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Keeping the family farm in the family
BY RON FRIESEN

When Jill Verwey was taking the agriculture diploma course at the University of Manitoba in the late 1980s, farm record keeping was simple. You used the old Manitoba Co-operator double entry ledger and you put your receipts in an envelope attached to a calendar on the fridge. Once a month Jill would come home from university, empty the envelope and do the books for her farm business plan course.

How things have changed. Today, sitting at a desk in her farm home south of Portage la Prairie, Jill is surrounded by paperwork. Priorities include the farm’s year-end and financial projections for 2018. Payroll records are on a computer. So are all invoices, making it easier to file quarterly GST reports.

Environmental farm plans have been part of Jill’s duties since 2005. The farm also hires a professional agronomist to look after the farm’s manure management plan, which includes soil testing. The agronomist also provides annual cropping recommendations based on past plans, as well as well as doing seasonal scouting of all fields.

The farm also has a certified accountant and farm advisor to help with financial matters. Besides day-to-day matters, there’s also long-term planning, which involves the possible doubling of the farm’s dairy herd. On top of everything else, Jill, her husband Raymond and the family are taking first steps toward an intergenerational transfer of the farm to the next generation.

Such is life when you’re running a diversified mixed farm, cropping 6,000 acres, operating both a beef and dairy herd, and employing four brothers and three nephews.

Verwey and her family are examples of how farming has become specialized big business over the last 30 years. Large farms with high-tech equipment and advanced computer technology are now standard throughout Manitoba.

But despite thousands of acres of land, expensive machinery, high-level commerce and large financial investments, it’s still a family farm. And the expansion which the »

Right: Charolais cattle, with calves, from the Verweys’ 250-head beef herd.
Verwey farm has undergone over time has one main goal: to keep the farm in the family.

“We want to grow to a point to give our children an opportunity to be able to continue farming,” says Jill. “If they’re going to do that, then we have to grow our bottom line. We fully realize that for the farm to grow, we have to have a strong relationship with our lending institution and work as a team to achieve the goals of the farm, working through projections and setting a plan.”

Right now, that plan involves increasing the farm’s dairy herd to 200 cows from the current 108. With the price of quota currently running around $25,000 per kg, that’ll involve a major cash outlay. But Jill says dairy, with its monthly milk cheque, has always carried the farm financially, even though grains and oilseeds still provide the bulk of the revenue, and there’s no reason why it can’t continue doing so.

“The growth potential in dairy offers us stability with it being a regulated industry,” she says.

“We have to be innovative in growing the operation and hopefully we can achieve that through the dairy side.”

The Verweys’ plans to expand the dairy operation took root in 2009 with the building of a new straw-pack barn with a milking parlour accommodating 24 cows at a time, 12 on each side. The Verweys also intend to keep their 250 Charolais beef cow herd — an example of a regulated industry and an unregulated one operating side by side.

Although expanding the dairy herd will be expensive, it has to be balanced against the cost of buying or renting more land. Jill says good farmland in the Portage area can run between $5,000 and $7,000 an acre — not the best option right now.

“When land is that price, wheat is $7 a bushel, beans are $10.50 to $11, and with expenses it doesn’t leave a lot of room to make payments on land.”

For that reason, the Verweys are considering tile drainage for surface and internal drainage improvement. It’s another cash outlay but it would mean making better use of the land they have instead of shelling out thousands of dollars an acre to buy more.

Jill says the family does not expect to resume growing processing potatoes, having discontinued them in 2013 after 20 years. Even a $460 million expansion plan by Simplot to its Portage plant, announced in February, may not be enough enticement. Margins on potatoes are thin, contracts are for only one year and there’s no big payback on investment.

Growing up on a grain and beef farm near Neepawa, Jill had agriculture in her blood from the start. While in school she was active in the local 4-H home economics and beef clubs. Her major on graduating from the U of M agriculture diploma program was in livestock. But it was her course work in farm management that landed Jill a job in banking at Portage la Prairie.

Here she met Raymond and eventually married into the Verwey family, using her banking background to help with bookkeeping, finances and regulatory information.

Despite her heavy workload and hectic schedule, Jill still finds time to serve on the Portage Hospital Foundation board of directors. The foundation is dedicated to raising funds for the local hospital and other care facilities. Every year a gala sponsored by the board raises in excess of $100,000. Last year a fundraiser helped pay for an airlift helicopter pad at the hospital for transporting patients.

Jill is also a board member of the Portage la Prairie Co-op, which operates an agri-retail business, a farm and building centre, a bulk petroleum outlet, four gas bars and a local food store.

In addition, Jill represents District 2 on the Dairy Farmers of Manitoba advisory committee.
As if that wasn’t enough, Jill was elected Keystone Agricultural Producers vice-president at KAP’s annual meeting in January. Having been KAP members “forever,” Jill began attending district meetings with Raymond five or six years ago. From there she graduated to a delegate for District 6 and a member of the grains and oilseeds committee before being asked to stand for one of KAP’s two vice-president positions.

Jill says she and her husband have been strong KAP supporters ever since Raymond went door-to-door selling KAP memberships to local farmers early on.

“It’s so important to have a voice for farmers that takes concerns from the ground up and has strong people at the top to handle them.”

The Verweys’ operation is a three-generation farm started by Jill’s father-in-law John Verwey, the son of Dutch immigrants, nearly 60 years ago. John and his wife Norma are still involved in day-to-day operations, as are Raymond’s three brothers — Gerry, Conrad and Roger. Three nephews are full-time employees.

Jill and Raymond’s four children — three girls and a boy — could be following in their parents’ footsteps. Rachael, the oldest, is graduating in agriculture from the U of M with a major in animal science.

Lindsay is pursuing her diploma in agriculture and is currently president of the Manitoba Charolais junior beef club association. Brice will graduate from Grade 12 this year and has already signed up for the agriculture diploma course this fall. Randi, the youngest, is in Grade 10 and helping Lindsay plan the national Charolais show this summer.

“I think their full intent is to come back to the farm,” says Jill.

Which means an intergenerational farm transfer plan will have to be worked out very carefully to accommodate the interests of so many people.

The milking parlour in the new barn can accommodate 24 cows at a time.
Address to the House of Commons agriculture committee on the grain transportation crisis

By Dan Mazier, KAP President

In 2013 to 2014, Canada suffered from a grain transportation crisis that is estimated to have cost Western Canadian farmers approximately $6.5 billion. When shippers (grain buyers) are unable to reliably move their commodities to port, they will begin offering farmers lower cash bids or no cash bids for their products. So, although farmers are not the actual shippers ordering the rail cars, they are the ones who end up bearing the costs of poor rail service.

The Government of Canada responded to this last crisis in several ways, including an order in council that penalized the railways for missing grain movement targets, and an accelerated schedule for the statutory review of the Canada Transportation Act. Out of that review came several recommendations which were incorporated into Bill C-49, which has passed through the House of Commons and presently sits before the Senate.

During that last crisis, the magnitude of it caught many in government and industry off guard. This time around, we became aware of the challenges railways have been having moving our grain much earlier in the year, largely because we now collect information on grain car orders and deliveries.

This is done by a group called the Ag Transport Coalition which reports weekly data on the number of grain cars that are ordered by shippers, compared to the number of cars each railway actually delivers. According to the Ag Transport Coalition data for Manitoba, six weeks ago at the beginning of February, CP supplied 74 per cent of cars ordered, and CN only delivered 14 per cent.

Things only got worse from there. In CP’s worst week in February it only managed to deliver 17 per cent of ordered cars. In CN’s worst week, it delivered zero per cent of car orders. On average, the railways combined only delivered 29 per cent of the ordered cars, which created a backlog of 28,000 cars. This left more than 30 ships waiting for grain off the coast from the port of Vancouver.

When the smoke has cleared and we have an opportunity to assess the impact that this current grain shipping crisis has had on the Canadian economy, I have no doubt that we will again be measuring the damage in the billions of dollars.

So, how do we move forward and fix this problem before we do permanent damage to our country’s reputation as a reliable shipper of grain?

A good first step is to come up with a plan to get the grain moving. It all boils down to getting more people and more locomotives to move more products. I would encourage using all the tools possible to monitor and support the ministers so we can all keep the pressure on the railways to get the backlog cleared.

The elephant in the room is the need to have Bill C-49 strengthened and passed as quickly as possible. I, along with other farm stakeholders, have given presentations with recommended amendments to the bill that we argue will create a policy environment where the railways are held more accountable for their service failures and the impact they have on shippers.

I would like to point out that the current design of the long-haul interswitching option in Bill C-49 is being viewed as overly restrictive in terms of which shippers are eligible to apply for it. We are recommending clarifying existing language for interswitching to ensure it is the most effective it possibly can be for shippers to access the program.

The most impactful amendment we are recommending is to empower the Canadian Transportation Agency to initiate investigations into service issues when it becomes aware of them, and mandate solutions when necessary. At present, it does not have that authority.

In addition to these service-related measures, we are insisting that soybeans and related products be added to the Schedule II list of grains that are eli-
egible to be covered under the maximum revenue entitlement (MRE).

In Manitoba, with more than two million acres planted in 2017, soybeans represent our third largest crop by area. Currently, the transportation costs for soybeans are as much as 40 per cent higher per car more than MRE-covered grains, with still no promise of getting these cars.

There is no reason that soybean producers who have innovated and adapted to changing conditions should be denied by a monopoly industry the same protection from price exploitation that farmers of other crops receive.

It is critical that Bill C-49 pass with these amendments before the house rises in June. This way shippers and carriers will know what their obligations are under the law, and will make the needed investments to ensure that the 2018 crop is delivered to customers on time. This will ensure farmers do not suffer the same economic hardships that we have now suffered twice in less than half a decade.

If government does not hold the railways accountable for their failures, I can promise that farmers will hold government accountable for its failure to address the situation.

The railways must face repercussions if they fail to meet acceptable service standards, they must not be allowed to gouge captive shippers of soybeans, and their performance must continue to be carefully monitored and action taken when they fail.

In Canada, our growing season is very short. Our seeding and harvest windows are narrow and it is difficult to predict how long they will last. To deal with this challenge, we invest in more equipment than nearly any other farmer in the world, and, when the conditions are right, we work all day and night to get the crop off the field and into the bin.

I fully expect the railways to make the investments necessary to get the job completed. And if it requires that Senators and members of Parliament work all day and all night to get Bill C-49 strengthened and passed into law, then I expect that as well.

Farmers will not accept excuses about parliamentary procedures, political egos, or partisan grudges preventing an amended bill from becoming law by June. If government does not hold the railways accountable for their failures, I can promise that farmers will hold government accountable for its failure to address the situation.

Canada’s economic wellbeing is critically tied to rail transportation. Politicians should not shy away from their responsibility to ensure that the Canada Transportation Act addresses the challenges farmers face and ensures that the Canada’s economy can grow to its full potential. FV

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The emerging field of digital agriculture

Making sense of all that farm data

BY JACQUIE NICHOLSON

If there’s any one thing farmers have in common, it’s a desire to improve their efficiency and boost their economic returns — and a willingness to step out of their comfort zones in the process. In recent years, on-farm data collection has been touted as the foundation of the next agricultural revolution, and there is no shortage of tools available to do it — from drones to built-in monitoring equipment in machinery.

But does having the ability to collect almost bottomless amounts of information about your production necessarily translate into better yields and more money in your pocket? It may not, if you don’t know what to do with the data you’re getting.

Stuart Cullum is the president of Olds College which specializes in agricultural innovation, and a former farmer himself. He recalls meeting with a board member in his combine over harvest this past year, and hearing him sum up the challenge many farmers are facing.

“He pointed to his monitoring equipment and said, ‘I know I’m only able to get about five to 10 per cent of the value out of this box. I know there’s so much more I can generate, but because of connectivity challenges, communications challenges, or just not having all day to sit around figuring this stuff out, I’m not getting the value I could be, despite the money I’ve invested into it.”

Solving this producer’s problem is the aim of the emerging field of digital agriculture. It asks, how can we make sense of the information we are gathering on the farm? And how do we turn it into practical gains in the form of time and money savings?

What is digital agriculture?

Martin Scanlon is the associate dean of research at the University of Manitoba’s Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences. For him, digital agriculture is all about producers’ ability to make sound decisions.

The most effective decisions are going to be those that combine a farmer’s years of hands-on experience and wisdom with what science says about the likely outcome of an action. This, of course, requires being able to interpret the data you’ve collected on your farm. “For example,” Scanlon says, “you might have a drone that is acquiring literally gigabytes of data for you, but you don’t want to go through the whole video yourself if there is a software solution that will automatically look for information associated with say, the onset of a disease in a portion of a field.”

 Technologies that search out patterns in reams of data and look for cause-and-effect relationships between different variables are essential, Scanlon says. Not only do most farmers lack the time to pore over hours of video, maps, and numbers, but they may not understand them even if they did.

“Growing crops is a particularly complex activity,” Scanlon says. “And there are so many variables where we often
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Canada’s Silicon Valley?
It's not just academics and agribusiness that see the potential of developing agricultural technology. The federal government is putting significant funds behind a huge economic development and research project aimed at enhancing the plant protein industry in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta.

Protein Industries Canada is a collaboration of 120 businesses, organizations, and post-secondary institutions across the prairies that recently received a $150 million investment from the Government of Canada's Innovation Superclusters Initiative.

“Switch from field to transport in 30 seconds”

Scanlon describes superclusters as concentrations of expertise that foster rapid advancements in technology and industry. A well-known example is the tech hub of California’s Silicon Valley.

It’s people with problems, people with solutions, and people with capital — and all of them actively discussing ideas, challenges, and opportunities,” Scanlon says.

For Protein Industries Canada, the major challenge is how to bolster Western Canada’s role in providing high-quality plant proteins to the rest of the world, with a focus on canola and pulses.

“We use the word protein because it captivates the imagination,” says Keller, who has played a significant role in the project. “The world is heading in to an era where there is a need for protein. In Asia there is more demand for meat, and livestock requires feed containing quality plant protein.”

The funds from the federal government will be matched dollar-for-dollar by the stakeholders in the PIC consortium, and will focus on projects in seed genetics and plant breeding, market development, and enhancing on-farm production through digital agriculture technologies.»
“Another thing we are looking to emphasize is processing and product development,” Keller says. “Taking beans, canola, and peas, and looking at whether they can be processed here in Canada, to keep some of that economic return here instead of shipping raw commodities overseas.”

At the processing level, digital agriculture will play a role, says Scanlon, who is also involved in the PIC collective. Adopting techniques that minimize water use and waste production will be important to companies like Roquette, whose pea protein plant in Portage la Prairie is slated to open in 2019.

“We’re looking at whether we can load sensors onto the line so that the processor knows in real time whether they’re overconcentrating the proteins,” Scanlon says. “The goal is to optimize the amount of water that’s being put in and reduce the amount of wastewater without undermining the quality of the protein stream that we’re getting out of the other end of the factory.”

A second agriculture-based supercluster was shortlisted for funding from the over 50 competing proposals. The Smart Agri-Food Supercluster, which among other things, aimed to fund a series of digital agriculture research projects across the country, made the final 10 but ultimately wasn’t selected.

Fortunately, aspects of the initiative will be able to continue even without the federal dollars. The Werklund Agriculture Institute at Olds College in Alberta, for example, will be both a hub for digital ag research and a space to demonstrate new technologies to farmers.

Cullum calls the new project a “Smart Farm,” and says it aims to bridge the gap between a technology’s potential and whether it can actually be used by the people it’s intended to help.

“We take our lead from the farmers themselves,” Cullum says. “When we talk about the challenges we need to solve with these technologies, they’re not challenges we’re making up; they’re the challenges that farmers are coming to us with.”

Possible pitfalls and solutions
The key theme in digital agriculture is data: collecting it, interpreting it, and using it to make decisions. You can’t have digital agriculture without data. But some have reservations about sharing so much of it — and understandably so.

“We’re generating lots of data on-farm,” Scanlon says. “If you’ve got a combine that has 60 sensors on it, and all that data is being uploaded, you don’t know who is using it and what they’re going to do with that data.”

To address some of these concerns, Scanlon is part of a fledgling project to create a safer way to store on-farm data and limit who can access it. It’s modelled on the Manitoba Population Health Data Repository, where all manner of data on health in the province is stored, from pharmaceutical use to immunization records.

“Everyone has lots of data related to health,” Scanlon says. “And you don’t want this data being traded between different companies or different sectors of the government, and you certainly don’t want outside people getting access to that data. So they start, for example, making sure that you’re paying more for insurance premiums because they know there’s a history of heart attack in your family.”

To guard against abuse of information, the health data repository anonymizes data so that it can’t be connected to a particular individual, and uses firewalls to limit access to it. Researchers looking to use the data for the benefit of the public are permitted to access it, but only after their research proposal is accepted by an oversight committee.

The repository has been very successful for health research, and Scanlon and his colleagues have obtained permission to use the model to develop a similar agricultural database.

The ability to do this type of research with farm data would be an enormous benefit to producers, he says.

“If we’ve got all these yield monitors from all these combines working across different soil regions and different parts of the province, different weather conditions, and then I come in and say, ‘Okay, I’d like to look at the relationship between soil types and the history of water stress in these soils, that I’ve got from satellite data — and I want to understand how these interactions relate to yield.’”

“If you do prove your hypothesis, you’re then able to then recommend to farmers: if you want to get the best returns for the lowest inputs, here are your top three options regardless of soil type.”

Ultimately, he adds, people are not going to feel comfortable sharing their data unless they know it’s not going to be used against them. And since digital agricultural technologies require huge amounts of data to be effective, gaining trust is important.

“Often, when it comes to data collection and digital agriculture, all you ever hear is the good story or the bad story,” Scanlon says.

“But the reality is, like any technology tool, there will be both good sides and bad sides. We’ve got to try and chart the course that makes the best use of it for the most people, as opposed to having all this data that other people are going to make money from, rather than the farmers who are generating it.”
Manitoba’s young farmers are exploring ways to maximize profit from farm production, and every year one Manitoba farm family under the age of 40 is recognized by the Manitoba Outstanding Young Farmers Program for their efforts.

Recently, the husband and wife team of Brooks and Jen White, who own and operate Borderland Agriculture, were named Manitoba’s Outstanding Young Farmers for 2018. They are also KAP members. »
The pair have been working to improve the profitability of their 7,500-acre farm for several years and it’s been a huge learning curve, especially for Jen who had never farmed before marrying Brooks 14 years ago.

“I have no background in agriculture at all. So everything I’ve basically learned is from Brooks. And he’s a great teacher,” Jen said.

Brooks is a fifth-generation producer on the farm he renamed Borderland Agriculture once he took it over. He said it seemed like an appropriate name because the land borders both Saskatchewan and North Dakota, the latter being where Jen grew up.

Brooks began his involvement in the farm in 1999 as a minority shareholder, and in 2012 he acquired the rest of the shares. Neither of his siblings had any interest in farming.

Before he began full-time farming Brooks earned a diploma in agriculture from the University of Manitoba. He said part of his course work was developing a farm plan. In that plan, he took the farm’s marginal cropland and any areas subject to excess moisture, and converted them into a bison operation where grass replaced grain crops.

“After graduating I came back to the farm and followed through with the plan from school,” Brooks said. “I always knew that if I was going to farm I wanted to be involved in livestock… but we were a straight grain farm.”

Brooks and Jen started the bison operation with 33 heifers of their own and developed a bison boarding farm giving absentee owners, folks who wanted to own animals but didn’t want to manage or care for them, a place to keep them. This brought the total number of bison to 150.

Brooks said eventually they bought out some of those animals because when BSE hit the absentee owners no longer had any interest in them. This increased the number of animals in the Borderland Agriculture herd. This, along with regular breeding, grew the herd to the 600 head it is now.

Brooks noted that his interest in livestock began when he visited elk farms with his dad. Now raising bison not only meets his initial goal of changing the function of the farm but also supports his plans to follow regenerative farming practices and restore the nutrient levels in the soil.

The Whites sell the bison through Canadian Prairie Bison; they are members of this co-op that markets a branded product. Their animals are processed at True North...
Foods in Carman, a federally approved facility, or at a plant near Denver, Colorado.

“It depends where the customer is,” Brooks explained, adding the cost of shipping is also a big factor when choosing a processor.

Brooks said some animals are sent to the U.S. live, and most are sold between 18 and 24 months of age. Some animals are held back a year and sold as bred heifers.

Over the years the couple has attended any workshop they heard about that they thought would be helpful for them on their farm. Jen said they attended a grazing workshop in Virden, travelled to Brandon to hear a guest speaker at the Brandon Research Centre and attended a no-till conference in Kansas. They’ve also attended agriculture-related events in Regina and Saskatoon.

Both Brooks and Jen enrolled in the two year Canadian Total Excellence in Agricultural Management (CTEAM) sessions. The CTEAM website indicates the course is designed specifically for producers and ranchers, and consists of week-long sessions held in four different cities across Canada. CTEAM sessions are described as experiences that “will develop and implement your own strategic and operations plans for your farm.”

Jen said the CTEAM sessions were held over a period of two years and participants attended two sessions a year.

“I wouldn’t be able to go and be a part of any of it if wasn’t for our support system — and that’s one of the reasons I enjoy farm living,” she said. “It’s been good. It’s been great for raising small kids. It takes a village to raise a family basically. As our kids get older you start to realize that really is true.”

Both sets of grandparents live nearby and the couple has friends who are also willing to help care for their children when needed.

“If it weren’t for them we wouldn’t be able to go and learn all these new things, and take in all the exciting conferences,” Jen said.

Jen and Brooks have two children: son Sawyer, who is now seven; and daughter Piper aged four.

Brooks noted that having his dad nearby is a great resource for him. His dad is retired now but shows up on the farm regularly and always finds something to do. In addition to providing an extra pair of hands to help keep things going, Brooks said his dad provides him with invaluable experience and knowledge.

Brooks said he’s not clear yet on what events the couple will be involved in over the next few months, but is sure he’ll be meeting a number of people who will be great contacts and mentors in the years to come.

Brooks and Jen will be participating in Canada’s Outstanding Young Farmer competition that will be held in Winnipeg in November. FV
Delegates at KAP’s 34th annual meeting, January 24 to 25 in Winnipeg, passed 18 resolutions.

They called on KAP to address the labour shortages in agriculture — with one resolution directing KAP to work for the establishment of a designated agricultural trade offered at an accredited post-secondary institution, and another directing KAP to work with educational providers to develop a farm equipment operator course to train new entrants into the workplace.

“Both of these resolutions reflect the need for training that will educate prospective workers in both farming and safety,” said KAP president Dan Mazier. “Farming is one of the most dangerous occupations, and while we are desperate for workers, we must ensure they are properly trained.”

Delegates also called on KAP to lobby the province to ensure rural residents and communities receive timely emergency response services, including the development of an effective strategy for farmers working in remote areas with no cell coverage.

Another resolution, endorsed by young farmers from the University of Manitoba’s agricultural diploma program, called for support for young farmers to purchase land. It would come in the form of a levy on farmland bought as investment and not being farmed for three years. The levy would then go to expand the Manitoba Agricultural Service Corporation’s young farmer rebate program.

Delegates also called on KAP to address climate change by encouraging governments, universities, private industry and farmers to develop experimental farms and best management practices that increase the sequestration of carbon into the soil.

Guests at the meeting included provincial Agriculture Minister Ralph Eichler and federal Natural Resources Minister Jim Carr.

Dan Mazier, a grains and oilseed producer from Justice, was acclaimed for a fourth term as KAP president. Bill Campbell, a cattle producer from Minto, and Jill Verwey, who runs a mixed operation near Portage la Prairie, were acclaimed as vice-presidents.

See complete list of resolutions on page 18 »
BUSINESS RISK MANAGEMENT

KAP will:
• Lobby the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation to develop separate hail insurance rates for pod-shatter-resistant varieties of canola.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

KAP will:
• Lobby the Manitoba government to develop an effective emergency communications strategy for farmers and others working in remote areas with poor wireless coverage.
• Lobby the Manitoba government to more clearly communicate its plans to maintain service levels to KAP members and rural residents; lobby the Manitoba government to ensure rural residents and communities receive timely emergency and fire services.
• Lobby the Manitoba government to investigate the challenges associated with identifying rural locations and access routes in order to develop a solution that will standardize and simplify the ability of emergency responders to identify these locations and the best routes for accessing them.

ENVIRONMENT

KAP will:
• Encourage governments, universities, private industry, and farmers to research and develop model farms and beneficial management practices which further foster and promote healthy soils and increase the sequestration of carbon into the soils.
• Continue to lobby the Manitoba government to exempt the fuels and utilities that are used to heat and cool confined livestock, grain dryers and greenhouse spaces under Manitoba’s carbon pricing plan; if KAP is unsuccessful in doing this due to government inability to segregate said use, that KAP lobby the Manitoba government to provide a full carbon tax rebate associated with said fuels and utilities use.
• Support and encourage the early adoption of the B5 biodiesel mandate; lobby the Manitoba government to give preference under the B5 biodiesel mandate to biodiesel produced using products that are grown in or sourced from Western Canada.
• Lobby the Manitoba government to require that membership to conservation districts be mandatory for all municipalities, towns and cities in the province of Manitoba.
• Work with the Manitoba Canola Growers Association and the Manitoba government to find some way to minimize the impact of the carbon tax, such as bringing the three Manitoba oilseed crushing plants into the output based pricing as a single emitter.

FARM LABOUR

KAP will:
• Establish a committee to prepare a formal proposal to Apprenticeship Manitoba to establish ‘Agricultural Craft’ as a designated trade offered at an accredited post-secondary institution.
• Investigate opportunities with educational providers to develop an agricultural operator’s trade course.

LAND PRICES AND LAND USE

KAP will:
• Lobby the Manitoba government to explore the possibility of initiating a five per cent levy on farmland sales prices for any investor who buys farmland and has not been actively farming within three years; lobby the Manitoba government to use money collected through a farmland sales price levy to enhance Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation’s Young Farmer Rebate Program.
• Make a submission to the Manitoba Ombudsman outlining the issues that arose with regards to the Municipal Act and the procedures followed by the Manitoba Municipal Board during the 2016-17 process of the City of Steinbach’s annexation of nearby farmland.

LIVESTOCK

KAP will:
• Lobby the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to ensure they are enforcing the requirements within the Feeds Act and associated regulations that set maximum contaminant levels in feed produced and sold by commercial feed mills.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

KAP will:
• Lobby the Government of Canada to make changes to the Competition Bureau in order to allow it to monitor corporate mergers and make companies financially accountable for commitments they put forward while going through the merger process.

TRANSPORTATION

KAP will:
• Lobby the Government of Canada to continue funding the Ag Transport Coalition.

WILDLIFE

KAP will:
• Send a letter to the Manitoba Wildlife and Fisheries Enhancement Fund supporting The Cypress River Wildlife Association’s request for funding for the purchase of the Jager Pro M.I.N.E. Trap.
• Lobby the Manitoba government to increase bag limits to at least two white-tailed deer per license, including either antlered or antlerless deer in this bag limit. PV
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MANITOBA AGRICULTURAL SERVICES CORPORATION paid out more than $6.1 million in compensation to producers last year for damage to crops from wildlife. Both big game animals such as elk, bear and deer, and waterfowl including geese and ducks, can cause crop damage through predation, trampling or contamination with feces.

The number and value of wildlife damage compensation claims was up considerably in 2016 to 2017 than the year before. That’s likely because of higher crop values and more acres of damage, which could have been driven by the severe winter weather in some areas.

“Cold temperatures and deep snow in winter often result in deer and/or elk being attracted to stored hay,” says Janine Stewart, human-wildlife conflict biologist with the wildlife and fisheries branch of Manitoba Sustainable Development. “Wildlife population levels, availability of natural foods, types of crops grown and where they are grown will all be factors to some degree.”

Most damage will generally occur when crops are first emerging in the spring or when they are ready to harvest in the fall. In the case of waterfowl, the timing is particularly relevant because spring and fall are the times they are migrating, so they are looking for abundant food sources.

“A lot of waterfowl and animals like the tender young shoots that are coming out of the ground, so spring time crops can be particularly hard hit,” says Stewart. “In the fall, when the crops have been swathed, there’s a lot of trampling and defecating that goes on — and also disturbance of the swath rows, and of course the wildlife is consuming the grain as well. They are also seeking out the tender young shoots of weeds or volunteer crops that are coming in behind.”

According to MASC data, traditionally geese cause the most damage, especially in the fall, but it is variable from year to year.

“The amount of impact that the geese will have is based on harvest conditions primarily, how quickly farmers are able to get their crop off,” says Stewart. “If they have the crops all harvested in the bins before the waterfowl are migrating they [the birds] don’t have much of a change to cause damage.”

**DETERRENTS REDUCE RISK**

But, as every farmer knows, Mother Nature isn’t always that co-operative. So what can farmers do to help prevent crop predation or damage, or at least reduce the risk?

The first thing, says Stewart, is to work with local trappers and hunters to try and prevent waterfowl and big game populations from becoming so large they are causing significant damage.

There are also a number of deterrents that farmers can use to scare off wildlife. They can borrow equipment such as propane-fired scare cannons, pyrotechnics and predator effigies — such as bald eagle effigies — from their local Sustainable Development office. What’s important is to use a combination of deterrents and to move them frequently so the wildlife doesn’t become accustomed to them.

One propane scare cannon per 40 acres provides optimum
protection, especially when used in combination with other deterre nts such as scarecrows or flags. They should be set to detonate at random timings, rather than at regular intervals, and should be moved every two to three days.

Pyrotechnics, also known as shell crackers, can be used to scare waterfowl and enhance the scaring effect of other deterre nts.

“What we have found effective for waterfowl is to use shell crackers to scare them out of a field initially and then put out the scare eagle in the field, followed by the scare cannon to prevent them from returning,” says Stewart. “Farmers should move the scare eagle, we recommend on a daily basis, so that it remains a novel deterrent.”

A farmer will need to sign a form to receive shell crackers or a scare cannon from the wildlife and fisheries branch, and must own a 12-gauge shotgun (modified choke or less restrictive), which requires a possession and acquisition licence. Eye and hearing protection are a must when using shell crackers.

Scarecrows or flags, which are also effective, can be easily constructed from basic materials such as lath and black garbage bags and are the least expensive way to effectively scare wildlife. Depending on the wildlife population density, they should be placed every 10 acres or less.

In the case of bears, electric fencing and crop choice may help keep them out of a specific area.

“If farmers can’t fence an entire crop, they could consider fencing the area closest to the forest from where the bears are most likely going to approach the field,” says Stewart. “Some farmers have reported having success growing a crop that is less desirable for bears (such as bearded wheat) on the perimeter of the field they want to protect.”

For deer and elk, exclusion by woven-wire fencing or electric fencing can be effective.

“Producers will need to weigh the costs and benefits of this approach to determine if it is a worthwhile investment for their operation,” says Stewart. “In areas with healthy wildlife populations, producers may want to carefully consider farming practices. For example, field feeding techniques such as bale grazing may attract elk and increase hay loss.”

SHORTENING CROP TIME IN THE FIELD

Any farming practices that shortens the amount of time a crop is in the field will also reduce the risk of it being damaged by wildlife. Straight combining instead of swathing wherever possible, harvesting at higher moisture levels and drying the grain, and growing early maturing varieties might be useful.

There are more expensive options such as lasers that can be used early in the morning to disturb birds in an area or prevent them from landing in the fields. Devices that make the sounds of predators or bird distress or alarm calls are also available.

Whatever deterrents farmers choose, without a doubt the most effective strategy is to use different combinations and move them as frequently as possible to have the best preventative effect.

COMPENSATION AVAILABLE

If all these best efforts don’t work, MASC offers a wildlife damage compensation program for crop damage caused by deer, elk, moose, bear, wood bison, ducks, geese or sandhill cranes.

Producers can receive compensation up to 90 per cent of the value of the production loss, which is adjusted for quality based on a field sample. The damage must be reported within three days of the occurrence. Most crops are eligible for the program.

Baled hay is eligible once it is gathered from the field and placed in storage, but bales remaining in the field due to wet conditions are also eligible for compensation.

Resources for wildlife crop damage prevention and compensation


For details of the MASC wildlife damage compensation program go to: www.masc.mb.ca/masc.nsf/program_wildlife_damage_compensation.html

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In response to consumer curiosity over the housing and care of laying hens, Manitoba Egg Farmers took a camera crew inside a variety of laying barns to show how hens are housed. In 2016, that camera footage formed the basis of a television advertising campaign in which farmers could explain each of their housing and care scenarios — and build trust and transparency in the process.

“We wanted to open up the barn doors, so to speak, to reassure the public that farmers were conscientious caregivers of their birds,” said Brenda Bazylewski, director of communications with MEF for the past three decades.

“We felt strongly we needed to make a long-term investment to reassure the public that laying hens are well cared for, because people need to feel good about the food they are putting on their plates,” Bazylewski explained.

She said they wanted to feature farmers who raise their hens in a variety of different housing environments — and to show there are benefits to them all.

Every year since 2016, Manitoba Egg Farmers has added two new 30-second ads a year in a television campaign that runs on three local television stations. Now there are six ads on rotation featuring six different farm families, each employing one of the following housing environments: enriched, free-run in a barn, and free-range/organic housing.
According to Bazylewski, the U.S. based Centre for Food Integrity conducted a five-year study on hen housing comparing animal care, food safety, worker health and safety and environmental sustainability. She noted the study concluded there is no one perfect housing system, but there are benefits to all types.

For example, even conventional cages that are being phased out in the egg industry offer the hens smaller group settings, which can be less stressful for the birds. Conventional housing systems also enable all the birds, even the timid ones, to have access to fresh food and water, while maximizing food safety.

Bazylewski said the egg industry has invested heavily in poultry research over the years, and now farmers are moving to alternative housing environments such as enriched and free-run. These systems enable the hens to express natural behaviours such as perching, scratching and laying their eggs in private nesting areas.

“We know this is the way to go, and our farmers are always looking for continuous improvement when it comes to the well-being of the hens,” she said.

The drive to improve housing for laying hens is purely animal-welfare driven, and not based on nutritional or economic factors, said Bazylewski. As a matter of fact, the egg’s nutritional value is the same whether the hens have been raised in conventional housing or free-run, or whether the shell colour is brown or white.

“Family affair: Eric and Sandra Dyck and one of their three children proudly showed their operation — 4D Farms Ltd. — in one of the TV commercials.”

Brenda Bazylewski
The nutritional value of the eggs changes only if the hen’s diet has been changed, such as omega-3 eggs, where the hens are fed a flax ration.

Bazylewski said Manitoba Egg Farmers tests the ad campaign on a yearly basis to measure its awareness and message retention, and admitted to having reservations prior to its launch.

“I have to say I was a little nervous in 2016 because no one had ever launched a television ad campaign showcasing hens in a layer barn before” she said. “Some people said the public wasn’t ready to see hens in cages, but I was proud of the way our farmers cared for their birds in all types of housing environments and wanted the public to see for themselves.”

In the pre-testing stage, Bazylewski said the campaign tested very well. She said the Winnipeggers they surveyed told MEF they were “grateful to the farmers for letting them into the barns.” In post testing research, Bazylewski said 68 per cent of Winnipeggers were familiar with the ads, and of that, 61 per cent could specifically recall the television campaign.

“It appeared people respected that the campaign was local — that these were real farmers and real people and were willing to open their barn doors and share with the rest of us,” she said.

Because eggs — along with turkey, broiler, hatchery, and dairy — are a highly regulated commodity under supply management in Canada, Bazylewski said all 170 egg and pullet farmers in Manitoba must adhere to very strict programs in animal care and food safety, regardless of how farmers choose to house their hens.

“The standards are high, the expectations are high, but then we are producing food for people to eat, so yes, we are expecting a lot,” she said.

Bazylewski said eggs are healthy and affordable, and an excellent source of high-quality protein.

“For that kind of quality protein, it’s really hard to beat. If people choose to buy more expensive free-run or organic eggs, then we’re happy to provide that choice, but we are also pleased to provide regular, affordable eggs for anyone who wants to eat them,” Bazylewski added.

She also said Manitoba Egg Farmers is very proud that Manitoba can produce “eggs for all tastes and all walks of life.”

Manitoba Egg Farmers is an independent, self-funded organization that represents 170 regulated egg and pullet farmers in Manitoba. For more information and to watch the television ads, visit the News section on www.eggs.mb.ca.
Guide for installing grain dryers now available

A new online publication, Installing Your Grain Dryer: Information for Agricultural Producers, brings together information on both the gas (natural gas or propane) and electrical requirements for grain dryers in Manitoba. The guide was put together by the Office of the Fire Commissioner, in partnership with Manitoba Agriculture, Manitoba Hydro, and an industry sub-committee — including KAP. It can be found at www.firecomm.gov.mb.ca/docs/grain_dryer_guide_2017.pdf.

Reminder: If you’re considering installing or purchasing a used grain dryer, and are unsure of it’s certification or approval status, you can arrange for a representative from the Office of the Fire Commissioner to visit your site and make an assessment — including options to get the grain dryer operational. To make arrangements, or for additional information on installing your grain dryer, please contact the Office of the Fire Commissioner at 204-945-3373.
Manitoba’s electoral boundaries under review this year

BY JAMES BATTERSHILL, KAP GENERAL MANAGER

A STATUTORY REVIEW OF MANITOBA’S electoral boundaries is being done this year and the outcome may change the political riding you vote in during the 2020 provincial election.

We often hear about ‘gerrymandering’ with how electoral boundaries are manipulated in the United States to ensure that certain parties and candidates have a better chance of being elected. Manitoba’s system attempts to avoid the politicization of the process because the Electoral Divisions Act clearly defines how reviewing and changing boundaries is to be done.

The basic principle that guides the process of setting electoral boundaries is called ‘effective representation.’ It establishes that peoples’ votes should have relatively equal power to determine the outcome of an election. Secondary is that communities should be allowed to elect a person to represent their collective interests and to ensure there is some degree of accountability of government to a local, geographic level.

The Electoral Divisions Act dictates that an electoral boundaries review commission of five pre-defined individuals be struck to review the boundaries. They are the presidents of the University of Brandon, University of Manitoba and University College of the North, as well as the chief electoral officer and the chief justice of Manitoba.

Defining these commissioners in legislation reduces the risk of the process being influenced by the government of the day. It also gives more credibility to the outcome of the process compared to if a government-appointed group served as a review commission.

The commissioners are required by the legislation to make changes if populations have shifted between ridings and become unbalanced. They do this by establishing what’s referred to as a quotient — that is, by taking the population of the province according to the most recent census and dividing it by the number of seats in the legislature.

Therefore, Manitoba’s population of 1,278,339 is divided by 57 seats for a quotient of 22,427.

If a riding is above or below the quotient target by more than 10 per cent, the commission is required to make a change. There is, however, a special provision in the act that allows for ridings north of the 53rd parallel (Thompson, The Pas, Flin Flon) to be 25 per cent above or below the quotient.

The commission adjusts riding boundaries to take in more, or less, residents to get the riding closer to the quotient target. Sometimes this makes ridings bigger or smaller, and in some past instances an entire riding has been eliminated in one area and its population merged into neighbouring ridings. A new riding was then created somewhere else.

The 2018 commission is going to have its work cut out for it because there are 16 ridings that are outside of the quotient range — one in northern Manitoba, one in Brandon, seven in the city of Winnipeg, and six in rural Manitoba.

During Alberta’s most recent review of its ridings, three rural ridings were eliminated, and three new ones created in urban areas. This resulted in much political anger from rural residents and farmers who felt that their political voice was being weakened.

In the long term, this is an issue Manitoba farmers should be concerned about, but it is unlikely that the Manitoba commission is going to recommend eliminating any ridings in rural areas in 2018. The reason is that collectively, ridings in Winnipeg and rural Manitoba are actually pretty close to being represented accurately. Northern Manitoba is over-represented, but the legislation takes special consideration for that.

What is likely is that we’re going to see a lot of minor adjustments to boundaries in rural areas.

The commission is required to make changes for the Interlake, Dauphin, and Swan River to make their ridings larger because their populations are not close to being represented accurately. Southern Manitoba is in the opposite situation, largely because of growth in towns and cities in these areas. The ridings of Morris, Morden-Winkler and Steinbach all need to be made smaller because they are above the target.

It’s not unreasonable to think that nearly every rural riding in the province could see a small adjustment.

KAP is going to be active in this review, making the case to retain rural ridings and ensure that members are informed about what opportunity they have to provide input at the local level. If you’re interested in learning more, the Electoral Boundaries Review Commission has an excellent website with interactive maps that I would encourage you to check out. FV
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