

The Future of Agriculture in Saskatchewan over the Next 10-15 Years

by Taylor Bohay

Technology, diversification and value-added are all keys to keeping Saskatchewan agriculture on the leading edge in a global economy. Saskatchewan boasts 62 million acres of agriculture farm land producing more than \$100 million worth of product to 19 different countries. That is a huge undertaking for a province with only 44,329 farmers and a population of just over 1 million people.

Producers need to remain competitive in global markets and it starts at the farm gate. Saskatchewan farmers are under continuous pressure to expand their scope of production while using less land, water and pesticides. Advancing technology will keep farmers competitive while being more efficient than in the past. Since the Global Positioning System (GPS) changed the way farmers and agribusinesses view the land from which they reap their profits. GPS has allowed farmers more precise application of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers, and better control of the dispersion of chemicals, thus reducing expenses, producing higher yields, and creating a more environmentally friendly farm.

Today precision farming is being used for farm planning, field mapping (pests, insects and weed infestations), soil sampling, crop scouting, variable rate applications and yield mapping to mention a few. Farmers and agriculture service providers can expect even further improvements as GPS continues to modernize thus improving quality and efficiency of operations. This management tool will continue well into the future aiding farmer's decision making.

Saskatchewan's future producers are looking for viable crop options that will help develop stability on the farm. For example, with the development of the bio-fuel industry and some of the largest operating wheat-based ethanol plants we are able to turn waste crop material into valuable fuels and products. There are many indicators that a continued expansion of these industries will have huge potential to provide diversification options for farmers and economic opportunities for communities.

Research is necessary to add value at the farm gate and grow Saskatchewan's industry. For example, every year canola growers have a couple dozen new canola varieties to consider that provide farmers and consumers' with increased yields, agronomic and nutritional benefits. These new crop varieties and cropping practices allow producers to lower inputs costs, control crop pests and increase yields. In January 2011, 42 crop-related research projects received \$7.4 million from the provincial and federal governments. Over time this funding will result in long-term benefits for producers and give them an advantage in global markets.

This is an exciting time in Saskatchewan's agricultural industry as it is evolving in places we never imagined. With the recent opening of the University of Saskatchewan College of Agriculture and Bioresources new bioprocessing pilot plant that will be used to study plant compounds that can be used in biofuels, crop development, and health products. This unique facility will advance the province's agricultural potential to develop new uses for crops thus adding value to the industry.

Bottom line farmers are looking for new innovations and technologies that will help them stay competitive in global markets and increase their return's well into the future.