

MANITOBA Farmers' Voice

SPRING 2014 EDITION



The Official Publication
of Keystone Agricultural
Producers

MEMBER PROFILE

GEORGE MATHESON

Success, respect and
a balanced lifestyle

KAP 30th annual meeting

Resolutions, photo gallery, highlights

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The Manitoba Farmers' Voice – Spring 2014

Published four times a year by:
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**Next Publication/
Advertising Deadline:
May 9, 2014**

Manitoba Farmer's Voice is produced by
Farm Business Communications — a division of
Glacier FarmMedia



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George Matheson has it all:

balanced lifestyle, respect in the industry, success on the farm

BY RICHARD KAMCHEN

BEGINNING AT THE PROVINCE'S original agriculture settlement near the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, and then moving to Stonewall where they have been for over a century, seven generations of George Matheson's family have farmed in Manitoba.

"We go back to 1873 in Stonewall and we can trace our roots to the Selkirk Settlers before that," said George, who operates a 500-acre mixed farm 40 minutes north of downtown Winnipeg. He and his wife Shelley took over half of his parents' farm in 1982, and raised four children there — Graeme, Madeline, Austin and Hannah.

George grew crops and produced 1,000 weanlings a year that he sold to a neighbouring farmer, a time he still looks back on with nostalgia.

"I enjoyed those times and they may have been my happiest times in the busi-



One of two bio-tech barns on George's farm. Straw is used for insulation and bedding, and pigs can move around freely.





George and Shelley Matheson in front of their 1895 home. George's father rented the land the house is situated on, eventually buying it and incorporating it into his farm. By 1995, when it was 100 years old, George and Shelly owned the historic farmhouse and enlarged it with an addition to accommodate their growing family.



ness,” George said. “There were a lot of producers then and a great deal of camaraderie.

“We had districts in the province for pork producers — I belonged to the Interlake district — and at meetings, there might be 80 of us, and we could encourage each other and bounce ideas off each other. It was a different kind of atmosphere than today.”

George would go into the farrow-to-finish business in 1988, feeding out those 1,000 weanlings every year. Things went swimmingly until the hog crash of '98, from which many of his peers never recovered.

“We had strong years in '96 and '97, getting close to \$200 a hog, but by the fall of '98, we could get maybe \$40 a hog,” George said. “It was devastating. And little by little after that, producers left the business. That was the beginning of the end for a lot of independent producers.”

Over the last few years he’s made several changes, including getting out of the farrowing end of the business, instead buying weanlings to finish, and downsizing significantly.

He’s also focussed more on direct marketing of pork to the general public. The profit margin for a small producer like himself is better for sales of this kind than for sales of commodity hogs, and being so close to a large centre like Winnipeg has allowed him to develop a customer base of around 200.

He’ll probably feed out 400 pigs this year, 150 of which will be non-commodity pigs and the rest will be sold to Maple Leaf in Brandon. George’s pigs are housed year-round in two bio-tech

“Someone once said being rich is having money, but being wealthy is having time. I think there’s truth in that...”

George Matheson

shelters, where they can move about freely. He uses the straw from large round bales as insulation and bedding, and the pigs are warm even in 40-below weather. He mixes the feed in a nearby shed that is connected by augers to several grain bins.

“There’s a small niche of people who want to know what the pig was fed, how it was raised, any antibiotics used — and I can supply that information,” he said. “Some people feel that pigs should roam and root, something that’s natural to them and will affect the final product. If my customers feel that way, that’s fine by me.”

On the crop side, George will be seeding 390 acres of grains and oilseeds this year. He shares machinery with his brother Bill and nephew Nick. He admits his is a small operation and that a similar size wouldn’t be for everyone, but that it works for him and allows for a balanced life.

“Quite frankly, I lead a relatively stress-free life and I think a lack of stress sometimes is underrated. Someone once said being rich is having money, but being wealthy is having time. I think there’s truth in that,” said George, whose yard is surrounded by 70 acres of woods that he cross-country skis in almost every day during the winter.

He added: “My week is not complete unless I sit in a pew at Stonewall United Church on Sunday morning.”

George has given time over the years to

both KAP and the Manitoba Pork Council. It’s a pursuit he never would have thought he’d follow, and he’s found himself pleasantly surprised by the outcome of pushing himself outside of his comfort zone.

He is an executive member of the Manitoba Pork Council, having first run as a delegate in 1997 when a neighbour of his retired.

“Over the years, positions became available, and I have been encouraged by the chair of the board and the general manger of Manitoba Pork to pursue these opportunities,” said George. “They gave me a great deal of encouragement, and I must say they had more faith in me than I had in myself.

“And today I’m on the four-member executive of Manitoba Pork. Ten years ago, if somebody had said I would have had that position, I would have said absolutely no way. But I enjoy working with producers and trying to make a difference in the industry.”

George is also involved with KAP, representing red meat commodity groups on the executive. This includes representing the beef sector, and he says although Manitoba Beef Producers is not a KAP member, he receives good advice and assistance at meetings from individual cattle farmer members.

As for the future of agriculture, George looks to his nephew Nick, the sixth generation of the family to farm in the Stonewall area, and knows it’s up to his generation.

“I think the challenges we have today will continue to exist: no control over the weather; little control over commodity prices; little control over exchange rates. And I think cash flow will continue to be a problem as farming is becoming very expensive.”

George says that while farmland values may have made some retiring farmers wealthy, servicing debt for those young farmers buying the land is a big burden. Land prices in his area have risen fourfold over the past 15 years.

“It isn’t debt that’s necessarily the problem, it’s the cash needed to service it that can be a crippler,” he said.

The agriculture industry will be an exciting time for young farmers, he notes, but they need to look at farm history and learn from it.

“I think they would do well to read their grandparents’ and great-grandparents’ history, because bull markets tend to go to a person’s head,” said George, adding the Roaring ‘20s was a good example of a decade of sustained economic prosperity that ended with a devastating crash.

“The person who does not learn from history is condemned to repeat it, and I think it will be very interesting to see what this next generation does in terms of rekindling the co-operative spirit that their forefathers had on the Prairies. When there’s a lot of sellers and very few buyers, sometimes collective bargaining becomes a necessity.” MFV

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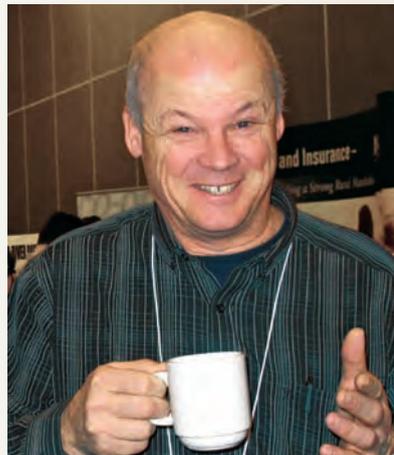
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KAP 30th ANNUAL MEETING

HIGHLIGHTS

Good fellowship,
great debate,
excellent speakers



KEYSTONE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCERS, Manitoba's major farm policy organization, wrapped up its 30th annual meeting January 31 after having passed 24 resolutions that reflect the views of farmers across the province.

"This meeting is a forum for discussing any issues our members bring forward related to farming and to living in rural Manitoba," said KAP president Chorney. "It is also a call to action, where we develop policy and positions for affecting change which our organization acts upon in the coming year."

One of the resolutions calls for pressing the federal government to raise the cap on the amount available to farmers through the Advance Payments Program. With virtually no grain moving in Manitoba, farmers will need to access more money through the program to purchase seed and crop inputs for the spring.

Other resolution topics included Manitoba Hydro service, UPOV '91, railway service and grazing of cattle on Crown lands. See page 12 for complete list.

Chorney had some good news for delegates attending the meeting, telling them there is a 22 per cent increase in KAP membership.

"We are trying harder to get our message out to non-member farmers about the good work we are doing on their behalf, and it's obviously paying off," he said.

Delegates were updated and challenged by a variety of speakers, including columnist and author Diane Francis who spoke about the advantages of Canada merging with the U.S., motivational speaker Doug Brown, columnist and former CFL player, and CBC climatologist John Sauder.

During the meeting, Chorney was acclaimed president for his fourth and final term. Under KAP bylaws, a president can hold office for a maximum of four years. Also acclaimed for second and third terms respectively are Curtis McCrae and Dan Mazier.

Next year's annual meeting will take place January 28 to 30, 2015





KAP 30th ANNUAL MEETING

RESOLUTIONS

TRANSPORTATION

- Investigate transport truck load restrictions in northern counties and states, and report findings to the KAP Transportation Committee for review.
- Lobby the Government of Canada to impose monetary penalties on the railways for lack of service, payable to grain companies which are affected by non-performance.

TAXATION

- Lobby the Government of Manitoba to re-examine and expand the list of PST-exempt assets for farmers.
- Lobby the Canada Revenue Agency to create a tax exemption for the transfer of farm ownership between family members.
- Lobby the Government of Manitoba to remove out-of-province ownership restrictions and the \$5,000 cap on the Farmland School Tax Rebate Program.
- Lobby the Province to remove the time restriction for claiming the Farmland School Tax Rebate.
- Lobby the Government of Canada to have capital gains exemptions carried forward until an estate is settled.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT

- Lobby the Government of Manitoba to designate increased spending towards rural infrastructure.
- Lobby Manitoba Hydro to improve and expand hydro and natural gas capacity in rural Manitoba to accommodate future rural needs.
- Lobby the Government of Manitoba and regional health authorities to provide Manitobans with a lab that can do Lyme disease tests.
- Lobby the Government of Manitoba to instruct Manitoba Hydro to provide reliable, prompt, economical service in rural areas.
- Request that the Government of Manitoba lift the suspension of STARS operations while they undertake an external review of their operations and procedures.

LIVESTOCK

- Lobby the Government of Manitoba to remove size restrictions on applications for permanent grazing permits on Crown lands.

GRAINS, OILSEEDS AND PULSES

- Continue to work with the Government of Manitoba, the Office of the Fire Commissioner, and farm dryer dealers to simplify the procedures for new and used grain dryer certification for use on Manitoba farms.
- Work with the Manitoba Canola Growers Association to ensure that producers receive compensation for high oil content in canola.
- Work with the Manitoba Surface Rights Association, MAFRD, the Manitoba Canola Growers Association, the Canola Council of Canada, oil companies and related industries to implement a cleaning and disinfecting regime of all oilfield equipment and vehicles at every entry and exit of new and existing oil developments in order to prevent the spread of clubroot.
- Lobby the Government of Manitoba to add epoxy-coated bins to the list of items conditionally exempt from PST.
- Raise awareness of the implications and ramifications of UPOV '91.
- Support the current Canadian Food Inspection Agency system for seed inspection.
- Lobby Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to increase the limit for the Advance Payments Program, and increase the interest-free portion to \$400,000.

ENVIRONMENT AND WATER MANAGEMENT

- Lobby the Government of Canada and the Government of Manitoba to continue to fund BMP incentive programs related to the Environmental Farm Plan program.
- Lobby the Government of Manitoba to cost share fuel storage as one of the eligible BMP categories under the Environmental Farm Plan Program.
- Work with the Government of Canada in conjunction with the Prairie provinces and their municipalities, conservation districts, and farmers to establish a body to research the long-term needs of water on the southern prairies, with emphasis on southwestern Manitoba and with the objective of maximizing the total arable acres in the province.
- Be involved in the establishment of an Assiniboine River Basin Commission which would include all tributaries.

State of the industry address

BY DOUG CHORNEY

Looking back over the year, I can say it has been one of great challenge, opportunity and ultimately success for many Manitoba producers

Crop challenges began early in the year with rising costs and a very late start to seeding, followed by cool growing conditions that hung on all the way through July. All crops were developmentally delayed, and many of us feared our long-season crops would struggle to reach maturity.

At the same time, livestock producers were dealing with high-cost feed grains, and hog producers were also facing regulatory constraints just as they were hoping to rebuild. Beef producers, too, continued to face ongoing challenges — particularly those trying to recover from the 2011 flood.

However, opportunity for success seemed within reach on the crop side, with buoyant commodity prices. A strong level of optimism prevailed, and in spite of everything, being a farmer was starting to feel pretty good!

Then came the success! When most of us started harvest we found incredible yields for cereal and oilseed crops. Quality was high and the trend held for long-season crops like soybeans and corn. Many of us had forward sold crops at good prices, before the erosion of commodity prices began.

Success was also in the minds of livestock producers, as feed prices began coming down and cattle and pork prices started rising.

While low grain and oilseed prices are a concern for crop producers, market fundamentals remain strong with demand side pressure underpinning market conditions. While it seems somewhat bleak today, we must remember that market cycles are just a fact of life, and we must accept this reality and maintain strong financial discipline in the management of our farm businesses.

We continue to be a major economic driver and an industry that is one of the most important in the province. This year at our Sharing the Harvest event, KAP focused on the 62,000 jobs we, as farmers, create. I note also that our potential for growth is starting to seem boundless, due to new market access



assured by the CETA agreement and a global hunger for what we produce!

However, we do see constraints — such as rail service that continues to plague us. KAP has been successful in getting our message out on this issue, with opinion editorials in *The Free Press* and the *Edmonton Journal*, as well as the farm press. In addition, we have written a letter with APAS and AFA to Transport Minister, Lisa Raitt.

Another constraint is government offloading of system costs from the Canadian Grain Commission. This has been done on the backs of producers, and KAP is still working to express our concern and put forward options that will cost producers less.

On another note, and certainly not a constraint in most cases, is the significant regulatory reform that is coming at us — at a pace not seen in Canadian history. This, in fact, is unlocking potential — although it is creating a sense of uneasiness about how things like UPOV '91 will impact farm level costs.

KAP has taken the time to study how bringing Canada in line with UPOV '91 will affect producers, and we have a number of key questions we will be asking. We are not basing our questions on ideology, but rather on the opinions of our members. We look forward to continued input as we go forward.

As an organization that is steeped in grassroots democracy, it is here at forums like our AGM, and at General Council, that KAP develops policy and positions. This is the hallmark of the organization that I am proud to lead, and I look forward to hearing thoughtful debate and consideration in the next few days on this and the many other issues we face.

Last year, I, along with the rest of the KAP management team, spent a great deal of time looking at how KAP functions. We really did a self-examination of every aspect of our operation. We had a new beginning with James Battershill taking on the role of general manager, and several other staff changes.

As your elected representatives, Dan, Curtis and I considered how we could improve our engagement of all farmers, support our staff, and improve overall functionality. Curtis, who is on the management team for the first time, really questioned everything we do — and brought creative suggestions forward.

We ultimately decided to take more responsibility for our own success as an organization, and we saw the entire team embrace this spirit of self-reliance! We conveyed to members and non-members alike what our accomplishments have been, and we appealed to them to support us in our continued endeavours.

What was the result? Well, we have witnessed the greatest single yearly membership growth in KAP history! Seven hundred and twenty-seven new members saw us grow by 22 per cent, and we have been able to achieve a strong budget surplus after years of deficits.

Last year, KAP saw success with grain dryer regulations, the postponement of coal ban enforcement, and educating Hydro on biosecurity when entering farmland — to name just a few. We lobbied endlessly on a variety of issues — including intense lobbying to the Province for reversal of the changes to the School Tax Rebate program this is costing many of us so much money.

What will happen in the coming year? Well, we will continue our efforts, as directed by our members. For 30 years we have addressed the problems and issues they have brought forward, and we will continue this tradition in our 31st year.

We will make no excuses for saying things that may frustrate political leaders, but we will continue to conduct ourselves in a professional, business-like manner, bringing forward practical solutions and alternatives to inferior policy. We will maintain the highest standard for communications, explaining clearly and concisely to stakeholders, government and the public what are issues are.

I'm proud to be a farmer and I'm proud to be a part of this organization. Let's celebrate this AGM as an important milestone, and look at it as a stepping stone to the next level of success!

In closing, I note that enrolment in agriculture departments and faculties is up in Manitoba, so our next generation must be seeing this industry as “the place to be!” I see this positive energy holding the focus of our imaginations, and I continue to feel we have reached a new level of momentum that will drive us forward to a time of industry renewal. MFV



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KAP reminds all Manitoba farmers....

The deadline to apply for the 2013 Farmland School Tax Rebate is March 31, 2014

This is one of the changes to the program that was made in last spring's budget, and KAP believes it will affect producers who may not be able to pay municipal taxes because of cash flow issues — something that is particularly relevant now that there is virtually no grain movement in the province.

Other changes to the program are a \$5,000 cap on the rebate, as well as out-of-province landowners being made ineligible. The cap will greatly affect any farmers in school divisions with high mill rates, while the lack of eligibility for out-of-province landowners could drive up land rental prices.

KAP has strongly spoken out about these program changes, particularly in light of the promise made by the government during the 2011 election campaign that farmers would pay no school taxes on farmland.



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Rail service issues a question of competition

BY JAMES BATTERSHILL, KAP GENERAL MANAGER

THERE IS A FRAMED WINNIPEG FREE Press article hanging in the hallway of the KAP office, written by Laura Rance in 1986. It begins: “Manitoba’s fledgling farm organization, Keystone Agricultural Producers, has dived head first into the one issue it vowed to shun — transportation policy.”

The article, accompanied by a picture of KAP’s first president Jack Penner, goes on to explain how KAP was going down the path of tackling the same rail freight issues that had been the demise of the Manitoba Farm Bureau, the general farm organization that preceded KAP. Clearly, dealing with railway issues is ingrained in our DNA as an organization.

Through the Canada Transportation Act and the recently enacted Fair Rail Freight Service Act, the federal government does attempt to address the market failures that are present in the rail freight shipping industry — failures that are due to a lack of competition related to both the quality and price of services.

Under the Canada Transportation Act, the maximum grain revenue entitlement, or revenue cap, limits the amount that railways can charge grain shippers. It is based on a formula that provides them with what is deemed to be a fair return for their service, as well as on the number of tonnes of grain shipped, the average length of haul, and an index to account for increases to operating costs.

The revenue cap has been criticized by farmers because it hasn’t been adjusted to take into account gains in railway efficiency, and has increased between 2000 and 2013 from \$366 million to over \$544 million for CP, and \$394 million to \$563 million for CN.

The railways criticize the cap calcula-



tion because they say it doesn’t allow them to generate enough revenue for the additional expense associated with investing in surge capacity to handle peak, post-harvest shipping periods.

However, they have mastered the art of maximizing allowable revenue in a given crop year by charging as much as they can, without exceeding the cap limit. If there was any real competition in the marketplace, additional charges for providing surge capacity could be made because the railways wouldn’t be reaching the revenue cap limit so consistently.

The Fair Rail Freight Service Act provides additional protection for shippers in the form of access-to-service contracts. However, the protection that this new legislation attempts to provide is clearly not effective, as we have yet to see a single shipper utilize these new service

“ We have yet to see a single shipper utilize these new service contract provisions, despite this year’s shipping challenges

contract provisions, despite this year's shipping challenges.

Many organizations, including KAP, are criticizing the service agreement provision as not being adequate, and are demanding that the government revisit the recommendations made by members of the federal Rail Freight Service Review in 2011.

Regardless of the regulatory regime in place, it is clear that rail service issues stem from a lack of competition in the marketplace. The Rail Freight Service Review, in fact, demonstrated this was true for all industries that rely on rail shipping.

The review panel hired a firm to perform a statistically representative survey of 262 shippers from all industries, not just grain, and the results are shocking, but not surprising.

Shippers with access to more than one railway, and that had transportation alternatives, were only satisfied with their rail service 23 per cent of the time. Shippers that were served by only one railway but had transportation alternatives were satisfied with their level of service 14 per cent of the time. However, shippers that were captive to a single railway company for service were only satisfied 11 per cent of the time.

The research group also noted that customer satisfaction research usually results in much higher satisfaction levels, ranging from 50 to 70 per cent.

Unless the Government of Canada is willing to look at introducing legislation that requires the mainline railways to share their lines, a provision referred to as running rights, the root cause of poor service and pricing issues is going to be an ongoing issue.

Regulations, such as those in place now, can help to protect shippers from monopolistic power, but they cannot be a catalyst for change the way in which a competitive marketplace can.

KAP is going to continue to work on this issue and press the government to take decisive action to make sure that farmers and the Canadian economy don't continue to suffer from this backlog of grain, and put provisions in place before next year's marketing prospects are significantly affected.

It is important, though, that we not forget about opportunities for marketing grain here in the province. A strong livestock sector creates a significant market for feed grains and creates additional economic value within the province.

With both the pork and beef sectors looking like they will be entering a sustained period of profitability, we will be continuing to work with our commodity group partners to lobby the Government of Manitoba to eliminate the restrictions presently in place that will prevent these key industries from expanding.

We are still fighting the same transportation battles that Jack Penner was back in 1986, but now we have new work to do that will allow us to add value to our commodities right here in Manitoba. *MFV*

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New phone app brings a customized safety manual to your smartphone



Henry Holtmann, a dairy farmer near Rosser, was on the committee that conceived the idea for an online safety tool and phone app.

BY RON FRIESEN

LET'S SAY YOU'RE IN A DAIRY BARN VACCINATING cows when you suddenly draw a blank. What's the recommended safe procedure for vaccinating cattle without accidentally stabbing yourself with the needle?

There's a safe work procedure manual in the office but you don't have time to get it and flip through the pages. Besides, it's too bulky and awkward to use when you're in a hurry.

What do you do? You whip out your iPhone, punch in a few commands and — presto! — the correct information comes up on the screen.

Magic? Not at all. It's the result of a new Safe Farms online tool and iPhone/Android app designed to help producers develop safe work procedures on their farms.

You begin by opening a personal account on the Safe Farms website (www.SafeFarms.ca), using your e-mail address and selecting a password. This can be done from computer, laptop or tablet.

Then you fill in fields on a provided form to create safe work procedures (SWPs) for activities which occur on the farm. Those fields include: the name of the activity, who supervises it, persons at risk, protective equipment, training requirements, steps to complete the task safely, hazards present, additional ways to reduce risk.

All fields are optional, so you can skip over any one that does not apply to you.

Once the information is input, you can subscribe to the free app for iPhone or Android, and connect to your Safe Farms account. The information is then stored on your phone, so your SWPs will be available even when you have no reception or Internet access. The app should also work on an iPad or Android tablet.

The only time you need to use the Internet is when you're inputting the SWPs in your account, downloading the app, or making changes to the SWPs.

“...once you have the information in your app, your safe work procedures are available anywhere.”

Henry Holtmann

When making account changes, you would then update your app through a very simple online procedure.

“Basically, this (online account) is a place where you can park your safe operating procedures in one spot,” said Henry Holtmann, who operates a 500-cow dairy farm at Rosser. “Then, once you have the information in your app, your safe work procedures are available anywhere.”

The data you enter in your Safe Farms account is no different from what you would put in a book or binder, but Holt-

mann says it's easier to change, and you're not messing with a lot of paper or hauling unwieldy binders around. With the addition of the app, the information becomes so much more accessible.

Holtmann represented Dairy Farmers of Manitoba on an industry committee that conceived the idea for this online tool and app. It was created by Winnipeg's Centre for Education and Work, with funding from the Workers Compensation Board of Canada. It was unveiled during a January 15 news conference at the Winnipeg Technical College.

Farm safety has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years as operations expand, machinery becomes bigger and more complex, and farmers are pushed for time. Every year, tragic stories appear in newspapers about a farmer or family member accidentally killed on the job.

Less publicized are injuries resulting from farm accidents that scar lives for-

» CONTINUED ON PG 21



Holtmann, who has 13 employees, is committed to farm safety. His safety procedures, currently contained in a binder, will be transferred to his Safe Farms web-based account and then transferred to his smartphone through an app.

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ever. The increasing rate of work-related accidents on farms once prompted an Alberta farm safety expert to suggest if agriculture were a regulated industry such as mining it would be shut down because it is too dangerous. That may be an exaggeration. But the importance of farm safety is not.

Holtmann has an on-farm safety program for his dairy operation, which employs 13 workers. His safety procedures, currently contained in a binder, will be transferred to his Safe Farms web-based account, which will be edited and kept current. Holtmann has his own templates for his dairy SWPs, but he plans to borrow other people's templates when developing SWPs for the grain part of his operation.

Holtmann also has future plans to supplement the information with videos shown during training sessions. This feature is not available now, but is in the works. He anticipates he will be able to put these videos into his online account and then access them through the app, so that he can illustrate safe work procedures to his employees, many of whom do not have English as a first language.

Also in the works is a function that will allow a user to scan a phone (with the app) over a QR code posted on the side of a combine or other piece of equipment in order to get his/her SWPs.

On-farm safety has been foremost in Holtmann's mind ever since 1996 when his father Theo was accidentally killed after a hay bale fell on him. That personal experience has made Holtmann passionate about impressing producers with the need to develop and follow safe work procedures on farms.

To do that, farmers may need to undergo a change in mindset, Holtmann admits. Everyone agrees farm safety is important. But it takes time to develop safe work procedures and farmers are often people in a hurry.

"Farmers want to be safe. They never want anybody hurt and they feel terrible when it happens. But sometimes they just want to get the job done and that isn't good enough. We've got to change that culture," Holtmann said.

That's where tools such as this Safe

Farms app can make the job easier, he says.

"Farmers are asking us to give them something they can work with. They don't want to spend a lot of time administratively figuring it out. We can make it easy for them if they have templates to fill out. But that's just the start. They have to sit down with family members and employees and say, safety is our biggest concern. Tell me where there's a hazard.

"Once you have that in your head, you'll have a safer workplace."

Holtmann says it's important for producers to get ahead of the curve in developing safe operating procedures before governments, concerned about the rise in farm accidents, decide to regulate them.

"At the end of the day, it's a culture change. Will technology fix all the problems? No. It's really about people changing the way they think about things." MFV

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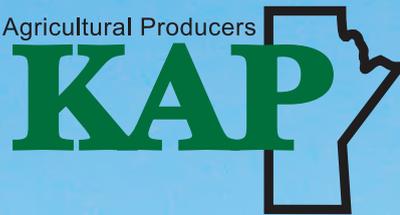
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Railways must improve service to grain shippers

BY DOUG CHORNEY

IT'S NOT NEWS ANYMORE THAT western Canadian farmers harvested their largest crops ever in 2013. Record yields were met with unbridled excitement as farmers anticipated high yields would offset declining grain and oilseed prices.

What's news now is that last fall's optimism has turned into concern because these crops are still on the farm. Abysmal service once again by Canada's two major railways has limited crop movement so drastically that grain companies, which buy and market the crops, are buying very limited amounts — or are not buying at all.

The companies' inland terminals and elevators are the points at which the grain is held and loaded onto trains bound for ocean ports — and they are full up waiting for railcars that don't come.

While western Canadian crop yields are up by 33 per cent over last year, the number of railcars allocated to move the crop, compared to the same point in time last year (mid-November), was only up by two per cent, according to the Western Grain Elevator Association.

In addition, when the railways do fill elevator orders for railcars, only 27 per cent of the cars are delivered to the elevators on time. Further, railways are leaving the cars at the elevators to be loaded for longer-than-average time periods — sometimes as much as 11 days. Imagine the effect of this on loading and shipping schedules.

This poor railway service is holding the system up, from the farm right to the ports, creating unnecessary expenses for

the grain companies that will ultimately be passed onto farmers as handling fees and lower prices for crops.

For example, port terminals were without rail service for 28 days during a 3-1/2 month period last fall. When there is no grain to load onto waiting ships, or shipments are late, grain companies are charged a penalty by the ship companies of between \$12,000 and \$18,000 per day, per ship.

The effect of the situation on farmers, on Canada's economy and on our inter-

national reputation cannot be understated.

Canada is losing sales because contract deadlines with international buyers cannot be met. Canada's agriculture ministry prides itself these days on implementing programs and conducting trade negotiations that make agriculture more competitive. All of this is negated when we can't deliver the goods.

Agriculture plays "an important role in federal and provincial economies," directly providing one in eight jobs,





A pile of winter wheat, unable to be shipped because of inadequate rail service that has severely congested the grain-moving system, sits at twilight under a tarp at the Paterson terminal northwest of Winnipeg.

employing 2.1 million people, and accounting for eight per cent of total gross domestic product, according to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. Poor rail service is, quite simply, obstructing a sector that is a major economic driver.

We need short-term intervention by Transport Minister Lisa Raitt and the federal government because farmers need to get their crops to market as soon as possible, before more sales are lost.

In the long term, there needs to be a government-directed reassessment of how railways do business. Moving grain and oilseeds is seasonal in nature, not fitting into transport cycles where product is picked up on a regular basis, and so the railways must be directed to plan for it.

Every other sector that provides services in crop production invests in “surge” capacity, including input suppliers, equipment dealers and grain companies — and railways need to adopt this same practice.

The monopoly the railways have in the marketplace allows them to provide inadequate service without fear of consequences. Unfortunately, the new federal Fair Rail Freight Service Act is not an effective mechanism to resolve these service issues — and amending it must also be a priority.

Since agriculture began on the Prairies, shippers of agricultural commodities have experienced poor and lethargic rail service — and it appears that it is getting

worse. In 1993, in mid-November, CN and CP moved 8.7 million tonnes of crop, while in the same week of 2013, only 7.5 million tonnes were moved.

The yields of 2013 are only the beginning of larger and larger crops as new high-yielding varieties are adopted and modern agronomic practices continue to become more efficient. This is not a once-in-a-lifetime situation; instead, it will be the norm in a few years. Will we wait until then to fix our rail system, or will we begin to do it now? *MFV*

This article appeared in the Edmonton Journal, the Winnipeg Free Press and the Manitoba Co-operator, as well as other media venues.

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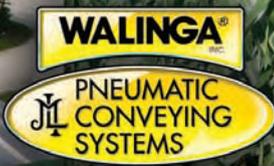
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