

March/April 2006

# AgriSuccess

JOURNAL



## The trait race

Monumental advances in crop traits are occurring in everything from soybeans to alfalfa.

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Contributing photographer  
Greg Huszar

Cover photo  
Greg Huszar

Subscription information  
Change of address or questions:  
Phone: 1-888-332-3301  
E-mail: [info@AgriSuccess.ca](mailto:info@AgriSuccess.ca)  
For undeliverable mail,  
please return to:  
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Julia Zilka, University of Guelph  
research assistant, has high oil  
soybeans in her sights.

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# Letter from the editors



FROM KEVIN HURSH AND ALLISON FINNAMORE

**S**ome of the most amazing advancements in agriculture are in the area of crop genetics. For generations, plant breeders have improved crop yields and incorporated disease resistance while shortening the time to maturity. In the last decade, the rate of advancement has accelerated, with many of the traits geared to meeting the needs of end-use consumers.

Some people automatically associate crop traits with genetic modification. While GM technology is being employed in canola, corn and soybeans, it's being avoided in many other crops. Even with the more conventional tools for genetic improvement, the developments are mind-boggling.

Crop traits are a broad and complicated topic, but in this edition of the AgriSuccess Journal, we provide a glimpse of what's coming down the pipeline and what it may mean for you.

We're also pleased to welcome a new columnist to the Journal. Well-known agricultural journalist and commentator Hugh Maynard from Quebec is taking over the Planning to succeed segment.

Your story ideas and comments are always welcome. Please e-mail us at [info@agrisuccess.ca](mailto:info@agrisuccess.ca) or call 1-888-332-3301.

**AgriSuccess**  
JOURNAL

## This month's contributors

Kevin Hursh, Editor

Kevin Hursh is a consulting agrologist, journalist and broadcaster based in Saskatoon, Sask. He also takes an active role in the management and operation of a grain farm near Cabri, Sask.

Allison Finnamore, Assoc. Ed.

Allison Finnamore is a freelance agriculture journalist from Moncton, N.B. She's been writing about the region's agricultural issues for 15 years and is past president of the Canadian Farm Writers' Federation.

Owen Roberts

Owen Roberts, a native of Mitchell's Bay, Ont. (near Chatham), teaches agricultural communication at the Ontario Agricultural College, University of Guelph and is director of research communications for the university. He is also a freelance journalist and broadcaster.

Rae Groeneveld

Rae Groeneveld is Farm News Director at GX 94 radio station in Yorkton, Sask. He has extensive knowledge of agricultural issues in western Canada from his years of behind-the-scenes work in the industry.

Hugh Maynard

Hugh Maynard is a specialist in agricultural communications based in Ormstown, Quebec. A graduate in farm management from Macdonald College (McGill University), Hugh is a seasoned farm journalist and broadcaster.

The editors and journalists who contribute to AgriSuccess Journal attempt to provide accurate and useful information and analysis. However, the editors and FCC/AgriSuccess cannot and do not guarantee the accuracy of the information contained in this journal and the editors and FCC/AgriSuccess assume no responsibility for any actions or decisions taken by any reader of this journal based on the information provided.

## Selling carbon credits



BY RAE GROENEVELD

Producers may soon be approached to sell the carbon sequestration ability of their land. Through practices such as direct seeding and minimum tillage, carbon can be stored in the soil, offsetting greenhouse gas emissions.

Canada is working on an offset trading system to regulate how large greenhouse gas emitters

meet emission reduction targets through the purchase of carbon credits.

The Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association is monitoring the progress and vice-president Edgar Hammermeister thinks aggregators, or brokers for buyers and producers, will approach producers once protocols are finalized.

“The most important thing for farmers is to be aware of what kind of liability could be attached to the land,” he says.

Hammermeister says producers carry less risk by leasing the carbon sequestration ability, despite reduced value. Selling could net more money up front but increase restrictions on how the land is farmed. Also, more maintenance liability could be incurred.

More information on this issue is available on the association’s website at <http://ssca.usask.ca>.

## Final decisions on corn duty

BY KEVIN HURSH

Final decisions are coming soon on the provisional anti-dumping and countervailing duties that were placed on American corn imports back in December by the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA).

The CBSA will make a final decision on or before March 15. If the agency determines the duties should remain in place, the Canadian International Trade Tribunal will issue a decision on or before April 14 on whether the Canadian corn industry has been injured by American corn imports.

The provisional duties total \$1.65 US per bushel, which is about \$1.90 Cdn. The duties have put upward pressure on Canadian feed grain prices, which increases the cost of feeding livestock in this country.

### Funding for co-ops BY ALLISON FINNAMORE

The federal government is continuing to seek projects for the Co-operative Development Initiative (CDI), a \$15-million program. CDI provides advice and support to new and existing co-operatives and helps with research and testing new ideas for the co-operative model.

According to CDI, projects that address added value in agriculture is one area where innovation and research funding is available. Funding ranges from \$5,000 to \$75,000 per project per year and helps cover costs of successfully implementing a project.

Proposals are assessed on innovation, links to federal priorities, expected results and level of partnership commitment.

Full details are available at [www.coop.gc.ca](http://www.coop.gc.ca) or by phone at 1-888-781-2222.



# IP production brightens grain industry outlook



BY KEVIN HURSH

**I**ncreasingly, analysts and economists are questioning Canada's ability to compete in the traditional grain and oilseed markets. Compared to our major competitors, many of our production costs tend to be higher, as are transportation costs to export markets. Meanwhile, our production per acre is often lower.

In addition to competing with countries like Brazil, Argentina and Australia that have some natural advantages, Canadian producers also compete against the subsidies provided by the U.S. and Europe.

Myriads of new traits are being developed that will tailor Canadian crops to specific end-uses.

At least part of the answer can be found in getting out of the bulk commodity game. Myriads of new traits are being developed that will tailor Canadian crops to specific end-uses, both domestic and international.

This is no longer wistful futuristic musing and it goes beyond the specialized canola and soybean varieties that address the trans fat issue. The market opportunities will often be narrower, but the financial incentive may be even greater.

One of the many companies involved is Agrisure United (AU), which markets under the Proven Seed brand. Linola from Agrisure United has been grown under contract for many years. Developed from flaxseed, Linola has high-quality polyunsaturated oil suitable for edible oil markets.

AU has now developed a high linolenic (high omega-3) flax that appears to have some unique market fits. Called NuLin, the new type of flax will be available for Identity Preserved opportunities in future years.

Paul Dribnenki, the flax and Linola breeder for Agrisure United, says NuLin will combine high omega-3 content with high yields and high oil content. That will make the crop more valuable in the nutraceutical and functional food markets. For instance, it will lessen the amount of flax needed in livestock rations to have an omega-3 effect in meat and eggs.

Traditionally, flax has been used for the production of linseed oil for industrial purposes. Dribnenki says the higher omega-3 content will mean a faster drying oil and that may also have some special applications.

AU has developed a new variety of wheat aimed exclusively at Warburton's high quality bread production in England. As well, breeders are developing oats with elevated levels of beta-glucans for a functional food company.

There will always be regular crop varieties for the major commodity markets, but the best opportunities would seem to be in Identity Preserved contract production for crops with specific traits for specific end-use markets.

Many of the opportunities will involve only a few thousand acres and a small number of growers in a closed-loop production system. Viewed singly, they are not a magic answer to all the difficulties in the industry. Added together, they promise to change the face of grain and oilseed production in Canada.





University of Guelph research assistant Julia Zilka checks on the progress of new soybean varieties.



# The trait race

BY OWEN ROBERTS AND KEVIN HURSH

**I**t would take a book to describe all the traits being developed in all the crops grown in Canada. Here's a look at a few of the traits coming down the pipeline that promise new opportunities for growers.

## Soybeans

In soybeans, public breeding programs have a history of developing groundbreaking varieties (such as OAC Bayfield) with major performance advantages, particularly yield. Now private researchers are beginning to introduce food and industrial traits. The low linolenic acid trait – one that imparts no trans fats into soybean oil during processing – is expected to be an industry staple in another decade.

Peter Hannam, former co-owner of First Line Seeds and president of Woodrill Farms Ltd. just outside Guelph, predicts as much as 50 per cent of the varieties on the market will bear this trait in another decade. They're already sweeping the U.S.; there, farmers grew 500,000 acres last year of low linolenic acid soybeans (marketed under the brand name Vistive, from Monsanto), and it's predicted they'll grow twice that number this year. That prediction became more of a sure thing in December when Kellogg's, one of America's main food manufacturers, announced it would use Vistive soybeans to eliminate trans fat in its products.

Canada is behind on the low linolenic acid frontier, but will likely see field trials in Ontario in 2006 to start establishing parameters for low linolenic acid soybean

production and processing. Because low linolenic acid soybeans are identity preserved, they need to be treated separately, from planting through harvest, delivery, handling and processing – just like the specialized food soybean products that have been shipped to Japan for the last 25 years.

Among the other new varieties on tap are those with extra vitamin E, extra isoflavones and more digestible protein, all directly targeted at a health benefit for consumers, and all with the potential to provide a premium for farmers.

## Canola

Canola is ahead of soybeans with regard to varieties being grown to address the trans fat issue. For several years, substantial acreages of high oleic varieties have been grown under IP contracts with producers.

The two companies involved in this market are Dow AgroSciences (Nexera canola) and Cargill Specialty Canola Oils. In most regions of Western Canada, contracts for 2006 were filled quite quickly last fall. Although the specialty varieties do not deliver top yields, many producers believe the price premiums more than make up that difference.

Numerous other canola traits are in various stages of development by both small and large companies. Roy Button, executive director of the Saskatchewan Canola Development Commission, is in a unique position to monitor the traits that have been publicly announced.

"Most of the traits are transgenic," notes Button. "That means they'll need approval in a number of countries before registration can proceed and that will slow the process down." – *continued on page 8*

Canola is ahead of soybeans with regard to varieties being grown to address the trans fat issue.

### The trait race – *continued*

Developers hope new traits will confer drought tolerance, cold tolerance, sclerotinia resistance, and resistance to flea beetles. Each would be a major benefit to producers.

Shatter resistance has the potential to turn canola into a crop that can be straight combined, thus avoiding the cost of swathing. Yellow seeded canola has the potential to produce a more valuable canola meal. Another exciting development is a trait that seems to confer increased nitrogen-use efficiency.

How many traits will be stacked within varieties and when these varieties will be commercially available is difficult to estimate. In the meantime, Button notes hybrid canola varieties now account for 45 to 50 per cent of the acreage and yield potential continues to increase.

### Corn

In corn, trait stacking with new combinations is the big news for 2006. Jamie Rickard, marketing manager for Guelph-based DEKALB, expects his company's triple-stacked corn varieties to be hot, combining Roundup Ready weed control, Bt rootworm control and Bt corn borer control. (Bt is a naturally occurring soil bacterium that can be added to plants by transgenic means for insect resistance.) DEKALB's three varieties will cover 2,800-3,000 heat unit growing areas. Rickard thinks they will likely account for one to two per cent of the market.

This particular trait stacking mainly offers agronomic benefits to farmers growing multi-year corn, but has some advantages for the public, too. "It's better for the environment, it's easier to use and there's less user exposure," says Rickard. "For growers who have traditionally used a seed box insecticide, it's a great alternative."

### Durum

In North America, soils naturally contain the heavy metal cadmium. Certain grains and vegetables, including durum wheat, take up cadmium. More and more markets are asking for reduced cadmium levels, including customers that need durum for the production of pasta and couscous.

A new variety of durum called Strongfield addresses the cadmium issue. Developed by Dr. John Clarke at

the Semiarid Prairie Agricultural Research Centre (SPARC) in Swift Current, Sask., Strongfield contains a gene for low cadmium uptake. All future varieties will require that trait.

In addition to cadmium levels cut roughly in half, Strongfield has stronger gluten strength and higher yield. It is expected to become the standard for durum varieties on the Canadian prairies.

### Alfalfa

In alfalfa, there's a lot of interest in traits, but not in genetic modification. A bid by Monsanto to introduce Roundup Ready alfalfa was poorly received. There's a limited market for it and Canada does not have a specific-trait production and processing system.

For now, Roundup Ready alfalfa is on hold, although a genetically modified alfalfa variety equipped with a gene to make the plant's fibre up to 20 per cent more available is in the works. Bill Brown, agronomy and seed specialist for Kitchener-based GROWMARK, says that alfalfa is about three years from market.

In non-GM alfalfa, Brown says two traits in particular have become popular with growers. The first is late fall dormancy; it allows the alfalfa to shut down later in the fall, without affecting winter hardiness. The result is a variety of alfalfa that gives more cuts, with faster re-growth and good winter survivability. The second trait is leafhopper resistance, which has been highly effective against these insects as they blow up from the U.S.

### Other developments

Barley is being developed with traits that will make it more valuable for human food markets. Meanwhile, there's work to develop barley varieties more suitable as forage crops.

CLEARFIELD wheat has been introduced on the prairies. CLEARFIELD red lentils and sunflowers are coming soon. These non-GMO crops from BASF have resistance to a broad-spectrum herbicide providing new options for weed control. The CLEARFIELD wheat is called CDC Imagine and the herbicide resistance allows growers to remove barley and other types of wheat from the crop – something never before possible.

Name almost any crop and there are new traits on the horizon.

# Stocking the farm toolbox with media savvy



BY ALLISON FINNAMORE

**T**he media is always looking for a good source, someone to help create a piece that will draw realism to the issue. In agriculture, media often turns to staff of producer organizations.

Staff members, with their knowledge of sector issues, are natural spokespersons, giving an overview of how producers are handling the issue at hand. They're invaluable for providing background information and

statistics and in a world of tight deadlines, the staff of producer groups often become the only source journalists track down.

Effectively delivering a message has become another essential implement in the producers' farm toolbox.

Some reporters, however, are willing to dig deeper and find the story behind the story. Also, agriculture news like avian influenza, BSE and trade disputes are getting more attention in mainstream media, so reporters are working to find new angles on long-lasting issues.

When pork prices crashed in 1998, Crystal Mackay was a communications specialist at Ontario Pork and began fielding media requests by reporters wanting to dig deeper and talk to producers. It was a scramble each time, Mackay recalls.

The natural discomfort of having someone record your every word is a rational reason to dodge the media, but Mackay, like other communications specialists in Canada, wanted to change that. She developed the Speak Up media training program to help Ontario pork producers get comfortable with the media.

Mackay is now executive director of the Ontario Farm Animal Council and continues to deliver media training to a broad segment of producers. Speak Up workshops combine agriculture sectors, ages and farm interests, creating a diverse team of local producers who give journalists local angles to national stories. Although media training typically targets board members or staff, Speak Up participants are the "regular" producers, Mackay says.

During media training, producers get comfortable in front of a microphone and learn how to handle difficult questions or people. Mackay likes to visit nearby innovative agriculture practices to give producers specific examples that can be referred to during media interviews.

"Speak Up prepares a team of effective agricultural ambassadors who can think on their feet and get agriculture's message out, primarily to the media," Mackay explains, adding they promote agriculture any time – not just when the media pulls into the yard. "We're always on duty, whether at a municipal meeting or a wedding and someone asks you what you do for a living"

The continuous race against deadline means reporters don't always have time to make repeated calls to sources. Sometimes journalists are forced to go with what they have. If a person or group with an anti-agriculture stance does a better job communicating their point, that may be the one that gets printed or broadcast.

Being at ease in front of the microphone and effectively delivering a message has become another essential implement in the producers' farm toolbox.



David White, Natural Valley Farms, speaks at their plant-opening media conference at Wolseley, Sask.

# Agri-food research: no frills here



BY OWEN ROBERTS

**W**hen the chips are down and it's time to cut frills, where do you turn? Few farm operations have much fat; they likely cut frills years ago.

Some sectors might consider research a frill. After all, some say, it's expensive, it seems to take forever, and

when it yields results, they can be slow to be adopted.

But it's different in the farm sector, especially when it comes to technology. Here, the line between a development and its application is comparatively minute. New technology can go from the lab

to field trials, and then to growers, in almost no time. And the benefits are clear.

In the mid 1990s, agricultural economist Prof. George Brinkman at the University of Guelph gave the research community solid statistical fuel for supporting research. He found agricultural research in Ontario had a significant return on investment, with benefit-cost ratios typically 20:1 or more for individual commodities.

For the federal government – the country's biggest supporter of agricultural research, investing about \$700 million a year – this was one of the highest payback activities in the Canadian public sector.

And for growers, the news just got better and better. Brinkman also determined it was mainly producers, not the public, who accrued the overwhelming majority of research benefits – up to 96 per cent, depending on the commodity.

This was the kind of information the farm sector needed to throw its support behind research. When the Ontario ministry held meetings to ask producers their priorities for government support, research topped the list. Producers had become believers.

There's proof research works each time the industry receives a new trait, variety or feature. For example, OAC Millennium asparagus, the winner of this year's first

Canadian Seed of the Year contest, announced at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto, has revolutionized the asparagus industry. Developed by Prof. David Wolyn, University of Guelph, it has become a major part of the commodity's competitiveness, and accounts for 70 per cent of all asparagus seed sold in Ontario.

The contest's runners-up, OAC Kent soybeans and OAC Rex white beans, were likewise products of research, and offer major advantages to producers. OAC Kent is the most popular non-genetically modified yellow hilum full-season soybean in Ontario, while OAC Rex is the first white bean variety in Canada to deliver resistance to bacterial blight, a major disease affecting bean yields and quality.

There are more reasons to celebrate agricultural research. A privately commissioned study from the Western Grains Research Foundation found research advantages were widespread in prairie crops, too. For example, every dollar invested in wheat development returns a minimum \$4 to producers, while every dollar invested in barley returns a minimum \$12. One of the study's authors, Dr. Hartley Furtan, an agricultural economist at the University of Saskatchewan, says both findings reveal a remarkably high return on investment.

So whether you're in the East or West, you're realizing benefits from agricultural research. It's a no-frills investment.



New technology  
can go from the lab  
to field trials, and  
then to growers,  
in almost no time.

# Is your information the right stuff?



BY HUGH MAYNARD

The after-lunch conversation turned to the price of donkeys – how expensive they had become relative to crop prices, the difference in price between a good and a “not so good” one, and how hard it was to obtain a decent cart to go behind, quite literally, the backbone of local farm transportation.

## Find out what information your partners will need.

The banter was between a group of peasant farmers who had walked several kilometres to attend a community meeting at the Njwara Agricultural Training Centre, in The Gambia, where they had recently studied as “farmer leaders” so they could, in turn, train other farmers in their villages.

But the elements of the discussion could just have easily taken place at the counter of the feed co-op or at a meeting of the local fair board in Ruralanywhertown, Canada. Look at how high the price of pick-ups has become, would be the opening line, followed by the difference in price between new and used, and how hard it is to get a decent livestock trailer that doesn’t handle like a tank.

The context is different but the basics of the conversation are essentially – and importantly – the same: exchange of information.

Without adequate – and reliable – information, operational and management decisions become little more than guesswork. Assessing the value of a pick-up or tractor may seem straightforward, but putting together a complex business plan for a farm expansion, for example, requires considerably more deliberation. Having the right information for such an exercise is essential for those prospective partners, such as financial institutions, contractors and other contributing professionals.

But what is the right type of information? As detailed and technical as the information for the new barn may be, is it what the other party needs to see and

understand? Casually exchanging information over coffee is one thing, but in a more intricate decision-making process, paying attention to the information needs of the other parties is often overlooked.

So, even before amassing information you need, the very first step is to find out what information your partners will need so that the final proposal not only fulfills your expectations but also matches the requirements of lenders, suppliers and contractors. Whether it’s for donkeys or pick-ups, information only has value if it’s the right stuff, and that means asking the appropriate questions in the first place.

A good short cut to asking the right questions is to use the expertise of a farm business planning consultant for marketing, diversification, risk management, human resources and succession planning. The Canadian Farm Business Advisory Services will contribute up to half of the consultation costs (visit [www.agr.gc.ca/ren/cfbas](http://www.agr.gc.ca/ren/cfbas) for more information) to make sure that your information results in a successful planning process.



# Biological seed treatment

*derived from quinoa*

BY RAE GROENEVELD

A company based in Kamsack, Sask., is launching a new biological seed treatment into the highly competitive American market this year.

HeadsUp Plant Protectants received approval from the American Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Registration was granted on September 19, 2005,

enabling the company to sell their product commercially in the United States.

“We are really excited about this product,” remarked Joe Dutchshen, President of HeadsUp Plant Protectants Inc.

“The safety to the users, the safety to the environment, the economical cost of the product will make this a winner.”

The biological seed treatment is based on patented technologies relating to the quinoa plant.

Dutchshen, who has a pharmaceutical background, says they discovered the seed treatment aspect when analysing the quinoa plant for its health properties and potential in the pharmaceutical market.

The discovery led to the patenting of this novel product in 17 countries. The mode of action of the HeadsUp product is called Systemic Acquired Resistance.

“What it will do is activate the natural defence mechanisms in the plant to fight off different fungal and bacterial diseases for the full growing season,” Dutchshen explains.

Six years of research across the U.S. and Canada has shown the benefits of HeadsUp seed treatments for potatoes, wheat, beans and tomato crops.

“We are doing some work in Idaho on potatoes right now that is showing some remarkable results controlling disease, which normal chemicals of traditional chemistry can’t control any more.”

Research conducted at the Agriculture Canada Research Farm at Melfort, Sask., has shown a three to 16 per cent yield increase in wheat when compared to conventional treatments in years of seedling disease pressure.

Legumes like peas, beans and lentils have also shown good response to the seed treatment. Trials in Swift Current have shown equivalent protection compared to higher cost synthetic chemicals.

HeadsUp is already planning on expansion of quinoa acres for the 2006-2007 growing season to meet the anticipated high demand for the biological seed treatment. They are also in the process of finding distributors to market their product in the United States.

HeadsUp Plant Protectants Inc. has received support from the Canadian Rural Adaptation and Development fund (CARD) and from Ag West Bio. Through its commercialization fund, Ag West has made a repayable loan of \$95,000 to the Kamsack company. Tyler Bradley, Investment Analyst, said this project fits perfectly with their mandate of fostering growth in Saskatchewan’s bio-based economy.

“It is definitely a big success from Ag West’s standpoint, to have a product get regulatory approval in such a large market,” says Bradley.

Unfortunately, Canadian farmers will have to wait longer to access the HeadsUp plant treatment. The regulatory process is much more extensive in Canada and does not allow for quicker approval even if it is a natural, biological control. Dutchshen believes it could be three to five years away from introduction in Canada.

The discovery led to the patenting of this novel product in 17 countries.

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## Share your vision

Your opinion is worth something to Farm Credit Canada (FCC). Share your thoughts and enjoy rewards when you join Vision, FCC's national agricultural research panel. Vision's community of several thousand producers and business leaders is shaping the future of agriculture.

Vision members provide valuable insight into research projects including surveys, focus groups and special advisory projects. By sharing their opinions and insight, Vision members have helped design loans that are built by producers for producers, and streamline the loan renewal process.

FCC awards members with cash and other cool stuff for completing a profile survey and participating in future research projects. Vision members may also receive exclusive access to top-line results and consideration for special projects.

Vision maintains a balanced membership to represent the entire Canadian agriculture community. Members are recruited by phone, mail, e-mail and in person. Members agree to future contact and complete an introductory survey that profiles them and their business.

Join the Vision community online at [www.fccvision.ca](http://www.fccvision.ca) or contact Sean McDougall at (306) 780-7872. You'll receive a \$10 Canadian Tire gift certificate just for registering. Register online and you'll also be entered in a monthly draw to win \$500.

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