



Prairie Steward

Farming For Your Future Environment



The Newsletter of the Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association Inc.

Summer Issue No. 54, 2008

Economic Impact of Direct Seeding to Saskatchewan farmers

The Alberta Reduced Tillage Linkages (RTL) has released some preliminary numbers this spring on how direct seeding benefits Alberta. We recalculated their numbers to show the benefits to Saskatchewan farmers.

This is a quick estimate of some of the benefits

Saskatchewan farmers have realized by moving to direct seeding as compared to staying in conventional tillage. Using Statistics Canada Census data, we estimated the amount farmers in 2006 either saved or gained on the 19,839,959 acres they direct seeded.

These are preliminary figures and estimates.

Calculating other benefits such as soil erosion prevention, moisture management, environmental goods and soil quality is in progress. Some of the benefits, such as CO₂ reduction, are returned to society by the farmers. These are not benefits for which farmers are paid.

We have assigned 2008 values to the 2006 acreage data to reflect the rising cost of fuel and labour, the increased value of crops, and the value of carbon sequestered on the Chicago Climate Exchange (CCX).

Fuel savings of 6 litres/acre = 119,039,754 litres

In total, the cash savings from reduced fuel use to Saskatchewan farmers works out to \$71,423,852 @ \$0.60/L in 2006 and \$122,610,947 @ \$1.03/L in 2008.

Emissions reductions of 2.7 kg of CO₂e per litre of fuel burned = 321,407 145,004 tonnes

This is the equivalent to removing 113,811 cars from the road.

Labour saving of 15.7 minutes per acre = 5,191,456 hours

The labour cost savings to Saskatchewan farmers works out to \$51,914,559 @ \$10/hr in 2006 and \$77,871,839 @ \$15/hr in 2008.

Yield increase of 2 bushels per acres = 39,679,918 bushels

The value of increased crop yields, averaged across all grains and oilseeds, works out to \$158,719,672 @ \$4/bu in 2006 and \$238,079,508 @ \$6/bu in 2008.

Biomass increase of 0.272 tonnes per acres = 5,396,469 tonnes

Carbon sequestered (CO₂e) of 0.3 tonnes per acres = 5,951,988 tonnes

The value of soil carbon credits on the CCX of \$23,807,951 @ \$4.00/tonne.

2008 Summary - Value of Direct Seeding to Saskatchewan Farmers:

Fuel Savings =	\$122,610,947
Labour Savings=	\$77,871,839
Yield Value =	\$238,079,508
Carbon Value =	\$23,807,951
TOTAL =	\$462,370,245

(This total does not account for the large number of acres that would be in summerfallow in the absence of direct seeding).

Direct seeding has often been touted as the greatest revolution in prairie agriculture since the introduction of the tractor. These numbers prove that theory. ●

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Your Board of Directors at Work for You

Since the Annual Conference in February, your Board members have continued to represent the SSCA at numerous meetings and events. As your President indicated in her report, let your directors know if you think they are doing a good job. A "pat on the back" now and then makes the hours spent driving and the time away from the family and farm seem a little more worthwhile.

Laura Reiter

Feb 14 - Meeting with Saskatchewan Minister of Agriculture and staff.

Mar 10 - Agriculture Council of Saskatchewan Conference Call.

Mar 12 - Together with John Bennett, spoke at Redberry Lake Biosphere's meeting about soil carbon.

Mar 19 - In Regina for the Provincial Budget.

Apr 2 - Attended the Planning Meeting in Saskatoon for the SSCA's 2009 Conference.

May 29 - Participated in a consultation session with the Sask. Ministries of Environment and Agriculture on soil offset trading policy.

Media interviews about the new Journal.

June 18 Worked in the SSCA booth at the Farm Progress Show.

Doyle Wiebe

Participated in the meeting with the Minister of Agriculture.

Attended the SCCC annual and board meeting in Ottawa March 25-26 - now representing SSCA as a director.

Participated in the 2009 conference planning meeting in Saskatoon in April.

Participated in a meeting with the Sask. Ministries of Environment and Agriculture on soil offset trading policy in May.

Worked in the SSCA booth at Farm Progress Show in June.

Keith Stephens

Participated in the Conference Planning session in Saskatoon

Worked in the SSCA booth at the Farm Progress Show in June

Edgar Hammermeister

March
Farm Leadership Council - Carbon Trading Presentation.

SCCC Executive Conference Call.
SCCC AGM & Business Meeting.

April
Tech Journal Steering Committee conference call.

IPOG Ottawa conference call.
May

Tech Journal Conference call.
SK Ministries of the Environment and Agriculture - Canadian Carbon Offset System.

June
SSCA Executive Conference call
Worked in the booth at Farm Progress Show.

Erni Hall

Attended the Ag Forum sponsored by Hon. Garry Breitkreuz, MP Yorkton-Melville in April.

Participated in the Conference planning meeting in Saskatoon April 2.

Worked in the SSCA booth at Farm Progress Show in June.

Guy Lafond

As Editor, all of his SSCA activities were focused on getting the first issue of the new journal online and into print.

Ken Abrahamson

Participated in the Conference Planning Session on April 2.

Garry Noble

Participated in conference calls concerning the new Journal.

Spent several days on Carbon Committee work.

Most of the Board members were able to attend the June Board meeting in Saskatoon. ●

2008-09 SSCA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Regional Directors

Daniel O'Reilly SW 642-5863

Doyle Wiebe WC, 1st VP 283-4340

Laura Reiter NW, President 827-2267

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SSCA's mission is "to promote conservation production systems that improve the land and environment for future generations."

Disclaimer:

The opinions of the authors do not necessarily reflect the position of the Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association.

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Prairie Agriculture Cannot Afford Complacency

By Blair McClinton, PAg
SSCA Executive Manager

We have come a long way since I first joined SSCA in 1990. The move towards reduced tillage systems and direct seeding systems in particular over the past 18 years has been remarkable. Over the past few years, I have been watching some of the developments in conservation farming in other parts of the world that make me wonder if the agriculture industry in Saskatchewan is getting complacent about soil and water conservation.

Over the past couple of years, I have heard comments from some people in the industry, including government, input/equipment suppliers and producers, that there is no need to do anything more with conservation practices because everyone is already direct seeding. While 60% adoption is a remarkable accomplishment, does this mean we can rest on our laurels?

The problem with complacency is that agriculture in other parts of the world is not sitting still. When I look around the world, our global competitors in South America, parts of eastern Europe and Australia have adopted direct seeding systems more aggressively than Saskatchewan farmers with adoption rates between 70% and 90%.

Much of the increase in crop production coming out of South American countries has been directly tied to yield improvements from their rapid adoption of direct seeding systems. They have also been developing techniques to reduce input use in their production systems. For example, they have developed cover crop roller/crimpers that allow them to direct seed without a pre-seed burnoff. Their goals are to lower their production costs while maximizing the environmental benefits. The

Rodale Institute in the USA has adapted this technique to bring no-till principles into organic systems. Producer interest in making further system improvements is very high; between 1500 and 2000 farmers regularly attend AAPRESID, the major no-till conference in Argentina.

Can we make system improvements here? Often many producers think of plant breeding when they think about research. However, genetics only explains about 30% of a crop's yield. The rest is determined by agronomic management and environmental conditions. Improving our cropping systems must not only look at improved varieties but also look for new opportunities to manage the soil/crop environment.

"Much of the increase in crop production coming out of South American countries has been directly tied to yield improvements from their rapid adoption of direct seeding systems. They have also been developing techniques to reduce input use in their production systems."

How about improving water use? Water availability is the most important factor affecting crop yields in Saskatchewan. One of the biggest benefits of direct seeding in Saskatchewan is from improved water availability from snow trapping and reduced evaporation. Finding new ways to improve water availability would increase yields in most parts of the province. For example, 10 years ago, researchers from the Semiarid Prairie Agriculture Research Centre (SPARC) near Swift Current found that they could increase crop yields by planting into tall stubble. This yield increase was solely due to the micro-climate and did not consider any additional snow trapping benefits. However, seeding into tall stubble is not

without its challenges. Stripper headers or even straight-cutting can leave tall stubble, but residue clearance with shank-based air drills has limits.

More research and development work is needed to explore how we can develop tall residue systems.

Direct seeding is often criticized that it increases herbicide use. At the 2007 ManDak conference, Dwayne Beck, a prominent no-till researcher from South Dakota, stated that they have been able to avoid using in-crop wild oat herbicides in their

cereal crops for the past 10 years. Dr. Beck challenged producers to think outside the box to look for opportunities to reduce input use. Can we do this here? There have been several studies in western Canada showing how herbicides can be reduced in no-till systems. However, this type of integrated weed manage-

ment has not been widely adopted beyond a few innovators. What can the industry do to see more widespread adoption of IPM strategies to optimize input use?

Are there other methods to manipulate the soil/crop environment that could enhance productivity? This requires research and unfortunately research capacity at both Ag Canada and Canadian Universities is decreasing. Reversing this trend will require commitments from all levels of government and all parts of the agriculture industry.

We cannot afford to be complacent about our farming systems. We should always be looking for ways to make improvements and never accept that what we are doing now is "good enough." That is our challenge. ●



President's Report

Laura Reiter, PAg

I sit to write this after having returned home from the SSCA's summer board meeting. The board is made up of a diverse group of people that all work towards one goal. That is how best to provide value to our membership.

At the Farm Progress Show in Regina we were proud to launch the new Prairie Soils and Crops Journal. This is our way of making sure that prairie research is available to you for making decisions in your operations. As we all have a stack of paper on our desk to read "sometime", we have decided not to add to the pile. The new journal will be available at the web site www.prairiesoilsandcrops.ca. The first issue is for everyone to have a look at; the subsequent issues will be for members only or those that have a subscription to the journal. Our next issue is already in the works. Its theme is "Weed Management on the Prairies". I would encourage everyone to take the time to check out the new journal. The

committee has done a wonderful job on it and we are very proud of it.

We continue to spend a considerable amount of time working on carbon policy. It is our goal to make sure that farmer's interests are represented when these decisions are made. Others have hinted that we are "causing problems" in carbon policy but I would ask whose interests they are working to protect. As a farm group, we want to make sure that the potential for agriculture is reached while still protecting our liability. It is a job we take very seriously and do to the best of our ability. If that means we cause problems for those representing others involved, then so be it.

Unfortunately, as mentioned at the conference, we are still having funding troubles. The decline in revenue that resulted in the loss of most of our field staff has continued. We are pursuing a variety of different sources for funds and hope to find a solution to this perpetual problem. As it stands now, our finance committee has a grim task

in front of it as some difficult decisions regarding staffing issues will have to be made.

As **your** organization, we would like to hear from **you**. If you feel we are headed in the wrong direction, please contact the director for your area. On the other hand, if you feel we are right where we belong and should continue in this direction, again, contact a director. If you would like to become more involved with the SSCA, please consider letting your name stand for one of the farmer positions that are up for election this year.

In closing, I wish you all the right amount of rain this summer, as few insect pests as possible, and sunny skies at harvest time. Good luck and take care. ●



Membership

If one were to take great liberty with JFK's famous quote, it might read, "Ask not what your Association can do for you, but what you can do for the Association".

The SSCA celebrated its 20th Anniversary in February. It was time to reflect on the positive influence the Association has had not only on agronomic practices in the province but also on its role as the voice of the farmer in discussions about soil carbon. All members of the SSCA can feel proud of the Association's accomplishments.

Resting on those laurels is not enough. Your Board of Directors can see that there is still much work to do. As a result, it needs you to renew your membership and encourage your neighbours to join the SSCA. The more farmers the SSCA represents, the stronger its voice when meeting with government and industry.

What does your membership do for you?

1) The current most tangible benefit is that SSCA is your voice in the world of Carbon Trading. SSCA is a member of the Industry Provincial Offset Group (IPOG) that is negotiating the trading of soil carbon. Again, the SSCA's main interest is in making sure that the benefits to the farmers are maximized while the risks are minimized.

2) The SSCA is a member of CASA (see Blair McClinton's article on Page 7). In CASA, SSCA meets with other soil conservation organizations from Canada and the USA to share information on soil conservation and no-till. Through the Soil Conservation Council of Canada (SCCC), SSCA is also represented at Confederation of American Associations for the Sustainable Production of Agriculture (CAAPAS) (see Doug McKell's article on Page 9).

3) The SSCA has a seat on the Agriculture Council of Saskatchewan (ACS).

4) An Annual Conference is held each February and all SSCA members receive a registration discount.

5) All SSCA members receive the Prairie Steward, SSCA's newsletter, published quarterly. While the newsletter brings updates on the Association's activities, efforts are made to also include agronomic information relevant to conservation tillage systems.

6) The SSCA Update is emailed regularly to those members whose email addresses are in the system.

7) And while access to the new Journal is free to all for the first edition, SSCA members only will enjoy free access to all future editions.

How do you renew your membership? Just call or email Head Office at Indian Head: (306) 695-4233 or info@ssca.ca

Remember SSCA is a grass roots organization. Its Board of Directors is comprised of farmers and interested industry personnel. Show your support for an organization that is working for you. ●

Straight Talk on Straight Cutting Canola

Reprinted with permission from the Canola Digest

Straight cutting canola can be risky but it's becoming an increasingly popular option in parts of the prairies. The advantages are obvious. It saves time, labour and fuel. If it eliminates the need for a new swather, the capital cost savings are enormous. While a few growers are investing in specialized header attachments designed to straight cut canola, others are having good luck using their existing headers.

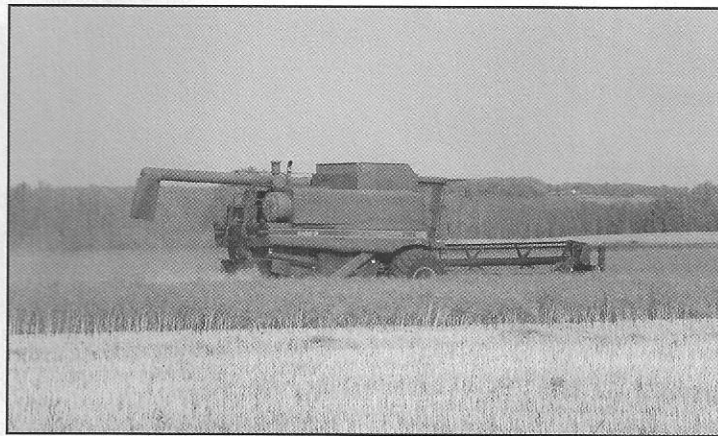
Corey Loessin, a grower near Radisson, Saskatchewan and SSCA Director, straight cut his canola for the first time in the fall of 2006. At swathing time, he decided to leave just a small amount of one field for his first straight cutting attempt. The piece was visibly greener than the rest of the field and the pods were very interlaced, so Loessin felt there was little risk that the piece would shatter if he left it standing. Even though there was a severe windstorm 10 days after he swathed the rest of the field, the standing canola didn't shell out.

"I just have an ordinary auger type header table and I cut the canola quite high," Loessin said. "It fed into the combine really well. There was no problem getting it to go into the header. As soon as you touch it with the reels, there is some shelling but it falls in the header so it's no problem. The only difficulty I had with the harvest operation was with the green stems underneath the pods. It was real tough to put them through the combine and I couldn't travel very fast."

"Standard headers will work very well. It comes down to the operator's skill," says Dave Vanthuyne, agronomist with the Canola Council of Canada in Saskatchewan. "You have to be patient and you have to have a certain technique to get everything feeding very smoothly. If you get too

much reel action, you'll cause shattering. If you don't have enough, it will tend to bunch up in the front and then it runs through the middle."

"Everything will go to smithereens as soon as it gets past that cutting bar, so getting all the material to go where you want it to is the key thing," says Canola Council senior agronomist Jim Bessel. "In my experience, the larger the feed auger, the better. Some of the older combines had feed augers with a much narrower diameter and they didn't feed nearly as well as the larger diameter feed augers they have today on most combines."



Straight cutting canola.

Photo courtesy of the Canola Council of Canada.

Draper headers

MacDon and HoneyBee draper headers have captured a growing share of the header market. According to Brad Nelson, general manager with HoneyBee Manufacturing in Frontier, Saskatchewan, they will work well in canola – with the right adjustments.

"Draper tables work very, very well in that environment," Nelson says. "You have all that space to lay it onto the canvas decks and get it down to the centre feeding area. You don't get any of that combine slugging that is common with an auger table."

Big bushy crops like canola, peas and mustard do not always flow smoothly down the canvases, so Nelson recommends that growers get the optional upper cross auger when they order a header. This auger, sold with both MacDon and HoneyBee headers, significantly improves

feeding in high volume, heavy crop conditions.

If growers are planning to use a 36-foot header, Nelson recommends the single solid tube reel instead of the more common two 18-foot split reels. Canola can jam up on the split reel's centre support arm.

Flexheader – lock up the cutterbar

"Using a flexheader with the cutting bar locked in a rigid position is another very good option for straight cutting canola," Bessel says. "A flex header cutting bar extends further than a rigid header and that's a key point.

A lot of shelling can occur when you straight cut canola. With an extended cutter bar, it's more likely to occur after the plant is cut, so it will fall onto the table itself."

Biso attachment

Extending the cutting bar is also the concept behind specialized canola header attachments such as the Austrian-made Biso. The Biso CX100 is a 28-inch table extension that can be quickly attached to the front of a

standard auger header. By extending the table and pushing the cutting bars out in front of the reel, any pods that drop or shatter when the reel touches them will fall on the table.

"We did replicated trials with the Biso header extension three years in a row at (Biso Distributor) Robert Breckner's farm in Grandview, Manitoba," says Derwyn Hammond, Canola Council agronomist in Manitoba. "The Biso did better than the swather every year. I think the average trend over four years was right around a four bu/ac yield advantage. The regular straight cut header gave results midway between the Biso and the swather."

Biso extensions also come with side cutters at both ends of the header. Hammond thinks the trials tended to underestimate their advantage. Standard crop dividers on the regular header

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www.prairiesoilsandcrops.ca Launched at WCFPS

By Juanita Polegi, PAg
Project Manager

"Good information!" "Easy reading." "Reading this journal should be a requirement for everyone in agriculture!" "The article on the cost of energy is timely as my farm is currently undergoing an energy audit." These are just a few of the comments we've been hearing since the release of the new eJournal published by SSCA.

Entitled *Prairie Soils & Crops: Scientific Perspectives for Innovative Management*, the inaugural issue was unveiled June 18 at the SSCA booth during Western Canada Farm Progress Show in Regina. The booth background was a huge poster of the front cover of the journal. A large monitor, hooked up to a computer, displayed the home page of the journal's website

www.prairiesoilsandcrops.ca. Visitors to the booth were encouraged to view the website and the articles. For the first issue only, a print copy is also available. Most of the visitors took a print copy so they could remember the website and to show it to their neighbours. Some commented that it would make good reading material while they were waiting for the water tank to fill for the sprayer! The visitors who didn't take a paper copy, copied the website and said they would look at it at home. Everyone agreed that a journal like this was needed by the farming community.

The theme of the first edition is Agriculture and Its Impact on the Environment. Topics include the ways farmers are striving to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in their farming operations; the real cost of energy with crop production; the sustainability of agriculture providing fuel alternatives; and the safety of our food.

The concept of the journal is novel in that it doesn't relay agronomic research on a particular project. Rather, the scientists who are the authors have reviewed the research as it pertains to a particular topic area and then offered their opinions on the interpretation of the results and on what additional research is required. The researchers are excited about this new format and the opportunities it presents to them for conveying their messages, not only to prairie farmers, but to a much broader audience. Dr. Henry Janzen of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada contributed the lead article in the first edition. He believes the Journal has great potential to

the website and flipped through the paper copy, she indicated the Board had first discussed the journal concept a couple of years ago. "On a daily basis, we farmers receive information on a wide range of topics and often this information is contradictory. This makes decision-making more difficult for us as additional effort is required to separate the good information from the bad. The journal brings

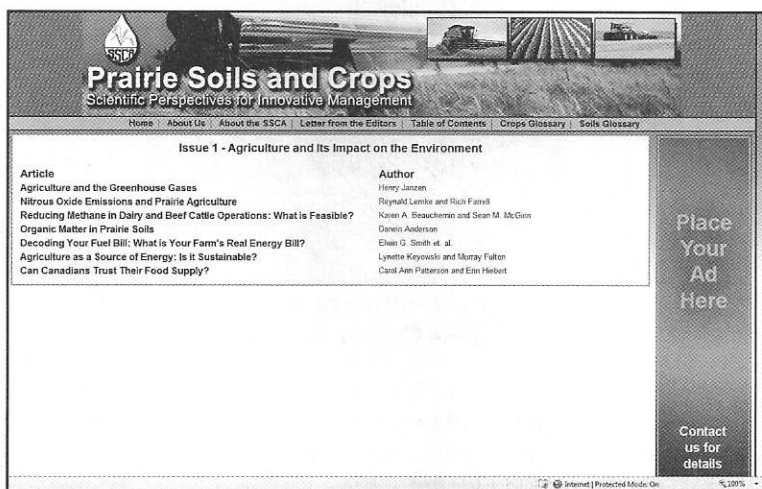
all the research together for us." She is grateful that ACAAFS (Advancing Canadian Agriculture & Agri-Food Saskatchewan) provided funding to SSCA so the project could be undertaken. "Without the ACAAFS funding, this journal would still be just a really good idea. The funding enabled us to make it a reality."

The SSCA Board of Directors has indicated that the first issue of the journal will be available to all at no charge. Paid subscriptions will be required to access future issues. SSCA members,

however, will have unlimited access to all issues at no charge as a membership perk.

Issue 2 of the eJournal is already in progress. Its emphasis will be the management of Weeds on the prairies. Ideas for future issues are welcome.

At this time, the SSCA wishes to thank Dr. Guy Lafond and Dr. Neil Harker, editors of the first edition, for their leadership in ensuring the journal came to be. They invited the authors to write the articles, provided guidance to the authors, arranged for reviews of the articles and edited the articles. Their efforts are truly appreciated. ●



The Table of Contents page from the Inaugural Issue of the new eJournal Prairie Soils & Crops: Scientific Perspectives for Innovative Management

educate both western Canadian farmers and our urban cousins. In the context of his article, Janzen said "This is a forum in which we can discuss that what we do on the land has enduring influence on so many facets of everyone's lives; and that, in return, what our city neighbors do – what they eat, what they drive, how they think – has lasting influence on the look of the countryside".

Laura Reiter, president of the SSCA and a farmer near Radisson was able to work in the booth at the time the journal was unveiled. She was pleased with the appearance and content of the journal. As she viewed

SSCA joins in forming the Conservation Agriculture Systems Alliance (CASA)

By Blair McClinton, PAg
SSCA Executive Manager

No-till, direct seeding and other such groups operate in many parts of the world. South American producers have been pushed ahead with forming an association that brings these groups together. CAPAAS (http://www.caapas.org/index_en.asp) helps South American farmers adopt continuous no-till. Unfortunately no such group

initiated discussions with interested conservation tillage associations. SSCA joined the discussions in June.

About twenty-five people met in Pine Mountain, Georgia in December, 2007 to begin formalizing the group. In addition to SSCA, the Alberta Reduced Tillage Linkages and the Manitoba-North Dakota Zero-till Farmers Association also attended this meeting. CTIC paid for our way and I was privileged to attend. The name for the group was

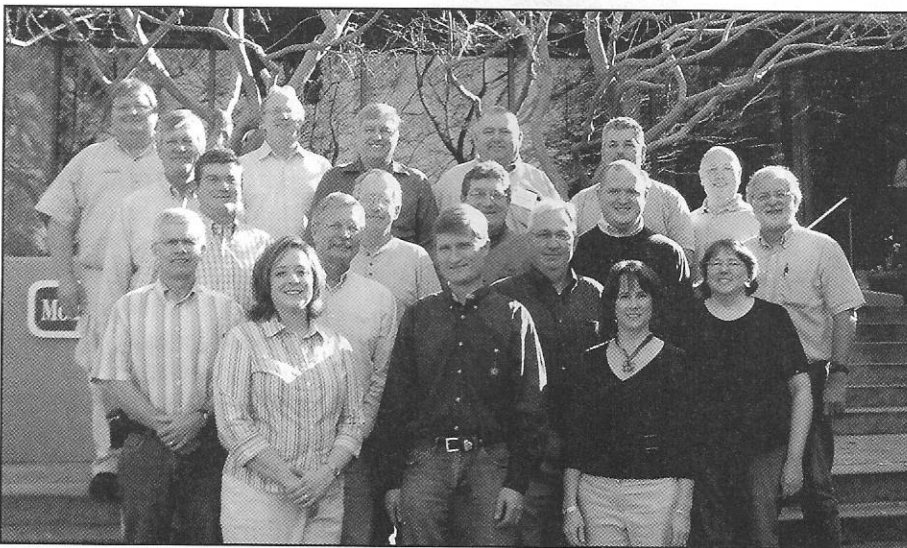
A brief description of the network follows:

Across North America voluntary producer organizations work hard to promote no-till systems and other practices that provide economic benefits as well as environmental benefits to their regions. These organizations share similar missions and goals, encounter similar challenges and struggle with all too common problems.

Today, there are a growing number of these similar groups working to form a communication network that will strengthen not only individual efforts but also the shared goal of increased conservation in agriculture.

"This communication network will form connections among and between groups so that information, success stories and lessons learned can be shared. Participating organizations and advisors will share information, respond to questions from others quickly and with honesty, participate regularly in dialogue, alert others to relevant opportunities, events, and provide social and moral support." (CTIC)

It has been exciting to meet with groups from all over the USA and Canada. We really hope the connections created will further the development of no-till and direct seeding systems throughout North America. ●



Members of CASA representing soil conservation organizations from across Canada and the United States. Blair McClinton is in the back row, far right.

existed in North America; that is until now.

The Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC) (www.conservationinformation.org) has been the driving force behind creating a North American conservation tillage network. Early in 2007, they

selected and we began discussing governance, goals and actions. Several committees were established to help build on the work started at this meeting. Peter Gamache, Alberta Reduced Tillage Linkages, is the Canadian representative on the operations committee.

STRAIGHT TALK ON STRAIGHT CUTTING CANOLA ... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

were shelling canola in a one-foot strip along the outside of the header. With a 30-foot header, this would give the Basis another three percent yield advantage.

Reel positioning

No matter what type of header is used, reel positioning is critical. Normally, the reel should be set as far back on the header as possible to minimize shatter losses. However,

finding the optimal reel position can be difficult. In some crop conditions, combine operators continually have to adjust the reel and struggle to keep the crop flowing smoothly while minimizing shelling. Popular options such as a hydraulic reel, fore and aft, make this much simpler.

"Hydraulic fore and aft is a necessity," Nelson says. "You usually want to have the reel back so if a pod shatters,

it shatters on the canvas. But this really depends on your crop condition. I have seen times when the reel has had to be all the way out and all the way back in the same field just to make sure you have good feeding of the product."

Pickup reels are preferable to bat reels. Bats tend to push the crop down and then slap it back onto the header,

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New Director-At-Large Joins SSCA Board

At the 2008 SSCA Annual Conference, Trevor Plews, PAg joined the SSCA Board as its newest Director-At-Large. Representing Industry at the Board Table, Trevor is the Head of Upland Restoration with Ducks Unlimited Canada in Yorkton. He is a graduate of the University of Manitoba.

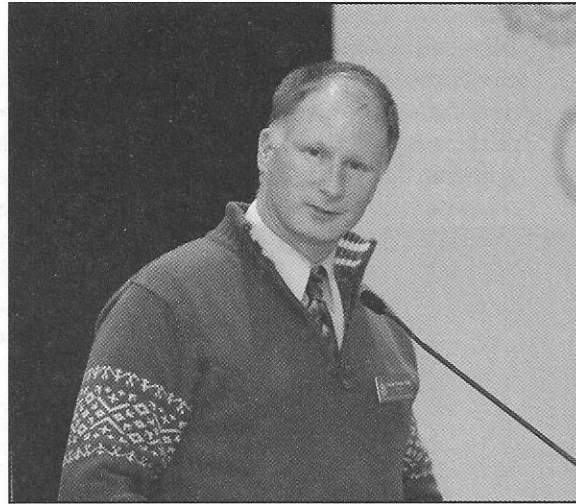
Growing up in Selkirk, Manitoba, Trevor had never intended to become an Agrologist but a summer job he had while a university student changed his mind. At the suggestion of Fraser Stewart, Manitoba Agriculture's Forage Agronomist, Trevor enrolled in the College of Agriculture. He became a DUC employee in 1989 and began working on the Prairie Care program in 1990.

The establishment of Duck Nesting Cover is important for any lands acquired by DUC. As an agrologist with DUC, Trevor's goal is to improve the landscape on uplands to create habitat for water fowl. This is achieved through the establishment of perennial cover or the seeding of winter wheat.

Trevor is pleased that 2007 was the year for winter wheat. "I feel we finally made a break-through with winter wheat in 2007", he said. "The yield advantage was there and the price of grain was up so it was all good for the crop". He indicated that the industry is beginning to see a significant increase in winter cereal acreage. In the early 80's, about one million acres were seeded to winter wheat. Within 4 or 5 years, that acreage was down to fifty thousand. In 2007, the acreage had increased to around 600,000. It's possible that within 2 more years, it could once again surpass the one million acre mark.

"There has been a change in the way we promote winter cereals and how producers

see them. Winter cereals are no longer an after thought during harvest", explained Trevor. Promotion of winter cereals is beginning in April so that producers can be thinking about how they will seed the crop in August at the same time as they are making spring seeding plans. Another boost for winter cereals came when Viterra



Trevor Plews, new SSCA D-A-L, chairing a session at the 2008 Annual Conference. Photo by Eric Oliver.

became active in the promotion of the crops to their clients. "When Viterra took up the cause for winter cereals, it helped producers to see them as having economic benefits", explained Trevor. "This has more appeal than when Ducks and SSCA were promoting winter cereals, as many producers thought we liked the crops for just their environmental benefits".

Winter wheat is truly a crop with many benefits to both the producer and to wildlife. Producers have always liked its resistance to wheat midge. The newer varieties are tall semi dwarfs so are less prone to lodging and their rust resistance

has improved dramatically since the 1980's. With the elimination of KVD, newer, even higher yielding varieties will be available. On the environmental side, winter wheat is a wildlife-friendly crop that sees a lot of bird use. Successful duck hatches occur wherever winter wheat is established.

When asked why he was interested in serving on the SSCA Board, Trevor indicated that it seemed a natural fit. "There's a direct link between soil conservation and wildlife," he said. "And since soil conservation includes forages, there's a link to my own line of work." Trevor believes that serving on the SSCA Board will also enable him to network with his fellow directors who he sees as being leading edge farmers. As well, SSCA has lots of credibility with the farming community because it has always had the producers' best interests in mind. "The SSCA is not affiliated with any entity. It has always had a good grasp of the issues pertaining to annual crop production and has been able to address those for the benefit of all producers", he said. Trevor also likes the provincial scope of the Association.

Trevor and his wife, Tammy and their two children live in Yorkton but they have some land east of the city. That land is dotted with potholes and sloughs, ideal for pasture. They have completed their own Environmental Farm Plan and have implemented a number of ideas including the fencing off of most of the wetlands and developing remote watering sites. They also have a Conservation Easement on the land.

The SSCA is pleased to have Trevor on the Board and appreciates DUC's willingness to allow him to do so. ●

Membership Fees to Increase

At the June Board Meeting, the Directors voted in favour of increasing membership fees. While no one likes to pay more for fees, it was pointed out that the last membership fee increase was in 1990! Costs for all member services such as the newsletter and the Conference have increased since that time.

Effective August 1, 2008 the following fee structure will be implemented:
\$100 for a yearly membership and \$250 for 3 years of membership.

As one Director indicated, "\$100 is the equivalent to 10 bushels of canola! That's pretty cheap when you think of all the benefits to membership in the SSCA!"

SCCC Experiences Conservation Programs in Paraguay

**Doug McKell, Executive Director
Soil Conservation Council of Canada**

Soil Conservation Council of Canada (SCCC) has been a member of the Confederation of American Associations for the Sustainable Production of Agriculture (CAAPAS) since 2003. In September 2007, I had the opportunity to attend the Annual Meeting of CAAPAS in Paraguay. The main purpose of the meeting is to get delegates together for updates on country activities, discussion of common issues and concerns, fellowship and demonstrations of local conservation activities through a field tour. The Field Day was held prior to the delegate meeting. Originating from the city of Bella Vista, the bus tour visited various farms, research projects and demonstrations.

Field Day Highlights:

1. Commitment to soil preservation. Paraguay farmers have virtually switched totally to no-till with over 90% of the cropped land being under no-till systems. The fields that we visited had excellent residue coverage and exhibited no evidence of soil erosion, either by wind or water.

2. Most Paraguayan farmers are organized into cooperatives. These farm cooperatives primarily serve to collect and market the member's grain. Some are very elaborate in that they operate input supply dealerships, machinery dealerships and value added processing.

3. The use of cover crops in no-till rotations is extensive in South and Central America. These cover crops function to provide residue cover for weed control and runoff prevention and to provide nitrogen for subsequent crops. South American farmers are researching various cover crop combinations and timing of growth ending techniques. Although conditions in SA are more conducive to using cover crops, it may be something we should be looking at developing in Canada, at least in the areas where we have the longest growing season.

Key items from meetings:

Much of the time spent in the two-day meetings was the sharing of conservation

experiences and activities taking place in each country. Most countries are experiencing a growth in no-till and a resulting growth in their total crop production. The no-till system seems to be the mitigating factor in preventing soil erosion from water, which is probably the key reason for the increase in average crop yields. Because of the yield and economic advantages that are experienced by farmers making the switch to no-till from conventional farming systems, no-till is the focus for most of the farmer groups and associations that have been formed over the past 20 – 30 years. These groups conduct



A No-till field in Paraguay seeded to corn in cover crop residue that was black oats and lupins.

events where information is shared, field demonstrations and in some cases conduct field research.

After the country reports were given there were a few key issues that were discussed including:

- * Collaboration with a major research organization.
- * Certification of farms where conservation practices are employed.
- * Taking the conservation message to the public.
- * Carbon credit trading for no-till farmers.

1. Collaboration with major research organization. One of the key issues that could be investigated is the effects of agricultural production expanding into the more fragile lands and livestock production areas. A workshop was conducted in

November 2006 to discuss opportunities for collaboration and priority areas. These priorities included:

- * A more systemic approach to research
- * The need for more information and more extension.
- * Environmental certification – what is its role i.e. tariff barrier or stewardship.
- * Affects of crop production moving into livestock areas.
- * Balance of nutrients and carbon.
- * Water management.

2. Certification of farms where conservation practices are employed. This is an issue that has been discussed for the past few years by CAAPAS. Some countries already have initiatives (ex. The Agro-Eco Index in Argentina) where they are working towards certifying farmers who are adopting sustainable farming practices. Certification models have also been developed by INTA (a major research organization in South America) and the Brazilian no-till farmers federation. There were many questions from delegates surrounding the certification issue including: Who would be the certification body? Why do it in the first place i.e. who is going to require it? And what is expected from CAAPAS in developing the process? A committee in Argentina is working on developing a certification process. CAAPAS could join this committee for \$10k/yr or could develop their own process.

It was clear from the discussion that CAAPAS delegates expect a certification process will bring added value to farm products that are produced under sustainable agriculture systems. They also feel that society will endorse this concept and place a higher value on these products. A concern was expressed that there are several different protocols existing throughout various countries for environmental certification. One suggestion was that a common protocol should be developed by a recognized umbrella organization.

3. Taking the conservation messages to the public. CAAPAS feels it should have a

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What was old is (frustratingly) new again

Edgar Hammermeister, PAg
Past President, Director SE

As some of our members have already heard through the "SSCA email update", the Federal Government (Conservative version) released in March details on proposed measures to reduce Greenhouse Gases (GHG) emissions and air pollutants. With the change in government came a change in program names. "Turning the Corner" has set targets that industry are complaining are too tough and environmental groups are calling for lenient. That must signal some type of balance happening. Industry's GHG reduction targets are now calculated on an intensity basis (emissions per unit of production). The targets are fairly aggressive and industry will be challenged to meet these targets. GHG reductions will be relative to the year 2006 instead of 1990. Further information can be found at www.ecoaction.gc.ca/turning-virage/index-eng.cfm.

Though there was a change in government, there was not a change in the bureaucracy. For all the changes to how Canada will reign in its GHG emissions, there are too many similarities with old ideas. So many questions yet remain unanswered:

1. Are maintenance liability periods being considered? If so, what length?
2. Are caveats on the land being considered?
3. Who will be responsible for long term monitoring for reversals?
4. What is considered a significant reversal?

In one way, it is good not to have these answers yet as it means there is still some time to influence decisions, on the other, it is frustrating as these questions have remained unresolved for over 8 years.

The issue of baseline activity has not been finalized but indications are not looking good for Saskatchewan. The implication being, the later the year picked (i.e. 1995, 2000 or 2005) the greater the discount against the Saskatchewan farmer. Increasing discounts equals decreasing value for carbon credits.

Environment Canada has included Temporary Credits (TC) as an option for managing soil sink permanence risk. The concept does alleviate the concern of the farmer for long term risk management. Though the SSCA had brought forward this concept we are not pushing the point very hard any more. Economic analysis indicates that there might not be sufficient value in the TC to support an infrastructure to verify and monitor it. However, this comes with how other components of the offset trading system are being pieced together. Industry has never been a fan of the TC. Industry did not want to have TCs because they do not have temporary targets. It is an oversimplified view on the challenge. An economic consideration likely applies as well. Would you rent a combine, knowing you will always need a combine but the cost of renting increases dramatically (even unpredictably) each year?

There has been discussion on the Alberta approach to use an "Assurance Factor". The approach uses conservative carbon sequestration (storage) rates (to be updated

as the science evolves) and an analysis of what the probability of a reversal event is and the impact of that event would have on the soil sink. In turn, the soil carbon credit is the same as any other credit. The Assurance Factor is a concept that brings a balance to sink maintenance liability issues and would streamline administration. Environment Canada has been quite cool to the concept so far.

The SSCA through our national association, Soil Conservation Council of Canada has been working with the Industry-Provincial Offset Group (IPOG) to lobby for a workable offset system. IPOG has had a significant number of meetings with Environment Canada and met with Ministerial staff. At times I feel the bureaucracy holds "Stakeholder Consultations" more so to be able to "check off that box". Contact with the Federal politicians, specifically those involved in committees and cabinet members will be important to try and move our points along. Indications are that policy will further evolve this fall.

The reality of dramatically increasing input costs are making the sinks vulnerable. Input costs are high but so are commodity prices. Good margin can be had... if you can get the crop into the bin. When the supply of sufficient moisture to grow the crop is of concern, storing water in a fallow period will be looked at as an option again. Not likely the tilled fallow of days gone by but chemfallow. The National soil sink inventory simply won't grow as hoped. Consideration certainly has to be made not only to incent sink creation but sink maintenance. ●

SCCC EXPERIENCES CONSERVATION PROGRAMS IN PARAGUAY ... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

role in promoting their messages and activities to the public in an effort to show what farmers can do and are doing in terms of environmental stewardship.

Delegates discussed how to involve the media in developing some professional information pieces aimed at promoting what farmers are doing to help protect the environment.

4. Carbon Credit Trading. This issue is also reflected in the issue of certification for farmers who adopt soil conservation strategies. Farmers in all South

American countries who have practiced no-till for many years are very aware of the carbon trading concept and the potential value of soil carbon. They are keenly aware of the efforts in Canada and the US to establish a trading platform and will follow whatever is developed here.

Summary

The CAAPAS AGM is an excellent opportunity to share experiences in the area of conservation agriculture with other farmer organizations across North and South America who have developed

similar expertise. There is much we can learn from these other organizations and individuals and much we can share from our own experience. Canada is viewed in high regard by CAAPAS member organizations who are very interested in the activities conducted and policies developed in Canada related to soil conservation. I strongly recommend that SCCC continues to be involved with CAAPAS and make every effort to fund delegates to attend the CAAPAS AGM. Next year the AGM is being planned by the Brazilian no-till near Sao Paulo. ●

Call for Nominations

By **Juanita Polegi, PAg**

2008 – the year of the Elections. There's that "little contest" going on in the United States; Divisions 1,3,5, & and the Reeve are up for election in the Rural Municipalities cross the province; and a number of SSCA Director positions are coming open.

At the June Board Meeting, I asked the Board members what appealed to them about serving as a Director. Networking with fellow Board members was the best part of being on the SSCA Board. The directors indicated that they are always learning something from their fellow directors. That there are only 3 Board meetings per year is also appealing. Everyone knows that we all attend a large number of meetings when we live in rural Saskatchewan. Being entrusted to represent the views of farmers from their respective regions is generally considered an honour by the directors. The SSCA Board has a number of standing and special committees so each director has the opportunity to serve on a committee in which he/she is particularly interested. The SSCA also pays expenses and a small honourarium to compensate for the time away from the farm.

A couple of the disadvantages of serving on a provincial board included time away from home and long drives to meetings and that some of the Committees meet more frequently than at the Board meetings.

In spite of those disadvantages, the SSCA has been fortunate to have many committed, knowledgeable people serving on its Board. Now is a great opportunity for you to serve on the Board of the SSCA and assist the other Directors in their efforts to represent the province's farmers on agricultural and environmental issues.

There are 4 directorships available this fall. The North East Region has been vacant since February 2008. If you reside in this region and are interested in being on the Board, please let Laura Reiter or Blair McClinton know that at your earliest convenience.

In the South East Region, Edgar Hammermeister will finish his final

term as the SE Director in February. He will not, therefore, be seeking re-election.

In the West Central Region, Doyle Wiebe is completing his first term. Also completing his first term is Garry Noble, one of 3 Farmer Directors-At-Large (DAL)..

Guy Lafond has served as an Industry DAL for 2 terms. He will not be seeking re-election.

Nomination papers for all the positions except the NE are to be filed by September 30 and signed by 3 SSCA members. To obtain nomination papers, please contact the SSCA Head Office at (306) 695-4233 or send an email to info@ssca.ca

Now if that little editorial hasn't convinced you to seek a position on the SSCA Board, perhaps this article, reprinted with permission from Canadian Farm Business Management Council will:

VOLUNTEERS SPILL THEIR SECRET: THEY GET MORE THAN THEY GIVE

By **Glenn Cheater**

They haven't resorted to kidnapping yet, but you've still got to be wary when dealing with volunteer-starved farm groups and associations. If you show any kind of interest at all, you'll likely find yourself being button-holed and pressured to join the board or a committee. But many of those volunteers say being shanghaied might be a stroke of luck, and end up paying big dividends for your farm business.

When Richard Robert joined an equipment-sharing group, his goal was to get his hands on a bigger Massey Ferguson combine. What he wasn't expecting was some valuable lessons in HR management. When a neighbour talked Lincoln Wolfe into joining a pulse growers' association six years ago, he figured he'd do his bit by attending a few meetings. He ended up with a worldwide contact network of growers who have become an essential part of his marketing efforts.

Robert and Wolfe are just two examples of farmers who have discov-

ered that joining a group has a lot of unexpected payoffs.

"The benefits I get from belonging to a group are much greater than what I contribute," says Robert, a dairy and grains farmer from Abitibi-Temiscamingue in northwest Quebec. "You get information before others do, and you get experiences, networking opportunities, and knowledge that you wouldn't get otherwise. The benefits are many."

Robert has joined lots of farmer associations since taking over his uncle's farm at age 26. It's easy to do in Quebec, which has an extensive network of federations. Many are commodity based, but the province also has equipment-sharing cooperatives and farm management clubs.

Robert is now the president of the Fédération des groupes conseils agricoles du Québec (federation of farm management clubs), whose 1,100 farmer members in 25 clubs can access agronomists and management experts at reduced rates. But he says some of his most valuable business management lessons came when he hooked up with three local farmers to share a larger combine than one he could otherwise justify for his 450 acres of grain land.

"For example, we had one person who operated and maintained the combine," says Robert. "So that guy had four bosses. It's a different kind of situation, but I learned a lot about personnel issues and about the right way to manage people."

Working closely with other farmers also builds a level of trust that allows you to talk more openly about your farm and the challenges you face, says Robert. He points to the annual meeting where he and his partners would "close the books" on the operations of the combine for the year.

"The first thing you know you're talking about your farm and its performance that year," recalls Robert, adding he inevitably learned things in those discussions he could directly apply to his farm and profit from.

Etched in Lincoln Wolfe's mind is the time he was meeting with a group of

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CALL FOR NOMINATIONS ... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

bean producers and Felipe Calderón, the president of Mexico, dropped by. Of course, Wolfe, then head of the Manitoba Pulse Growers' Association (MPGA) was in Mexico at the annual meeting of that country's bean producers when El Presidente made an appearance. But that day reminds Wolfe how much his view of the world has changed in the six years he's been actively involved in the MPGA.

"I don't really know how to explain it," says Wolfe, who farms near MacGregor in southcentral Manitoba. "I never really expected to meet the people outside of the organization that I have, but as you get to know them, it really opens your eyes to different ways of thinking.

"I've got to meet and interact with people who are really at the heart of the industry, and right on the cutting edge of what's happening now. And by meeting people from across the country and right across the world,

you really develop a global perspective on your industry."

Mexico is about 3,000 kilometres south of MacGregor, but it's an important market for the dry beans grown by Wolfe and his fellow pulse producers. It's also a market that can quickly be lost: Some sort of trade barrier can always be thrown up if a country wants to keep Canada's product out. So MPGA members, including Wolfe, have spent a lot of time with their counterparts from the National Bean Producers Union, which represents the 120,000, mostly small-scale, growers in Mexico. Wolfe and other directors have not only gone south, they've hosted Mexican growers in Manitoba, getting to know them and offering to share growing technology and varietal information.

Wolfe has developed similarly strong contracts elsewhere in the world, and he's now able to draw on those contacts as he develops his short- and long-term marketing strategy. He says his experi-

ence is unique in its details, but the underlying dynamic is typical – belonging to a group opens windows to the world you never knew existed.

"There are huge benefits from joining an association," he says. "The knowledge you gain and the benefits from the people you meet are just priceless."

Wolfe says he now realizes the person who persuaded him to join the MPGA understood that and was actually doing him a favour.

"Now that I've been around a while, I see in others what I guess happened to me," he says. "You can just see the person develop. They gain in confidence and before you know it, they're helping the newcomers develop. It's a real evolutionary process, and in my experience, one that everyone benefits from."

Along with information, experiences and networking opportunities, Robert says there's one other benefit to joining an association. ●

STRAIGHT TALK ON STRAIGHT CUTTING CANOLA ... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

increasing shatter losses. On pickup reels, it is possible to set the angle of the tines themselves so they reach out and draw the canola back and then push it down. Most headers also let you set the reel speed. Matching reel speed with ground speed is important. If you have it going too fast, you can shell the canola before it gets to the cutting bar. So you want to have that reel going the same speed as the combine's going or as fast

as you can take it up into the feeder housing.

"We've done quite a number of trials comparing straight cutting and swathing over the years," Hammond says. "The average yield is slightly lower for straight cutting, but isn't highly significant. It's the range that is the problem. In some years, straight cutting has produced significant yield advantages and in other years, we've lost one-third to half the crop. Each grower

has to weigh the potential benefit in terms of yield advantage and harvest efficiency against the risk of significant shattering losses."

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