an established producer with gross farm sales of at least \$10,000 a year and a net family income of less than \$45,000 (for a three-year average).
- (You are actively engaged in farming as a member of a corporation, partnership, cooperative or other farm association of persons) with \$10,000 annual gross farm sales and have a net family income of less than \$45,000 (three-year average).

- You are a beginning farmer – someone who intends to establish a farm or has already owned/operated a farm for less than six years and has gross annual farm sales of \$10,000 or more.

Beginning farmers, and their spouses or common-law partners, who have family income over \$45,000 are not eligible for financial assistance through CASS. However, they are eligible for the assessment and development of the individual learning plan.

CASS is an ongoing education program that farmers and their families can use to increase their education, learn new skills and sharpen existing skills to give them the competitive edge they need.

**For more information contact your local GO office.**

CASS is a joint federal-provincial program under the Agricultural Policy Framework.

## Turf Seed Industry Featured at Ag Awareness Day

Taking the concept of spinning straw into gold to a new level, the MAFRI Urban GO team grew an eight-by-24-foot patch of golf turf this winter and invited the premier and several Manitoba mayors to 'play through' at Ag Awareness Day.

The Urban GO team grew the real golf grass at the Manitoba Legislature's greenhouse this winter and moved it to the Legislature lobby for the March 21 event. Ag Awareness Day visitors had a chance to try out their putting skills on this made-in-Manitoba product.

The ever increasing popularity of golf is raising the demand for quality grass seed and that means added income for many Manitoba producers. Ninety-eight per cent of the grass seed grown in Manitoba is exported from Canada.

Manitoba's largest markets are golf courses in the southern United States where our local grass seed is used to extend the season. When native warm season grasses start dying in cooler weather, the golf courses over-seed the fairways with our cool season grasses. In the spring, the warm season grasses choke out the cool season grasses, creating a repeat market for Manitoba turf grass seed.

As Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives Minister Rosann Wowchuk pointed out at the Ag Awareness Day event,

Manitoba farmers produce more than 15 million pounds of turf grass seed annually, and virtually all of it is cleaned, packaged and sold to major sports and recreational facilities around the world. Manitoba grass seed is used for the Super Bowl, Fiesta Bowl and Rose Bowl as well as hundreds of golf courses throughout the U.S. It's also used at Canwest Global Park, home of the Winnipeg Goldeyes.

"The strong interdependency between businesses and the agricultural industry is the mainstay of our provincial economy," says Wowchuk. "Manitoba farm products are the launch pad for so many businesses opportunities." Golf turf grass seed is just one of thousands of products Manitoba farmers can use to add value to their operations.



# Optimizing Crop Returns – Keeping the Balance

With current high fertilizer nitrogen (N) prices and high costs of other cropping inputs such as fuel, coupled with lower than desired commodity prices, growers may be tempted to cut fertilizer inputs. Management of crop nutrients should be done carefully when considering the impacts on the whole crop production system.

## Determine available nutrient credits and crop nutrient needs

- Start by soil testing to determine available nutrients. This needs to be done this spring, if it was not done last fall. Be sure that tests are taken to a two-foot depth as subsoil nitrogen is available to crops and should not be missed. In-field nutrient variability provides opportunities to reduce nitrogen where yield variability occurred in the field. Fields must be sampled individually for nutrient levels to support this.
- Consider previous cropping as forage legume breaking and pulse crops can contribute considerable nutrients to a subsequent crop. Estimates of the amount of N contributed are available. Green manured or unharvested crops that have been destroyed and worked into the soil at a vegetative stage can release plant nitrogen that may be available for the succeeding crop.
- Set realistic yield goals, based on your local climate, soil type and management. As a benchmark for assistance in this you may want to consider using the local crop insurance average as your base.

## Managing crop nutrient input costs

- Balance crop nutrient needs according to soil test results and crop needs to optimize yields and minimize costs.
- Apply nutrients only as needed and micronutrients only if the need for them is identified by a previous problem. Sulphur will provide an economic response for canola on most soils. Annual crops rarely respond to applied sulphur when they are grown in rotation with sulphur fertilized canola.
- Phosphate rates may be reduced to 15 to 20 pounds P<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub> per acre (banded with or close to the seed) when soil test levels are medium and when seeding is delayed and soils are warmer.

- Different nitrogen sources have different costs per unit. There are now several options for applying lower-cost ammonia during seeding operations. Nitrogen application costs vary depending on the application method used. Compare costs and benefits to find the most effective method for your situation.
- Gain efficiency in methods, Nitrogen placement is most efficient through banding.
- Crop selection will affect nutrient requirements. Canola and winter wheat require more than pulse crops, which do not require nitrogen if they are properly inoculated.
- Nitrogen application should be reduced when seeding is delayed into the end of May and into June, because the yield potential of the crop is already reduced.

## Managing Crop Inputs – Keeping the balance

Nutrients are only one component of the crop production equation and all

components need to be managed in a coordinated fashion. Balance is needed to match crop needs with nutrients available. Achieving this balance will optimize returns, manage costs and protect the environment. To keep the balance be sure to:

- Use optimal seeding rates, seed by seed number not by volume as seed size and viability vary greatly. In some cases seeding rates can be reduced if seedbed conditions are ideal and seeding is early.
- Apply crop protection products based on integrated pest management practices rather than insurance or routine application of pesticides.
- Combine tilling/seeding/fertilizing operations when possible to manage fuel and equipment costs.
- Evaluate options and develop a cropping plan that will evaluate the yield impact of reduced nutrient rates through yield curves and soil test results and consider the potential impact on crop quality and premiums.



# Support for Implementing Environment Farm Plans

**M**anitoba producers who want to complete environmental farm plans and implement beneficial management practices may be eligible for funding support through the Canada-Manitoba Farm Stewardship Program (CMFSP). The program helps farmers who have completed their plans and adopt eligible beneficial management practices (BMP) on Manitoba farms.

Recent revisions to the funding program allow producers to apply whenever they are ready to implement their new practices. Wetland restoration, improved silage storage and anaerobic biogas digesters are just a few examples of the new practices supported through CMFSP.

More than 400 environmental farm planning workshops have been held throughout the province. Producers' response to the environmental planning process has been positive, with more than 3,100 participants so far.

Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (MAFRI), Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada – Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (AAFC-PFRA) and the Farm Stewardship Association of Manitoba Inc. (FSAM) all help deliver environmental farm planning (EFP) across the province. To date, over \$3.7 million in incentives has been allocated to Manitoba producers for this process. More than 1,400 farm plans have been reviewed, covering almost 2.5 million acres of land.

**Producers interested in environmental farm planning workshops can contact their local MAFRI office. Producers interested in having their environmental farm plans reviewed so they can apply for incentive funding can contact the Farm Stewardship Association of Manitoba at 1-866-872-8521 toll free.**

**For online information on environmental farm planning and upcoming workshops, visit: [manitoba.ca/agriculture/soilwater/farmplan](http://manitoba.ca/agriculture/soilwater/farmplan).**



## Tagging and Tracing Calves Critical for Trade and Consumer Confidence

**S**ince the BSE crisis, producers' ability to trace animals for testing has been important in giving consumers confidence, nationally and internationally, and the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency (CCIA) has led the way in developing and delivering a tagging and traceability system.

Because BSE in cattle is age related, importing countries have set age limits on livestock imports. For exports into the U.S., animals must be less than 30 months old; for Japan, the limit is less than 629 days old.

Age can be estimated visually by inspecting live animals teeth (dentition). Carcasses are assessed for signs of aging by inspecting for ossification of bones and vertebrae. Electronic age verification is also used for both live animals and carcasses.

The electronic age verification program means calves' ages can be verified individually or in groups.

When the group system is used, all calves in that calving group or interval are reported to be as old as the first birth date entered.

To qualify for individual animal CCIA certificates, producers must record birth dates as calves are born, using a calving booklet, calendar, or computer and keep

them for future reference. Producers, who tag calves at birth must combine the tag numbers and birth dates and send both to CCIA electronically. Producers who tag calves later, must use their records to combine calving dates and tag numbers and send both to CCIA electronically. Once the data has been sent to CCIA, producers can print birth certificates for each group of animals, or individuals, as recorded.

All calves must be tagged before their information is sent to CCIA and participating producers should expect an on-farm audit by an outside party. This audit verifies the data sent to CCIA and that the calves are tagged.

Producers who plan to participate in the CCIA program can get an electronic spreadsheet from their local Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives GO office to record their information. Once the information is completed electronically, producers can forward it directly to CCIA or return it to the GO office to be sent to CCIA for them.

**For more information on the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency program contact your local Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives GO office or CCIA at 1-877-2333; or visit [www.canadaid.com](http://www.canadaid.com).**

# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

April 21	Rivers Home Ec Achievement
April 22	Pierson Pathfinders Achievement
April 24	Roseland and Douglas Home Ec Achievement
April 27-29	Rural Forum - Brandon
May 2	Alexander Home Ec Achievement
May 6	Wallace, Lenore, Woodnorth Home Achievement - Virden
May 8	Elkhorn 4-H Club Achievement
May 10	Oak Lake Busy Buddies 4-H Club Achievement
May TBA	Virden & District 4-H Rally - Oak Lake
May 28	Napinka Grande Clairiere Beef Achievement
June 3	Tilston Beef Achievement
June 4	Melita Beef Achievement
June 5	Melita Inter Club Rally
June 6 & 7	Amazing Agriculture Adventure - Keystone Centre - Brandon
June 7-11	Manitoba Summer Fair
June 8	Southwest Farm Women's Network Steering Committee Meeting - Brandon
June	Southwest Pasture School Contact
July 1	Pipestone 4-H Beef Club Achievement
July 2	Boissevain 4-H Rally
July 4	Archie 4-H Beef Club Achievement - McAuley
July 4	Lenore 4-H Club Beef Achievement - Virden Wallace Community 4-H Beef Club Achievement - Virden
July 5	Virden & District 4-H Interclub Fatstock Show & Sale - Virden
July TBA	Southwest Farm Women's Network Garden Tour - Virden & area
July 22	Oak Lake 4-H Beef Club Achievement & Steer Sale - Oak Lake

Please call your local MAFRI GO location to confirm dates and times or for more details on any of these events.

## GO TEAM STAFF

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Brad Hall - Agent	747-2889
Anna Maitland - Clerk	748-4280
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Wayne Williams - Lending Representative	748-4779
Andy Elliot - Lending Representative	726-6018

## Farm Records 2 available at MAFRI GO offices

**Farm Records 2** - a farm accounting book published by the Manitoba Co-operator - is now available from Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives offices across the province. Supplies are limited so visit your local MAFRI GO office while quantities last. The price per book is \$10.50.

## Southwest Strengths and Opportunities

The Southwest GO team area is steeped in agricultural history and remains very dependant on agricultural exports. The local economy fluctuates with commodity prices and our dependence on access to U.S. markets, particularly for weanling pigs, beef feeders and calves, unprocessed canola and some unprocessed sunflowers, flax and forage.

The challenges in the export markets have resulted in fewer and larger farm operations in the area. While gross farm receipts rose \$152 million between 1991 and 2001, and farm size increased by 155 acres, total operating expenses also rose over \$414 million during the same period. These farm expenses are a very important factor in driving the economy of the Southwest area, but create a lot of financial stress for farm producers. This decrease in net farm income is clearly reflected in the drop in number of young farmers entering the industry.

The changes in net farm income have raised the number of farm families who work off farm to add to family income. These and other factors have led Manitoba Food, Agriculture and Rural

Initiatives to shift its focus from strictly agricultural production extension services to adding value and community-based economic development.

Despite the challenges in this region, there is plenty of opportunity in the Southwest areas. This is reflected in the 36 per cent increase in cattle numbers since 1991, a 131 per cent increase in hog numbers and a 112 per cent increase in sheep numbers, along with increases in forage exports and commodities processing. The Southwest GO team continues to research and explore feasible production options and is working with many community groups and individuals to take advantage of our strengths. An advisory council has also been set up to help explore and take advantage of existing opportunities. The council is composed of producers, community leaders and business people.

As well, the Southwest GO team has created a directional plan for the region and anyone interested in the details can contact your local MAFRI office in Melita, Boissevain, Souris, Virden or Brandon.