

Producers offered help with on-farm research

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By Barb Glen



Nevin Rosaasen is the policy and program specialist for Alberta Pulse Growers and one of the people involved in developing protocols for farmers to use in doing field-scale research. | Barb Glen photo

Alberta Pulse Growers wants to ensure that farmers carrying out their own research follow correct procedures

Crop research works well in small plots but do the results translate to field scale? That is a common question farmers ask when considering research results.

Alberta Pulse Growers has a project underway to help farmers undertake their own field-scale research and get reliable results despite the variables.

“Definitely farmers can be skeptical of small plot research,” said Nevin Rosaasen, the policy and program specialist with APG.

However, that’s the fundamental basis of how we can actually control so many variables.”

Every field is different but the fundamentals of good research are solid, he added.

He said APG wants to ensure that farmers carrying out their own on-farm research are following the correct procedures.

“What we are interested in is providing them with guidance in how to follow a strip protocol to make sure that they are controlling as many factors as they can and that they’re getting the best data and information possible from field scale research.”

Rosaasen gave an update on APG’s plot-to-field project at the Farming Smarter annual conference in Lethbridge early last month.

The project started in 2016 and this year a team of farmers, agronomists and technicians tested research protocols established last year.

Kent Sande of Lomond, Doug Clemens of Mossleigh and Josh Fankhauser of Claresholm are involved in developing the research protocols at a field scale.

It’s not an easy task given the variation in equipment, field shape, buffer zones, direction of travel, equipment calibration, seed lots, weed control, herbicide, fungicide and desiccant application, to name just a few variables.

Also needed are standardized ways to collect weather and rainfall data and assessing general plant health.

Seeding rate and plant density were the first questions undertaken while testing the protocol. They may not be the sexiest questions, said Rosaasen, but it seemed a logical place to start, with yellow peas as the crop.

Preliminary data is now in but analysis is not yet complete. Results will be shared with pulse growers. The field-scale protocol will also be available to them when it is ready.

Rosaasen said APG is considering its next research question for the project and is relying on growers to provide ideas.

Given what he termed the steady erosion of government funding, development of a protocol for farmers has added importance.

“We do have concerns about the erosion of our research capacity,” he told growers.

In a later interview, Rosaasen said research funds for agriculture pay large dividends — and not just for the growers involved.

“We’ve seen this over the years, that there is this misunderstanding that money that goes into ag research only benefits producers, and generally a lot of commodity organizations are taking up the slack for these budgetary cutbacks.”

But one in seven Canadian jobs is related to agriculture, so research affects the entire economy.

“It’s the grain companies, the railroads, the consumers themselves that end up relying on the fact that we have drought-tolerant crops, that we can provide higher yielding or decent yielding crops in periods of drought.”

However, there have been budget cuts in recent years at both the provincial and federal level for basic agronomic research and extension, he said.