

Topic: Diversification

Prepared by Amy McInnis, September 2004, for the Winning the Prairie Gamble exhibit, North Battleford WDM

Saskatchewan and wheat have been synonymous from the time of the first settlers. In the Atlas of Saskatchewan, Kulshreshtha and Storey explained, “Wheat provided the economic justification for settlement of the province” (223). Although Saskatchewan’s harvest accounts for half of the 20 million tonnes of wheat produced in Canada each year, farmers are diversifying into a range of crops and livestock (Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, 12). Saskatchewan farmers are diversifying to compete in the global economy, and to find ways of spreading their risk. The loss of the Crow Benefit, a grain freight subsidy, in 1994/1995 stimulated a greater interest in diversification in Saskatchewan (Storey and Kulshreshtha, 226).

Saskatchewan is a national leading producer of wheat, durum, oat, barley, flax, canola, mustard, pea, caraway and wild rice, as well as the world’s largest producer of canary seed, mustard, organic wild rice, lentil and dry pea (Saskatchewan Centennial 2005 website “SASKfacts”). In addition, a range of herbs and spices, vegetables, fruits, crops for the nutraceutical market and even Christmas trees are being grown in the province. Saskatchewan leads the country with over 1,000 organic farms producing a range of organic crops and livestock (Saskatchewan Agrivision Corporation, “The Organic Agriculture Industry”). Value-added processing and agricultural tourism are other ways in which some Saskatchewan farmers are diversifying their operations.

In the 2003 *Western Producer* article, “Farming the generations,” Warren Kaeding, a third generation farmer near Churchbridge, Saskatchewan, explains his diverse farming operation:

‘The crops we’re growing now, my dad would never have thought of growing corn for grain, or sunflowers, soybeans or chickpeas. That’s where I see the next revolution coming from. The next 20 years? ... that’s what I can’t wait for. That’s what gets me going in the morning and that’s why we’ve played with nutraceuticals, pumpkins, now we’re into trees, beans and all kinds of stuff’ (as qtd. in Strautman, 29).

Specialized livestock, beyond the traditional beef and dairy cattle, hogs, goats, sheep and poultry, are now raised in the province including bison, elk, deer, emu, ostrich, rhea, llama, alpaca, wild boar and several others (Saskatchewan Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization, “Census StatFact - Specialized Livestock and Poultry”). Marian Russell of RAR Alpaca Ltd. near Rosetown says, “I want my kids to have the option of staying home to live and work. My efforts with alpacas will make our farm more economically secure, and also shore up our wonderful lifestyle” (Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration, Saskatchewan Council for Community Development website, “CARDS Success Stories”).

References:

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