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The Windssock

Biofuels in Alberta

Alberta thinks of itself as an energy leader, but the petro-rich province has been a laggard when it comes to biofuels.

The industry's undisputed pioneer is Brazil. After three decades of hard work, The South American giant last year squeezed about 17 billion litres of ethanol from sugar cane.

The United States has surged ahead of the pack. Its 115 ethanol plants, fed by the massive Midwest corn belt, can churn out almost 22 billion litres annually. Another 86 plants are under construction.

Plants are popping up in Canada, too, though at a much more modest rate. Alberta, so far, has just one. But the province wants to change all that.

The government has a grand vision of a vast biofuels industry extending its tendrils into all corners of Alberta. Farmers will prosper by growing crops for biofuels production; the shaky forestry sector, besieged by pine beetles and low prices, will branch into producing ethanol from cellulose, or plant fibre.

But huge questions remain,

including: Who will pay to build the plants and infrastructure needed to get the fledgling industry on its feet? And is bioenergy actually a benefit to the environment?

Ideally, the province would prefer that farmers themselves invest in ethanol facilities by forming cooperatives and pooling their money together. But scrounge might be a more accurate word after the financial thrashing farmers have taken from drought and mad cow disease.

Alberta farmers have come out of the worst 5 or 6 years in the industry's history, said Rod Scarlett, executive director of the Wildrose Agricultural Producers. "So to get a farmer to invest something in this value added process like an ethanol plant - there isn't the money in the farm economy to make that investment.

Even with all the efficiencies, many economists doubt the biofuels industry would survive without being propped up by the government subsidies. "At its current cost of production, it is unlikely that fuel ethanol production in

Canada would occur at all without government support," said a recent paper from University of Saskatchewan agricultural economists Rose Olfert and Simon Weseen.

"The competitiveness of ethanol relative to gasoline depends on several factors, most notably the price of oil and the price of ethanol feedstocks (e.g. grain)", they wrote. "Changes in the price of either input will directly impact the viability of ethanol production."

For the last two years, ethanol producers have enjoyed an optimal situation of high oil prices and low feedstock prices, they note. But if oil prices are low and feedstock prices are high, ethanol becomes even less competitive and would need even greater government subsidies.

Out on the land east of Red Deer farmers hope fervently that the biofuels industry thrives.

Selling their crops to nearby Permolex has been mighty handy. The plant is very flexible about when it will take

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by tom kinniburgh

Here we go again with yet another year. The 2007 season is getting closer and I hope everyone has started thinking about what is to come. There are a lot of things to be considering for this year such as the O.U.I program all the way to the worker shortage that has been hurting some operators on the golden paved roads of Alberta!

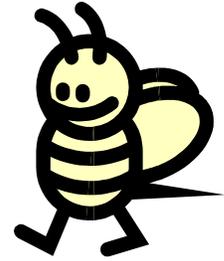
I hope most of you are ready for the CAP Clinics. Lets all try not to bring our aircraft to the clinic unprepared. Make sure you have run water through the system and everything works so things run smooth for that day. We only have a small window in the mornings before the wind starts to blow here in the south so be prepared. Also please take a couple of hours and go flying in your aircraft to get used to it again, remember there are people standing fairly close to the line . Let's keep it safe.

For those who attended the CAAA meeting in Winnipeg know that it was well worth your time and for those who couldn't be there I hope you can make next years because you sure do miss out on a lot of info when you can't attend. The last 4A's meeting following the conference in Winnipeg we touched on the 2009 CAAA AGM which will be held in Alberta. No location has been decided on as of yet. Also if anyone has any recent spraying pictures please email them to the 4A's office.

While in Orlando at the NAAA conference I had the opportunity to check out the famous P-51 Mustang, Crazy Horse and many other vintage aircraft such as the MK-XIV Spitfire. It was a great sight to see these aircraft flying around. If a person had \$2950.00 USD to spend per hour it would be well worth it according to Mike Carefoot and Jack Appleton.

In closing, remember to support those businesses that support both the CAAA and AAAA. Also if the season gets too chaotic take an hour or two and get out of the airplane and take a break, so you have a chance to do this thing we call a living for another year.

Working Together with Beekeepers



As a reminder to all applicators, the AAAA and the Alberta Beekeepers Association have established a bee hive registry to assist in the two industries working in harmony. Both the AAAA and the Alberta Beekeepers can provide a registry of beekeepers throughout Alberta. It is imperative the two industries have open lines of communication because bees will never stop foraging and farmers will always want to get rid of insect pest in their crops. The more everyone communicates, the better chance we have of working together so that farmers get what they need from sprayers and bees are able to pollinate and forage farmers crops to maximize crop yields. Please ensure you ask the grower about bees on his or adjacent lands. Do an initial reconnaissance of the field and surrounding area, particularly when bees are active. Choose the most appropriate insecticide when bees are in the area.

Alberta Environment has been dealing with some fall-out regarding complaints to the Minister related to an incident that occurred in southern Alberta recently. In responses to the complainants Alberta Environment has pointed to the proactive approach both associations have taken to work together, the requirement for registration of hives so aerial applicators can check, and applicators best practices involving determining beehive presence with their clients.

In addition, Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) which is a phenomenon that describes the massive die-off affecting an entire beehive or bee colony is growing in the US. About one half of U.S. honey bee colonies have vanished with some states estimating a 75% population loss. The cause is unknown but theories include pathogens, pesticides, mites and transgenic crops or genetically modified crops, or a combination thereof, being the causative agents. Since pesticides are possibly a contributing factor, when spraying around bees, consider the selection of the chemical to be used (one not likely to be carried back to the hive), the time of day (when bees are not foraging in the field), the stage of the crop (avoid spraying when the crop or weeds in the field are in bloom), and beekeeper notification (so the hives can be covered to contain the bees while spraying).

With a bit of effort and continual communication, these two important agricultural industries can work together and prosper.

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grain, which means the farmers can time their deliveries for when they need cash flow. Farmers, like all good business people, know it helps to have more than one place to sell their product. Farmers say "It doesn't hurt to support a local market and we like to have more than one market competing for the grain".

Licence Recertification Committee Meeting

The Alberta Licence Recertification Committee held its annual meeting with Alberta Environment to review the Licence Recertification Credit system. Attending the meeting were Fran de Kock, Brent Lange, Peter Hansen, Jill Lane, Jock McIntosh, Vivianne Servant and Linden Lundback of Lakeland College. Topics discussed included a 16% increase in credit sessions available in 2006 with 235 sessions approved, approximately 500 applicators recertify in 2006, online credit access, Lakeland College website and the review of the Alberta Environmental Code of Proactive for Pesticides. A Tri-provincial conference call followed the meeting including representatives from Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Issues discussed included licence reciprocity, credit tracking and in each province and multiple provincial licence holders.

AERIAL APPLICATION AND HONEY BEES

Spring is upon us and the push will soon be on for farmers to get their crops in. The push is also on for Alberta's beekeepers to get our hives up to strength for the upcoming honey and pollination season. Our industry has been appreciative of the positive communication with the Alberta Aerial Applicators, and we hope to continue that trend in the upcoming year. It is always of concern to us when aerial spraying is happening in fields where we have bees. If it is possible for the spraying to be done before 7 am or after 7 pm in those fields it would greatly reduce the chance of accidental kill. It would also be appreciated if you know you are spraying in a field with honey bees, either you the applicator or the farmer that you are spraying for, could get in touch with the beekeeper. Feel free to contact me if there are any questions during the upcoming season.

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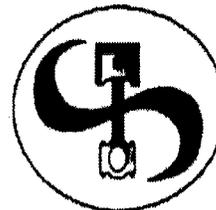
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2007 ALBERTA PEST FORECAST

The risk of economically significant grasshopper populations in 2007 will generally be low for most of Alberta. The 2007 Alberta risk map for grasshoppers shows low populations through much of the province with areas of moderate to severe risk just east of Edmonton and in southern County of Newell and northern M.D. of Taber County.

Areas of moderate to severe risk could experience problems with grasshoppers if environmental conditions favor the hatching and development of grasshoppers in late May through June.

The 2007 grasshopper risk map is based on adult grasshoppers counts conducted in early August of 2006 by Agriculture Fieldmen across the province. These adult counts give an indication of the number of adults capable of reproduction and egg laying. Environmental factors can result in higher or lower actual populations than forecast. Individual producers need to be aware of the potential risks in their area and monitor fields to make any control decisions (if necessary). It is important to remember that the warm dry conditions we experienced in the fall of 2006 may result in higher than predicted populations in 2007.

Particular attention should be paid to areas that traditionally have higher grasshopper populations on individual farms. In addition, grasshoppers tend to lay their eggs near areas of green growth in the fall which may be potential food sources the following spring. Areas with early green plant growth such as field margins, fence-lines and roadsides are also areas that will give early indications of potential grasshopper problems.

If insecticides are needed, note label precautions regarding user safety, proper application techniques and instructions to reduce impacts on non-target organisms. It is important to remember that control measures are intended to protect the crops from economic damage and are never successful in totally eliminating grasshopper populations.

Alberta Agriculture and Food acknowledges the commitment and support of the Agriculture Fieldmen across the province in conducting the surveys essential to the creation of this forecast.

For more information of grasshoppers and their management contact the Ag-Info Centre at 310-FARM (3276).



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