

January/February 2007

AgriSuccess

JOURNAL



Producer check-offs –
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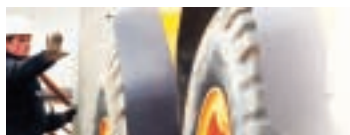
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Canada

Letter from the editors



FROM KEVIN HURSH AND ALLISON FINNAMORE

Not long ago, new crop traits meant varieties with better yields and improved disease resistance. Today, new traits encompass much more. Producers still check the agronomic statistics on new varieties, but increasingly you're taking end-use markets into consideration and whether meeting anticipated consumer demand will "pay off."

In this edition of AgriSuccess Journal, we take a closer look at crop traits. We have a story about the crop development underway to meet the needs of the emerging markets for ethanol and biodiesel. Another story examines the new crop varieties developed for consumer needs such as the elimination of trans fats in foods.

Our regular columnists tackle topics ranging from occupational health and safety laws to market globalization.

We hope you find the stories informative and thought-provoking.

Your story ideas and comments are always welcome. You can e-mail us through info@AgriSuccess.ca or call 1-888-332-3301.

AgriSuccess Journal is a magazine dedicated to helping producers advance their management practices by providing practical information, real-life examples and innovative ideas that foster personal solutions.

AgriSuccess
JOURNAL

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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. The views expressed in this journal are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editor or FCC/AgriSuccess.

Island invention shreds hay and straw without dust

BY ALLISON FINNAMORE

A Prince Edward Island company has a new piece of farm machinery that shreds straw with virtually no dust and noise.

The Bedding Pro is designed by Paul Fox of Double R Manufacturing in Crapaud, P.E.I., a small village located near the Confederation Bridge (www.doublermanufacturing.com).

The machine, small enough to be used with a 40-horsepower

tractor, has caught the interest of strawberry producers who will use the bedding for winter cover. Livestock producers are also interested in using the machine to chop hay for feed and bedding.

Interest has spread outside the agriculture community. International oil companies have noticed the new machine, and see potential for using it for clean-up at new sites. ❖

Grain reports to watch BY MIKE JUBINVILLE

Grains markets are statistical hounds. Here's a list of some important report dates for 2007 that you can mark on your calendar.

Statistics Canada (www.statcan.ca)

Stocks of Grain at Dec 31, 2006.....	January 31
March Intentions of Principal Field Crop Areas.....	April 24
Stocks of Grain at March 31, 2007.....	May 9
Preliminary Estimates of Principal Field Crop Areas.....	June 26
July 31 Estimates of Production of Field Crops	August 23
Stocks of Grain at July 31, 2007.....	September 11
September Estimate of Production of Field Crops	October 4
November Estimate of Production of Field Crops	December 6

USDA (www.usda.gov)

U.S. 2006 Production, U.S. Grain Stocks and	
U.S. Winter Wheat Seedings	January 12
Monthly U.S. Crop Production & Supply/Demand Report.....	February 9
Monthly U.S. Crop Production & Supply/Demand Report	March 9
U.S. Quarterly Grain Stocks and 2007 U.S. Prospective	
Plantings Reports	March 30
Monthly U.S. Crop Production & Supply/Demand Report.....	April 10
Monthly U.S. Crop Production & Supply/Demand Report	May 11
Monthly U.S. Crop Production & Supply/Demand Report	June 11
USDA 2007 U.S. Acreage and U.S. Quarterly Grain Stocks	June 29

Canadian wine is booming

BY KEVIN HURSH

The Canadian wine industry has been growing at a remarkable pace with almost all of the increase based on domestic sales.

A study called "From the vine to the glass: Canada's grape and wine industry" has been published in the *Analysis in Brief* series of Statistics Canada (www.statcan.com).

Between 1992-93 and 2004-05, total sales of Canadian wines (including cider, sparkling and coolers) increased by \$557.4 million. Of this amount, 93 per cent came from the Canadian retail market.

Exports also increased but remained at relatively low levels compared to domestic sales.

In total, the value of wine sales in Canada exceeded \$4.2 billion in the fiscal year ending March 31, 2005. Consumers bought a record high volume of 360 million litres of wine, of which 40 per cent were Canadian brands and 60 per cent were imported.

For the first time, the value of wine sales surpassed that of spirits in Canada. ❖



Producer check-offs – Canada versus Australia



BY KEVIN HURSH

Canadian producers are playing a big role in the development of new crop traits and varieties. Commodity check-offs are used to fund research and market development with various amounts going to plant breeding efforts.

Check-offs have been established on a wide range of grains, oilseeds, specialty crops and horticultural crops.

In Australia, producers are very involved in funding research and plant breeding.

The check-off amount varies by commodity and province. Sometimes the check-off is mandatory; more often it's refundable.

On crops like soybeans and canola, private companies are doing most of the variety development, but

there's often still a role for producer money to be invested in the development of specific traits.

With wheat and barley, the Western Grains Research Foundation (www.westerngrains.com) has become a major force by helping to fund the efforts of wheat and barley breeders at government and university research institutions.

Producers have taken an even bigger role in the pulse crop industry. Saskatchewan Pulse Growers (www.saskpulse.com) has been the primary contributor to a range of new lentils, field peas, chickpeas and dry beans. Growers are given royalty-free access to the new varieties.

In Australia, producers are very involved in funding research and plant breeding. In fact, the Grains Research and Development Corporation (www.grdc.com.au) is touted as one of the world's leading grains research organizations. It's run as a partnership between growers and the government.

Rather than many different check-offs in different jurisdictions, the GRDC has a producer levy on 25 different crops. Producer funding is matched up to a ceiling set by the Australian government. For 2007-08, the GRDC will provide funding support in excess of \$120 million to new and existing projects.

Brian Rossnagel, a barley breeder at the University of Saskatchewan's Crop Development Centre in Saskatoon, has monitored the development of the GRDC since its inception in the early '90s. Rossnagel has regular contact with Australian barley breeders and he admires the level of funding they receive.

He says through GRDC, Australia is making five times the investment per acre in barley breeding that Canada is employing. Rossnagel notes that Canada is still doing all right, but he worries about staying competitive over the long term.

The veteran barley breeder was actually a bigger fan of the Australian system back in the early days of the GRDC, when administration costs were much lower. He also notes Australian money has sometimes been spent on projects he would consider questionable.

However, the Australian system with one pool of money allows proportionately more investment in emerging crops that are showing potential. On the other hand, Canadian producers of a specific commodity do have more autonomy.

People familiar with both countries note a big difference in the attitude of growers. In Canada, check-offs need the support of producers before they can be established, but that support often comes grudgingly. Check-offs are often viewed as a cost, a drain on the farm business.

In Australia, where producer funding is higher and the check-off isn't refundable, growers view it as an important investment. That attitude is an even bigger advantage than the system they've developed. ♦



Utopia U-Pick



BY ALLISON FINNAMORE

For one New Brunswick couple, creating a vision, sustaining high quality and maintaining their integrity have combined to create a successful farm from a mere speck of land.

Jeff and Janet Everett operate Utopia U-Pick, and Magnetic Hill Winery. Utopia U-Pick is a direct-market strawberry and raspberry farm located near Moncton, so a population of about 190,000 people is just a short drive away. The winery, situated within the city boundaries, is adjacent to one of the region's major tourist destinations.

A thousand customers can visit the fields in a few short hours.

The Everetts started their farm from scratch. Both come from agriculture backgrounds, but Jeff was selling real estate in 1987 when he found a small farm for sale.

His first interest was to make the sale, but the call to farm was strong.

With a blank canvas, the Everetts could create whatever type of farm they wanted. Their vision of creating two full-time jobs was the foundation of their plan, but Jeff's upbringing also played a role. Growing up on a mixed farm, he recalled the most profitable part of his parents' business.

"The only thing that ever seemed to make money was selling direct. Why sell all these other things? We decided to specialize in one thing," he says.

Starting out with only four acres, the Everetts became masters of production.

"We had to become very good at what we do and we had to get a lot of return per acre," Jeff says. "When fields don't cut it, they're gone. When varieties don't cut it, they're gone."

They also focused on marketing and are one of the founding members of the Really Local Co-Op. Now with 25 regional producers, the Co-Op shares advertising costs and develops local customer loyalty and awareness. That co-operation meant setting aside rivalries.

"We are competitors, but I don't think we feel that way. We're just a bunch of farmers working together for the same cause," Jeff says.

"We knew to be successful, we had to get over it," Janet adds.

Opening their farm to the public meant extras in the fields, like short rows, parking lots and washrooms. However, the Everetts resisted the move to agri-tourism. It's important patrons enjoy their visit, yet profit is based on moving a high volume of customers through quickly. On some summer days, a thousand customers can visit the strawberry fields in a few short hours. The focus is on short visits.

Expansions have been cautious. Utopia now has 10 acres of strawberries, two acres of raspberries and a few other acres that are continuously being incorporated into new crops or rotations.

Jeff and Janet have stayed focused on optimizing their small land base by weaving their vision with hard work and determination. The result is a thriving business and two full-time jobs. ❖



Jeff and Janet Everett operate Utopia U-Pick near Moncton, N.B.

Food for healthy living



BY ALLISON FINNAMORE

Newspaper and radio headlines scream the blunt truth: “Canada a fat-food nation,” “Face the facts, parents: your kids are fat.”

Overweight means unhealthy, a fact that quickly follows headlines like the ones above. It appears as though we’ve become a nation careening towards tipping the scales, flattening the health care system with the weight of our bulging bottoms.

Headlines scream the blunt truth: “Face the facts, parents: your kids are fat.”

As news about obesity continues to drum at consumers, agriculture producer organizations are responding. Leaner meats are commonplace, producers are refining storage techniques to maintain nutrients in

fruits and vegetables, and processors are working at reducing fats and polishing the image of products like potatoes and grains.

Along with these campaigns, there’s an increasing focus on promoting healthy living, teaching consumers to work wholesome foods grown in Canada into their busy lives, getting active and reducing waistbands.

The Dairy Farmers of Canada (DFC) has a website that generates a personalized weight loss plan at www.yourhealthyweight.ca. The site assesses your weight, eating and physical activity habits then provides weekly goals and tips to help reach and maintain a healthy weight. Developed by nutritionists, the site combines their recommendations along with Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating and tips from Health Canada.

And last fall, in an effort to show that exercise can be fun, DFC took a circle-shaped bicycle across the country, inviting families to give the unique bike a try. It was the perfect forum to promote the importance of healthy eating habits and physical activity. By garnishing the attention of local media with the bike, it also gave DFC another forum to promote their message.

Meanwhile, Ontario-grown fruits and vegetables have started to make it directly into the classrooms in some northern Ontario schools. In a project designed by the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers’ Association, the provincial agriculture department, the regional board of health and several school boards, the Northern Fruit and Vegetable Pilot Program has been providing two to three servings of fruits and veggies to about 25 elementary schools since last fall.

Getting the food into the hands, and mouths, of young people is key to setting the stage for lifelong health, say the groups.

Positioning Canadian agriculture as an essential part of a healthy lifestyle is a noble venture. But let’s not kid ourselves – promotion is also good for sales, both today and in the future with campaigns focused on children.

There’s nothing wrong with that. As agriculture producers, you are your own best champion of the food you produce. Whatever way you or your producer organization chooses to weigh in on promotion, it’s a message that needs to be delivered time and again – for the health of agriculture and Canadians. ❖



Biofuels buzz

spawns crop research

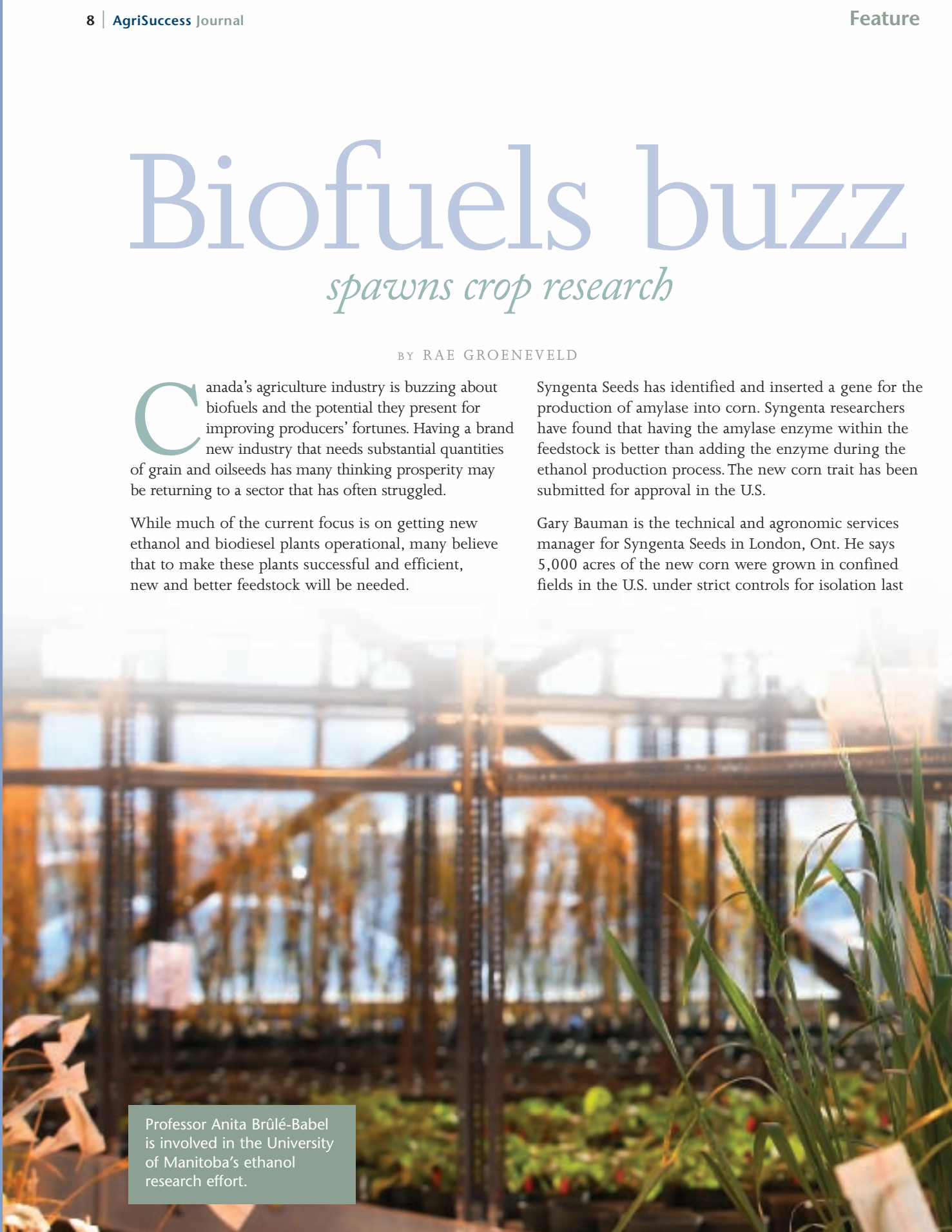
BY RAE GROENEVELD

Canada's agriculture industry is buzzing about biofuels and the potential they present for improving producers' fortunes. Having a brand new industry that needs substantial quantities of grain and oilseeds has many thinking prosperity may be returning to a sector that has often struggled.

While much of the current focus is on getting new ethanol and biodiesel plants operational, many believe that to make these plants successful and efficient, new and better feedstock will be needed.

Syngenta Seeds has identified and inserted a gene for the production of amylase into corn. Syngenta researchers have found that having the amylase enzyme within the feedstock is better than adding the enzyme during the ethanol production process. The new corn trait has been submitted for approval in the U.S.

Gary Bauman is the technical and agronomic services manager for Syngenta Seeds in London, Ont. He says 5,000 acres of the new corn were grown in confined fields in the U.S. under strict controls for isolation last



Professor Anita Brûlé-Babel is involved in the University of Manitoba's ethanol research effort.

year. The production will be run through a full-scale ethanol plant to assess the performance.

“The amylase corn package will also be submitted (for approval) in Canada,” Bauman says. Although there is still a lot of development work to do, Syngenta hopes the new corn trait will provide additional value for everyone in the ethanol supply chain.

Elsewhere, there are efforts aimed at improving wheat as a feedstock for ethanol.

Husky Energy, which is building the two largest wheat-based ethanol plants in Western Canada, has established a \$1-million endowment at the University of Manitoba for research in biofuels with a focus on ethanol.

In addition, Husky, in conjunction with the university, is applying to establish a Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Chair for wheat feedstock and ethanol

production technologies. If successful, Husky would be making a further contribution to the university of \$375,000 per year for five years.

University of Manitoba professor Anita Brûlé-Babel specializes in wheat breeding and genetics, and is leading the work on ethanol-specific crops. The creation of a general class of wheat by the Canadian Grain Commission and easing requirements for it to be visually distinct from other milling wheat classes is a huge factor in making this new research possible.

“Without the ability to register varieties, there is not a lot of point putting the effort into breeding those varieties until we can also register them so farmers can produce them,” Brûlé-Babel says.

Boosting yields, improving the starch characteristics, improving the ethanol production process and better utilization of the by-products – such as the dried



distillers grain – are all a part of U of M’s ethanol research effort. Winter wheat, Canadian Prairie Spring (CPS) and soft white wheat have already been recognized as having the most potential for fitting the current need and making improvements.

Winter wheat is the best fit for Manitoba according to Brûlé-Babel, but she notes the CPS and soft white wheat provide a better fit as you move west into Saskatchewan and Alberta. Soft white is currently best suited for ethanol production with, on average, seven per cent more starch content than a hard red spring wheat.

“I don’t know physiologically how much we can increase the starch content, but we can definitely do a lot in terms of improving yield.”

Brûlé-Babel adds they have varieties in the works that can increase the size of the kernel by 25 per cent. The bump in kernel size results in better utilization of the grain in the ethanol process.

While work progresses on crops for the ethanol sector, research is also underway on better crops for the developing biodiesel market.

“Over the years we’ve focused on food, food, food – and I think it’s high time that we look at other potential for oilseed crops,” says Zenneth Faye, president of Milligan Bio-Tech in Foam Lake, Sask. Faye helped start the business in 1991 and since 1999, it’s been creating biodiesel from canola oil.

A key focus of their business has been to ensure high quality biodiesel so it can’t be questioned by the automobile or petroleum industries.

“In the long term I want a crop that is bred specifically for the engine,” says Faye, who would like to see improvements in cold-flow properties and greater stability for diesel engines.

The other improvement that could make a big impact on the efficiency of Milligan Bio-Tech’s biodiesel plant is getting canola varieties with higher oil content.

While biodiesel operators like Milligan Bio-Tech would like to see improvements in crop genetics to better suit the fuel industry, the research at this time appears to be geared more towards trying to fill the increasing demand for biofuels.

Kevin Falk, a research scientist with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, says their work in Saskatoon is

focused on expanding areas where oilseeds can be grown. He is currently developing Ethiopian and oriental mustard species suited to the southern Prairies.

“They are typically grown in the drier areas and they are both heat and drought tolerant. Therefore, we’re looking at expanding oilseed production outside of the canola belt and further south,” Falk says. The species are being tested across Canada.

Working with mustards also avoids the challenge of getting new canola varieties registered. Falk says they don’t have to ensure the oil profile meets specific health standards. Focus is on the yield of the mustards and finding alternative uses for the meal after crushing.

Analysis is underway on the mustard meal as a bio-fumigant for nematodes in turf grass and potatoes. Stricter pesticide controls on North American golf courses are creating great potential for environmentally friendly alternatives.

Businesses involved in developing new crop varieties appear to be ready to step forward with funding for the new industrial development.

CropLife Canada, a trade association representing the developers, manufacturers and distributors of plant science innovations, estimates the demand for crops with industrial purposes will grow from a \$40-billion-per-year global industry to a \$500-billion-per-year industry.

President Lorne Hepworth says that type of potential has many of their member companies investing in research. To ensure further investment occurs, however, he says the regulations have to evolve to allow these new crops to come on stream.

Opinions vary on how the potential of biofuels will unfold. However, it seems certain that biofuels will change the crops and crop-types being grown. As a producer, you’ll want to keep monitoring and evaluating the new opportunities as they arise. ❖



Crops change, but the basics of learning stay the same



BY HUGH MAYNARD

The down side of officially being middle-aged is that I've started to catch myself saying "I remember when..." The upside, of course, is that I can still remember. There's a lot that comes to mind when taking a look at the evolution of crops and cropping practices since I bravely stepped forth with my farm management diploma in hand nearly 30 years ago.

Don't rely on your memory alone to retain all the valuable information you pick up at a field day.

Grain corn in Quebec was just coming into its own at that time with improved hybrids that enabled it to move beyond the failure cycle of one in every three years due to wet weather or early frost. Now, it's the province's largest grain crop and planted all the way east to (and sometimes past) Quebec City.

Soybean was a faraway crop from somewhere down in the U.S. It didn't exist in any rotation

plan, and now it's grown throughout the southwest of Quebec. Every agricultural region in Canada has a comparable story to tell about the changes in crops grown then and now.

Cropping practices have changed in similar magnitude. No-till has cut the amount of time that farmers spend in the field by half, and the "gangs" of equipment hooked together in a chain that allow cultivation, fertilization and seeding in one pass would have been looked on as science fiction in days past.

Despite all these advances, scientific and technological, the basics of learning have remained the same: look, listen and try for yourself. Agricultural societies were formed as a learning activity – show and tell with cattle and crops – and even though fairs today are more about celebrating farm and country life, field days and demonstration plots are popular with farmers as an opportunity to see how stuff works and grows. If there's a free lunch, it's a bonus.

These activities are a form of peer learning, an exchange of valuable information between users, as well as a chance to "kick the tires" before buying product or adopting a practice. It is one of the first stages of the farm management process that sets up the key points for financial analysis in the determination of which crops and which cropping practices provide the best return. Given the tight margins that most crops are operating on, every piece of information about variety performance and cost/efficiency ratios for equipment takes on added value.

Getting back to being middle-aged – don't rely on your memory alone to retain all that valuable information you pick up at a field day. Be a good student. Take notes. Ask questions. And a digital camera, or even a cell phone equipped with a camera, is a great way to capture images of crops at different stages of growth, or particular components of farm machinery. That way, 30 years later, you will still be able to say "I do remember when..." ♦



Get ready

for the second generation

BY LORNE McCLINTON

Fat-free french fries are just around the corner. Soy beverages will soon lose their chalky taste and trans fats in food will be a thing of the past. Seed companies have started to release a new wave of both GMO and non-GMO crop varieties with traits selected to meet consumer demand for healthy food choices. These new traits, commonly lumped together under the second-generation GMO banner, will soon revolutionize the North American food industry.

GMO crop varieties are nothing new to Canadian producers. They've been growing first generation GMO crops – the BTs (insect resistance), the Roundup Readies and the Liberty Links – for a decade. All these varieties had one thing in common: they were designed to offer agronomic benefits to the primary producer. While they made life easier for the producer by simplifying weed control and reducing the need for pesticides, they didn't offer the consumer anything. Anti-GMO activists exploited this, arguing that consumers were being asked to swallow a "new technology" that offered no additional nutritional benefits to justify the risk.

With this in mind, plant breeding companies have developed a new generation of plant traits for the consumer market. A good example is the push to develop stable new oilseed varieties that reduce or eliminate the need for hydrogenation. The hydrogenation process increases taste and shelf life, but forms trans fatty acids that have been linked to cardiovascular disease.

Dow's Nexera canola meets this new consumer demand. Nexera canola is a non-GMO variety with a unique high oleic/low linolenic oil profile. The oil, marketed under the Natreon label, is so stable it doesn't require hydrogenation.

"This increases its functionality – whether it's in a fryer or in a coating on a cracker," says Jim Wispinko, marketing manager with Dow AgroSciences. "It has more stability than regular canola oil, and it in fact has greater stability than partially-hydrogenated soybean oil but without the trans fats. From a nutritional standpoint, since it's low in

saturated fats, high in monounsaturated fats and has no trans fats, it's a very, very healthy oil."

Selecting consumer-driven traits has also become a key focus area for Monsanto according to Kurt Wickstrom, the company's U.S. soybean traits manager. "Vistive will be a new brand for Monsanto that will represent a number of enhanced compositional output traits in soybeans that will be offered exclusively to farmers in Eastern Canada and the United States," Wickstrom says.

The first Vistive product, a low linolenic soybean launched in the United States in 2005, will be available to Quebec and Ontario soybean producers this year. As more product development work is done with food companies, Wickstrom expects their acreage to expand to anywhere from eight to 15 million acres.

"They contain less than three per cent linolenic acid, which means that food companies can reduce or eliminate the need to hydrogenate it and still have the taste and shelf life that they require in their food products," Wickstrom says.

Monsanto is working on other soy varieties that will contain a significant amount of beta conglycinin protein. This will improve the taste, texture and palatability of soy beverages by reducing their chalky taste.

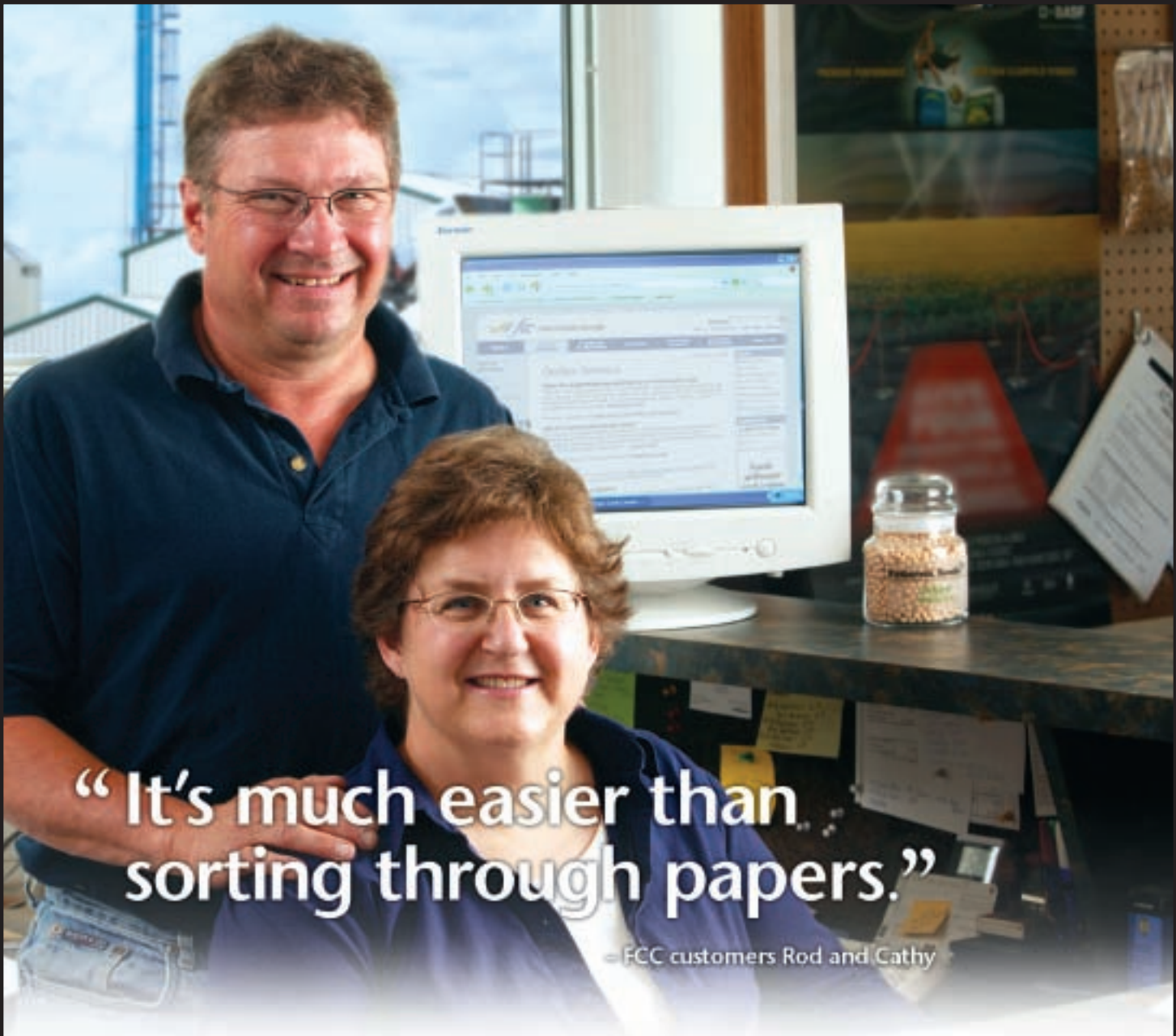
High stearate soybean varieties are also under development. These varieties will allow the use of non-hydrogenated soybean oil in more types of solid food products, such as margarines or shortenings.

"We are also working on a middle oleic in combination with low linolenic, and in the little bit longer term, what I'm calling the triple stack of bean oils – zero saturated fat, middle oleic and low linolenic," Wickstrom says. "Think of reduced or no-fat french fries."

Biotech is still in its infancy. Plants can now be engineered to produce a wide range of materials, ingredients and compounds to serve the needs of consumers. From the producer's point of view they also provide opportunities to improve the bottom line. ♦



Photo provided by
Dow AgroSciences.



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Manage your risk



BY PETER VAN DONGEN

By the time you read this, Prince Edward Island will have become the ninth province in Canada where occupational health and safety laws now apply to farm workplaces. That legislation, which took effect January 1, comes just six months after Ontario extended similar coverage to farm workers this past June.

Everyone should be interested in a safe work environment

In fact, Alberta now stands as the only province where farms continue to be exempted from health and safety laws that apply to most other occupations, and I suspect it's only a matter of time before things change there as well. Whether that's good or bad is not for me to debate. It simply is what it is.

Instead I set out with other questions in mind: What does this legislation mean to you as a farm employer? What rights and responsibilities does it impart on you and your employees? What risks are involved, and how do you manage those risks?

"There's a whole philosophy evolving around risk management as it applies to a farm – and really farm safety should be a part of that," says Bruce Johnson, general manager for the British Columbia Farm and Ranch Safety and Health Association. "It's part of good farm business management."

While the specific occupational health and safety laws vary from province to province, the basic principles are similar across the country. One of the cornerstones is the fact that employers and employees share responsibility for maintaining a safe and healthy workplace.

In general, as an employer you are required to take all reasonable precautions to protect your employees from injury and illness. This includes making sure employees have the skills and training to perform the job they've been assigned, and are aware of any hazards associated with those tasks. You are also required to provide – and ensure employees use – any protective equipment required to perform a job safely.

Employees, in turn, are typically granted the right to know about the potential hazards of their job, the right to participate in decisions about health and safety on the farm and the right to refuse work that they believe is unsafe or dangerous.

And with those rights come responsibilities. For instance, your employees are required to practise safe working procedures, report any potential workplace hazards and properly wear any protective equipment that the job requires.

If this all sounds like common sense, it is. Everyone should be interested in a safe work environment. Beyond the social responsibility, there are also important risk management considerations. The question to ask is this: What is my risk if one of my employees is injured or killed while working on my farm?

If such an incident were to occur (and let's hope it never does), the question of risk will more than likely come down to whether you took reasonable precautions to ensure the health and safety of your employees. And the first step to managing that risk is to become familiar with the occupational health and safety regulations specific to your province.

For more information, a good place to start is your provincial government website or provincial farm safety association. ♦



Bootin' around the global market



BY OWEN ROBERTS

If cowboy boots are on your shopping list, where better to get them than Texas? I was fortunate enough to be in the Great State recently, taking part in an education program at Texas A & M University in College Station. So, I decided to dash to a recommended western wear shop before heading back to Canada, and check out some authentic Texas cowboy boots.

What happens when such outsourcing takes place at the farmer's expense, and becomes part of the value chain?

Hundreds of choices existed. I wanted something I could wear to work and not look too conspicuous (where I work, most people wear running shoes). So I steered clear of the fancy \$300 to \$400 ostrich- and alligator-hide models and was instead drawn to humble, low-heeled tan boots with a composite sole, at a third of the price. (Canadian nationalists please note: over the years I have also amassed two pairs of Boulets, made in Quebec, and a pair of Alberta Boot Company boots. Talk about regional parity.)

I guess I should have been wary about the authenticity of these Texas boots by the name of the manufacturer: Georgia Boot. But I really did a double-take when, while waiting at the check-out line, I looked a little more closely at the inside and saw that pervasive phrase that now seems like it's everywhere: Made in China. That certainly put the price in perspective.

Randy Westgren, a professor in the University of Illinois Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, would probably say Georgia Boot was just being smart. During an address entitled "Opportunities for entrepreneurs in agri-food supply chains" delivered at the annual meeting of the George Morris Centre in Guelph in late September, Westgren said that knowing consumer preferences is an "astonishing valuable asset" for entrepreneurial activity.

Indeed, just look at Georgia Boot. It knew my preferences: economy and utility.

And according to Westgren, that's just fine. He says no one (such as western wear stores) should have to apologize for loading up their inventories with competitively priced goods. "Offshore outsourcing is not evil," he says, "it's a way of being entrepreneurial."

But what happens when such outsourcing takes place at farmers' expense, and becomes part of a value chain?

Jack Wilkinson, president of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP), says that's happening too much. At the same time Westgren was addressing his crowd, Wilkinson, an Ontario farmer who was recently elected IFAP president for an unprecedented third time, was issuing a news release from Europe calling for a new, global, farmer-centred approach in agri-food value chain systems.

The proliferation of supermarkets, superstores and chains in countries that once held smaller enterprises dear is making more producers think more about the supply chain. The bottom line is that many producers are not ready for such market concentration, and those that have been living with it don't like it.

Wilkinson is taking a measured approach. He's sending out a research SOS around the world, trying to build an information cache of what he calls "facts, numbers and statistics on market instruments, to see what works for farmers under different conditions." With this self-help inventory, Wilkinson figures producers will be better equipped to organize themselves and face the challenge of market concentration (see www.ifap.org and click on "Newsroom" and then "Press Releases").

Good management is vital in markets big and small. For producers, success hinges on having sustainable, research-based production and regulatory systems that support their efforts to satisfy consumers, no matter where in the world they buy food. ❖

Make the right decisions with accurate records

If you make a big investment, are you more comfortable playing a hunch or knowing the facts? If you're like most producers, there's no substitute for good information.

Knowing how your operation compares with other similar operations and how successful you are from one year to the next is key to understanding the health of your operation.

Peter Townshend, who owns and operates a 400-acre potato farm in Prince Edward Island, relies on accurate information in his operation. "Knowing where my operation stands makes it easier to make financial decisions based on numbers that are right," he says.

"With our system, we can pass information to each other instantaneously."

There are many ways to capture your information. From handwritten notes to computerized tracking systems and spreadsheets, the range is endless, with varying degrees of sophistication.

The best method is a system that lets you easily enter and access the information, says

Lance Stockbrugger, a farmer and chartered accountant with PriceWaterhouseCoopers in Humboldt, Sask.

"My brother and I started farming with a fancy spreadsheet on paper that had checkboxes for all the information we thought we'd need. Then I'd come to work and the records would be back at the farm or my brother would have them. I never seemed to have the information I needed at the time."

Today, Stockbrugger and his brother use a handheld computerized system to record field activities and income-expense transactions, to easily share information with each other. "With our system, we can pass information to each other instantaneously. I find it invaluable."

If you're looking for field management software, look for options that let you accurately track your input and yield records for each field. By tracking your day-to-day field activities with something like a handheld computer and accurately documenting and analyzing field histories, you will enhance your farm management and make your operation more profitable.

Townshend suggests looking for a field management system that tracks information for compliance with Canadian government programs and legislation like crop insurance and nutrient management reporting.

"Our province has beefed up the requirement for pesticide use on the island," he says. "Now you have to have up-to-date spray records, within one week, so if a guy stops by and asks for your records, you better have them up to date. With my system, I can just show him my handheld computer, which saves me a lot of time."

One system that covers every angle is the new Field Manager PRO from AgExpert, the software division of Farm Credit Canada. It's an innovative crop record-keeping and planning system that gives you access to all of your crop production data. This field management system includes both desktop (PC) and mobile (Windows OS handheld computer) components to accurately manage your input and yield records by field. You can enter and review data right in the field on a handheld unit, and synchronize with a PC back in the office.

The system features complete reporting abilities – including compliance programs – and traceability capabilities for IP producers. It also allows you to run multiple data files on one handheld device, and a new DataGuard feature protects handheld information from accidental deletion.

Visit www.AgExpert.ca for more information on AgExpert Field Manager PRO. ❖





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