

Soybean boom positive boost for Manitoba's growers and economy



Photo by MPGA

A crop of soybeans in Manitoba.

If you look at the agricultural landscape of Manitoba five years ago and compare it to today, it's easy to see how rapidly soybeans have grown as a crop of choice.

According to Dennis Lange, farm production advisor for crops with Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (MAFRD), the number of acres seeded with soybeans in Manitoba has more than doubled since 2011.

"In 2011 we had 570,000 acres, in 2012 we had 850,000 and in 2014 we counted 1,270,000," he says. "Theoretically if the crops keep growing we could hit an additional million acres in the next few years."

Nearly 80 per cent of Manitoba's soybean acres are in the Red River Valley area, an area that stretches from Morden to Portage la Prairie eastward towards Stonewall and Beausejour and then south to the Canada-USA border. But recently new earlier maturing varieties have allowed the crop to be grown over an area of the province extending west and north.

Approximately 97 per cent of the beans are grown for the crush market where the main products are soybean oil and meal.

Funding for Manitoba-specific research

With the help of funding from *Growing Forward 2's* Growing Innovation program, the Manitoba Pulse Growers Association (MPGA) has been able to work on seven research projects that maximize the potential soybeans have to grow in Manitoba's specific elements. With the rapid expansion of soybeans into Manitoba, it's vital that management practices from more established growing regions are tested rigorously and adapted to local conditions across Manitoba. The varieties that are grown in Manitoba are tested through diversification centres, and through private contractors. The Roundup Ready® soybeans are developed by private breeding companies.

"One of the main reasons we've seen an increase in soybean acreage in Manitoba is the crop's tolerance to our recent weather patterns. We've been experiencing wet springs and late fall frosts. Soybeans seem to be more resilient to the elements than other crops," says Kristen Podolsky, production specialist at MPGA.

Soybeans are generally planted in mid-May and harvested in October. The risk of frost heading into

the fall only affects the beans if they haven't matured. With proper variety selection for the region this risk is minimized.

"In the Red River region in 2011 we experienced a frost on September 14, but the beans were far enough along and there were no problems," Lange says.

MPGA also received *Growing Forward 2* funding to study soybean yield and quality under sub-optimal conditions, which was done in partnership with growers. Podolsky says the first-hand results they received are a huge benefit and will help growers while they're making decision for 2015.

The right time to invest in soybeans

Randy Froese, a Winkler-area farmer, began growing soybeans nine to 10 years ago and says the crop has been a great investment.

"My dad got into soybeans about 25 or 30 years ago, but they could only yield about 15-20 bushels due to limited varieties and because harvestability was not that great," he says. "Dad didn't throw the whole farm into soybeans, so they went back to what they knew would get results. It just wasn't the right time for soybeans, but now it is. With varieties tolerant to broad spectrum herbicides that we have, we can achieve great yields."

Froese, who sat on the board for MPGA for the past three years, made the decision to bring genetically modified soybeans to their farm 10 years ago, and says that it's easy for any grower to adapt to growing soybeans.

"The seeding equipment is pretty much the same as canola or wheat, or a planter if you have corn or sunflowers. You can test it out one year, and then see if you want to go out and buy more equipment to increase greater yield potential," he says. "Soybeans are straightforward when it comes to fertilizer and pesticide, so you end up saving a lot of fuel and energy that way."

Funding to keep pests under control

MPGA also received *Growing Forward 2* funding to do a soybean cyst nematode survey. It isn't a problem in Manitoba yet, but Podolsky expects to start seeing them within the next two or three years.

"They weren't in North Dakota five years ago, and now they are," she says. "We're monitoring crops to ensure that when they do arrive, we'll be aware." ■

Manitoba Pulse Growers Association soybean research leader in Manitoba

Soybeans have become one of the most popular crops in Manitoba in recent years. To continue that growth, Manitoba Pulse Growers Association is leading seven research projects in 2014 funded through the Growing Innovation program.

\$15,333 **Manitoba soybean cyst nematode survey**
Taking and testing soil samples for the presence of soybean cyst nematode in Manitoba. Early detection is significant in preventing infestation.

\$40,624 **Enhancing Manitoba soybean yield and quality under sub-optimal conditions**
Experimenting with various breeds of genetically developed soybean to see which yield the best results in Manitoba's unique climate.

\$49,650 **Effect of soil temperature at different planting dates and residue management on soybeans**
Planting beans on four separate dates where the soil temperature will vary to see what effect it has on the yield of the bean.

\$64,653 **Phosphorus fertilization beneficial management practices for soybeans in Manitoba**
Determining how much phosphorus beans need at each stage of their growth and how to manage accordingly with other crops.

\$78,867 **Research and technical support for on-farm transition to organic soybean production**
MPGA had four on-farm partners to research with in 2014. Conducting research on-farm allows for more practical results. Participants also benefit from gaining knowledge in their own environment.

\$88,933 **Soybean residue management**
Determining effective ways to reduce soybean residue.

\$105,000 **Alternative methods to reduce root rot in soybean and other pulses**
Identifying the pathogens associated with root rot, and determining effective and sustainable ways to reduce the disease.



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