



# The Oat Scoop

AUGUST 2011

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## Will There Be Frost on the Pumpkin?

### *The Oat Outlook*

"Cracks wide enough to lose the family cat!" That comment from a Manitoba farmer whose land has gone from the classic spring flood scenario to too dry in just a matter of weeks. And that was just one of the comments as August turned up too dry in southern Manitoba. At the same time analyst Randy Strychar of OatInsight.com reminded us that the next issue of consideration could be frost, especially since anecdotal reports abound of late spring seeding for many farmers.

So far, says Strychar, it's "theoretical and statistical" but no doubt something to think about. In the major Manitoba oat areas first frost ranges normally from September 12 to 17, while in southern Saskatchewan the statistical first frost ranges from September 2 to 16.

In his mid-August commentary Strychar also noted "70% of oat crops in Western Canada are on pace for average to above average yields." But it is that remaining 30 per cent that would remain the "unknown factor" as harvest rolls in.

Strychar is one who questions Stats Can seeded acreage numbers. For example the March 2011 report suggested 3.6 million oat acres in Saskatchewan, later reduced to 3.5 million in June. Strychar's own best – guess is 2.8 million acres – that combined with already low ending stock numbers leads him to predict we will be at or near to all time low carry out numbers for the end of the crop year 2011-2012.

And, although basis numbers have moved rapidly in the farmer's favour this summer, Strychar was advising growers not to "pull the trigger" on oat sales just yet. He expected light demand for oats "off the combine", but depending on the driving force from corn, there could be higher demand for oats post-harvest and therefore, unless harvest storage or cash flow was an issue, growers should sit on the oats for now.

Just outside Winnipeg, analyst David Drozd of Ag-Chieve confirmed that some oat swathing had begun by about August 12, and he expects that when the combines do roll the oats would come off somewhat light. Typically, Manitoba crops went into wet, mucky ground and then a relatively (compared to the past two years) hot July, and yes, dry. Notably, Winnipeg area set a new July (lack of) rainfall record at 10 mm, compared to the normal 70 mm. Some oat fields look normal, Drozd said, but many are also very patchy, likely from poor emergence.

In Alberta, Vince Bohkenfor with Viterra in Camrose said harvest could be three to four weeks ago, but the oat crops are looking good right now – he has heard speculation that some Alberta oat fields could run up to 150 bushels per acre, "But our biggest concern here now is frost".. For most of Alberta's crop land the average first frost date ranges from September 11 to 20.

In its August 11 report Alberta Agriculture said oat crops in the province rated 6% poor, 21% fair, 55% good and 18% excellent.

*A version of this newsletter which includes all photos and charts in colour  
can be seen at [www.POGA.ca](http://www.POGA.ca).*

## Happy Birthday CDC!

Summer wouldn't be summer without the annual round of crop tours but the annual tour of oat plots at the University of Saskatchewan Crop Development Centre had a very special air to it. This year the CDC is celebrating its 40th birthday!

The original supporters who lobbied for and worked hard to create the CDC in 1971, saw it as a three-pronged approach to some of the issues facing Canadian prairie agriculture in the late 1960s – they saw an ability to provide teaching, research and extension through a facility jointly funded by the province and other entities. That in fact has come to pass many times over and has resulted in hundreds of releases of crop types which have benefited farmers and the industry in general.

On the birthday tour this year, three significant oat varieties were highlighted. The following summary was provided by long-time oat researcher and now professor emeritus, Dr. Brian Rossnagel.

CDC Morrison, named for Grant Morrison, from Quaker Oats in Peterborough. This is a very high



quality milling oat with an excellent combination of “nutritional” quality for the milling industry and specifically for Quaker. It has a desirable combination of protein, beta glucan (equal to HiFi) and fat along with excellent milling yield. From a grower perspective it is not quite as high yielding as some of our newer newest varieties (it is equal to CDC Dancer), but it is shorter, stronger and earlier and has the same good rust resistance as HiFi. Canterra Seeds is handling pedigreed seed production.

**What's in a name?** Long-time Quaker oat specialist Grant Morrison (right) has seen his name added to one of the recently developed oat lines at the University of Saskatchewan Crop Development Centre. Plant breeder emeritus Dr. Brian Rossnagel (left) and his team at CDC developed the variety with Quaker and the food industry in mind. Director of Operations and Research Development for Canterra Seeds, Brent Derkatch (centre) was also on hand to mark the 30th anniversary of the CDC and official dedication of the new oat variety.

CDC Nasser is our second specialty feed oat with the more digestible hull and higher energy (higher fat) combination for cattle feeding. It is an improved replacement for CDC SO-I with similar feeding quality (energy similar to barley), but with less hull and considerably higher yield (equal to Morgan which is 10 - 15% > CDC SO-I). It has good strong straw but is a bit later maturing. T&L Seeds are handling Pedigreed seed production. It was named to recognize Dr. Kay Nasser who donated the Nasser Farm to the University for crop research.

CDC Big Brown is a high yielding milling oat (5% > CDC Dancer and Leggett) with the grain and milling quality of CDC Dancer and the same rust hesitance as Leggett. We see it as competitor/replacement for Leggett in eastern Saskatchewan and Manitoba. In addition to the pedigree reasoning behind the name, it has large, brown coloured grain. SeCan is handling pedigreed seed production.

Results from the Crop development Centre came soon after its founding. In the early years, variety releases from the CDC included Calibre oats, Laird Lentils, Harrington barley and Vimy flax.

The CDC today operates with an annual budget of about \$11 million dollars, including a current annual contribution of about \$2.5 million from the Saskatchewan Agriculture Ministry. Industry players such as Quaker Oats, General Mills and Grain Millers are significant contributors towards oat research at the CDC. An excellent and extensive article about the founding and significance of the Crop Development centre has been published in the 2011 Saskatchewan Seed Guide.

## All Gain No Pain?

Oats as a commercially grown field crop continue to provide opportunities both to farmers and the oat industry but it also has a painful side. Speaking to about 200 people at the annual Field of Dreams Tour (July 27) near Norquay, SK, Terry Tyson of Grain Millers Canada, said the painful side of oats is the fact that for some people oat is the crop you “throw in the ground” when nothing else works .

Even under “last minute” conditions oat continually outperforms other commercial crops, Tyson said, but greater opportunity lies in treating oats like any other crop, “seeding early and giving them some fertility”

Tyson said Grain Millers is keenly interested in plot work being done by the Field of Dreams team – centred on Hudye Farms and Hudye Soil Services of Norquay. Tyson said there were anecdotal reports (of higher fertilization rates) with field scale trials with oats, “but we’re really thrilled about having a bird’s eye view of this and seeing how it goes”.

The word of mouth reports suggest yields of up to 200 bushels per acre oats with heavy seeding rates and high fertility, but documentation of those reports, is lacking.



“I think conventional wisdom is that if you give oats too much N/nitrogen and too much fertility you’re going to grow a lot of very light oats!” Tyson said, adding that actual field trial data from Field of Dreams plot work will be very useful.

“Developments in oat genetics have not yet paced with canola (in Canada) or with corn and soybeans in the states, with the use of biotech, but we think that the crop is poised to make some fairly big strides in the breeding and varietal area in the near future.” Tyson also noted that in recent years pushing the yield curve higher often has an “unfortunate” side effect of lengthening maturity. “That’s an unfortunate linkage but it’s true of most crops that when you are pushing yield you’re often pushing maturity.”

**Pathways of oats.** Four buses stood by as participants in the 2011 Field of Dreams tours at Norquay, Saskatchewan gather to learn about opportunities in growing oats. In its 13th year, Field of Dreams featured oats along with canola. Hudye Farms along with local crop input supplier Yorkton Distributors set a yield goal of 240 bushels for oats and 75 bushels for canola. Several professional crop watchers said (on July 28) they believed the oats given maximum fertility and seeding rates were for sure on track for 200 bushels. Website: [www.hudyesoils.com](http://www.hudyesoils.com).

The point, said Tyson is that when growers adopt the “throw it in late” agenda they may be “short changing” the genetics – including yield potential.

Tyson referred to an oat genome mapping and marker project of which the Prairie Oat Growers Association is a key partner. The genome project he said, could make it possible for breeders “rather than just making crosses based on physical observations and hoping for the best (and then sometimes being fooled by the results), and wasting two or three generations in limited plot trials, they will be able to identify these markers ahead of time – markers linked to certain traits such as yield, length of maturity or high beta glucan, low fat, etc.” Plant breeders could then look at the off-spring of these better informed crosses and “ultimately to see what traits are there which should shorten up the process...We should see that develop into genetic improvements much quicker.”

Tyson noted that the industry is also playing a role. Grain Millers, a company founded as part of the 1980s "oat boom", he said, contributes up to \$100 thousand annually to varietal development research (as do several other industry players).

Research and development on the demand side is also crucial, Tyson said. "We think the big opportunity lies with the food oat industry." Science-based research and development leads that process as well, he noted.

Granola, he said, has been the 'leading edge' for oats in the food industry, but that too has levelled off in recent years.

"So right at this moment, the oat industry is looking for 'the next thing' and we think there is no doubt that the next thing will be based on health- based on the fact that oats is a healthy food." That he said includes the proven cholesterol-lowering properties of oats, the 'whole grain' interest, and the idea of adding value "in a nutritional sense."

On the market side, Tyson referred to the ever-present potential of the large Chinese and Indian markets, where, in his words, Quaker Oats is setting up shop -- " a vast opportunity for you (farmers) and for us" -- neither one of which grows enough oats to feed their own needs, a demand which cannot be fully met by Australia at this time.

Grain Millers now also has an office in Shanghai. "That's the new frontier for sure," he said, but also included in his remarks the now-growing potential for oats in the fast food/quick service restaurants, several of whom are now including oat items in their menu choices. "That may represent the nearest 'ramp up' in demand."

The Field of Dreams program is in its 13th year, anchored by Hudye Farms of Norquay and several crop input companies. Previously, only wheat and canola were featured but oats was added this year.

## Oats: Good Horse Food or Urban Legend?

When the lines between fact and opinion become blurred, the consequences can be enormous.

Take the case of oats as best-feed or even as "suitable equine nutrition". Somewhere, somehow, it appears research about starch-content in oats and its effect on horses may have been misconstrued. For sure, says Randy Strychar, spokesman for EFOP (Equine Feed Oat Project) a "subtle but imperceptible" shift took place in the world of equine rations.



**EQUINE FEED  
OAT PROJECT**

In some people's minds it became "fact" that oats may not be so good for horses after all. The misinterpretation, or at least misunderstanding of

the initial research document, was picked up and repeated in numerous formats. It may even have reached the status of "urban legend"!

What this early research really found was that certain older equines and/or horses with "metabolic issues" should possibly cut back on oat consumption. It was never intended to restrict oats in "normal" equine diets.

But now, thanks to the insight of directors of the Prairie Oat Growers Association (POGA) the "real truth" about oats and equines is emerging.

The Equine Oat Feed Project (EFOP) was the result of their early commitment towards market development. The farmer members of POGA realized that although a brisk trade in oats to the U.S. was developing in the 1990's the actual use of oats in the equine industry was declining. Obviously,

there were many market factors at play, but the loss of Canadian oat market share was alarming, and costly!

In order to confirm their own belief that oats remain a primary feed choice of both horses and their owners, POGA board members commissioned a leading equine nutritionist to provide a review of published research on feeding horses. That person is Dr. Laurie Lawrence, Ph.D. at the University of Kentucky department of Animal Sciences.

After the release of that study (in 2009) POGA engaged Randy Strychar of OatInsight.com to lead their efforts to “re-educate” certain segments of the equine and oat industries as to what horse owners already really knew – there’s nothing better to feed horses than oats. POGA hopes that re-positioning oats as a natural and healthy horse feed will not only be a boon to the equine industry but also to oat growers in general.

Strychar points to the leading factor in horse mortality – colic. Colic, he says, is something well-known but not always well understood. Even so, oats always have been known as a way to prevent colic. And now, nothing has really changed. “Oats remains the pre-eminent feed for ‘colic’ horses.”

Since the original Lawrence study POGA has conducted focus groups with US horse owners and has consulted with feed formulators and veterinarians. Most people, he says, take their equine feeding advice from “the vet” and so plans are laid to work further with the equine practitioners association, horse owner groups and again, the feed industry.

More information about Dr. Lawrence, her academic credentials and links to the study may be found on the EFOP web site, [www.equineoats.org](http://www.equineoats.org).



**Oat Industry tours Winnipeg area.** Despite another wet and flood-threatened spring planting season, Dr. Jennifer Mitchell Fetch and her team had some impressive oat plots to show August 4, adjacent to the Red River, at Winnipeg.

## Prairie Oat Breeding Consortium

Oat research has been approached from many angles, one of which is the Prairie Oat Breeding Consortium (POBC). POBC is a collaboration between AAFC and the private/corporate sector, jointly funding oat research. POGA is also a contributing/ funding member of POBC. Dr. Jennifer Mitchell-Fetch of AAFC’s Cereal research in Winnipeg hosted the annual POBC plot tours, August 3, 2011.

Her tour notes are as follows:

The tour was attended by nine industry reps. We toured the yield trials this year and had a good look at the various lines coming through the Western Cooperative Oat Registration Trial and the lines in the Uniform Midseason Oat Performance Nursery (from the US), the Rust Area Test, and the B Organic Trial.

Dr. Curt McCartney also informed the group about the work he is doing in developing and applying molecular markers to oat breeding programs. The group also had the opportunity to meet Dr. Gnanesh Nanjappa, a Visiting Fellow (NSERC) who will be working with Jennifer, Curt and Nick Tinker to assist with the application of molecular markers to the oat breeding program at CRC and at ECORC. Dr. Weikai Yan (ECORC Oat Breeder) also attended the tour this year.

## **POGA Welcomes New ED**

The directors of the Prairie Oat Growers Association (POGA), as well as the Manitoba Oat Growers Association (MOGA) and the Saskatchewan Oat Development Commission welcome Shawna Mathieson of Regina as their new Executive Director.

In announcing the appointment, POGA President Bill Wilton noted that Ms. Mathieson is a highly qualified individual with a background in corporate and agricultural administration.

Shawna Mathieson moved to Regina, SK in April of 2008 with her husband, Jeff, to take over the family farm near Watson, SK. Since that time, she has worked at SaskPower managing the marketing and advertising of their energy efficiency programs.



Shawna was raised on a farm in Kansas, graduated with an undergraduate degree in Marketing and Finance from Kansas State University and a Master's of Business Administration from the University of Texas at Dallas. She has worked with many Fortune 500 companies including Chevron Texaco, Corporate Express, Esso, Kimberly-Clark, Shell, Sprint and The Home Depot. Shawna enjoys playing and coaching sports, traveling and gardening.



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**MARK YOUR CALENDAR**  
**POGA Annual Meeting/Oat Industry Update**  
Thursday Dec 1, 2011  
Winnipeg, MB (venue TBA)  
*Watch [www.POGA.ca](http://www.POGA.ca) for details*

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## **Oat Advantage: Profile of an Oat Breeder**

Not your stereotypical idea of a family farm. Jim Dyck, with help from his entire family, currently is developing oat varieties which one day could find their way into commercial channels. Their company is called Oat Advantage and is located on about 80 acres on the outskirts of Saskatoon.

Jim actually grew up on acreage adjacent to the city of Winnipeg and became interested in plant breeding when he attended university. Jim also says he saw a humanitarian aspect of developing food sources, combined with the interesting and creative aspects of plant breeding technology.

His entry to field-scale work was with sunflower and canola, and later flax and barley as he worked with Elanco – later Dow Elanco – in southern Manitoba. In 1992 entered full-time plot research with Proven Seed/United Grain Growers. Oat Advantage took shape in 2008. Jim says oats is a “pleasing” crop to work with, in terms of making crosses between cultivars. He was also attracted by the nutritional aspects of oats – almost a “niche crop” within the context of some of research.

This year Oat Advantage has five lines in the Western Cooperative Oat trials and one in Western Cooperative Hulless Oat trial. His varieties have been developed in growth chambers rented from the U of S Controlled Environment facility, in fields in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and have even made a round trip to New Zealand.

Oat Advantage is able to draw on germplasm from many sources, including that of other researchers Dyck has worked with. Canadian commercial varieties are also available for crosses. Access to the national gene bank at Saskatoon, which he says has a large "library" of oat varieties, is a valuable plant breeder's resource tool too.



**A family tradition.**  
*The shirts say it all. Independent oat researcher Jim Dyck and his wife Laura-Lee say everyone pitches in at Oat Advantage, where new oat varieties are developed on 80 acres near Saskatoon. The kids are (back row left) Elena; Lauren between her mom and dad, and in front from left are Graeme and Colin. Currently Oat Advantage has five oat lines in development, which Jim hopes will be marketed through Canterra Seeds.*

The Oat Advantage lines under development are as yet unnamed but they are milling varieties with desirable nutritional qualities (such as higher beta glucan), including "some good disease resistance" and good yielding quality.

"I hope to have lines moving through the co op tests every year and eventually will be marketing my oats through SeCan (a well-known seed national see marketer in Canada)," Dyck says.

Jim Dyck also continues to work on a research project partly funded several years ago, by the Saskatchewan Oat Development Commission. That project investigates the specific rooting properties of oats. Jim Dyck believes there is still much we need to know about how the best oats are grown!



## Manitoba Oat Growers Association Director Nominations Open

Would you like help other oat growers continue the exciting work underway on oat development, equine feed, Prairie Oat Breeding Consortium, genome study and more?

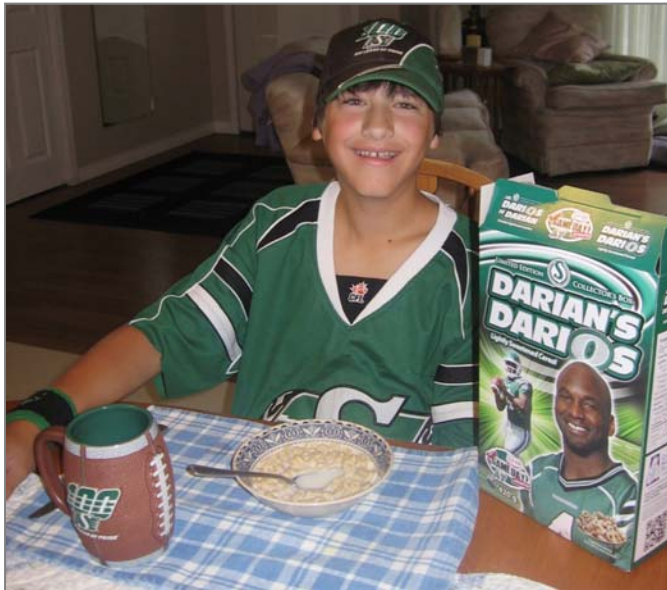
Do you know someone who does?

**Deadline for nominations is October 20, 2012.**

For nomination forms and further information contact:

MOGA Administration Office, 31 Broadway St. East, Yorkton, SK S3N 0K4

Telephone (306) 782 2210; Fax (306) 782 2281; Email [POGA@sasktel.net](mailto:POGA@sasktel.net)



**Ultimate Oat Cereal Fan!** Last year Saskatchewan Roughrider fans scooped up over 100,000 boxes of oat flake cereal named after Rider star Andy Fantuz. This year Fantuz has moved on but clever marketing by Federated Co-op grocery stores and the football team is back with Darios, another oat-based cereal (named after their starting quarterback Darian Durant). Fourteen-year-old Christian lives in Russell, ON, just outside Ottawa, but visits his grandparents Murray and Barb Straker in Saltcoats, SK every summer, where he digs into grandma's cupboard every time!



Nominations Now Open

## Saskatchewan Oat Development Commission

Would you help develop an important prairie crop? Do you know someone who would?

Nominations are open for three Saskatchewan Oat Development Commission Directors

**Deadline to apply is September 30, 2011**

Contact

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