Agri-News

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Diagnosing Plant Problems

Every year, the productivity and profitability of crops are impacted by a wide range of problems, including diseases, insects, chemical, physiological and weather-related disorders. Many problems can be managed; however, the problem must be accurately diagnosed before any treatment can be applied. Diagnosing a problem is like peeling an onion; it is simply the process of asking questions and gathering information until the probable cause is identified.

"The first step in the process is to get out into the field," says Robert Spencer, irrigated and specialty crop specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development's Ag-Info Centre, Stettler. "It is difficult, if not impossible, to correctly and accurately nail down a problem from the cab of a pickup, travelling at 100 km per hour. Producers must spend time in their fields in order to catch issues before they become unmanageable."

Once a problem is seen, the next step is to gather information. Start big and then narrow the focus for greater detail. Producers need to determine how wide spread the problem is, if there is a pattern, if the problem is restricted to only one crop, and if the problem is isolated in one area of the field, or if it is popping up in scattered areas.

After those broader factors have been answered, it's time to gather some peripheral information. Producers should know what types of production practices have been done on the field (such as irrigation, chemical application, tillage, fertilizer or manure application, etc), what the weather has been like, and what has been happening in the neighbouring/adjacent fields.

"Once some of this preliminary information is gathered, it's time to start to focus in on the problem," says Spencer. "It's important to be able to compare what you see on an infected plant to a healthy, normal plant. This comparison gives some reference points. If possible, pull up a plant and look for affected plant parts below ground, also."

The narrower focus will give additional information by establishing exactly what symptoms are present, what part of the plant is affected (head, leaf, stalk, root) and whether or not there is evidence of disease, insect presence or distorted growth that might suggest herbicide injury.

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This Week

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Alberta AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

"Gather other information to eliminate other possible causes," says Spencer. "As you gather information, you will hopefully see a clearer picture form. Further tests may sometimes be required, but hopefully you are closer to final diagnosis and solving the problem."

Contact: Robert Spencer
310-FARM (3276)

Alberta's Berry Crop – Ripe and Ready for the Picking

Producers have waited, and consumers have waited! They have all waited and waited and finally what they have been waiting for has arrived, or so to speak. About two weeks later than normal, Alberta's berry crop is ready for the picking.

"The cool, late spring not only delayed the development of trees and lawns across Alberta this spring, it also delayed development of berry crops across the province," says Lloyd Hausher, provincial fruit industry development specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Brooks. "Strawberries, raspberries, and saskatoons in all regions of the province are late maturing this year. On the positive side, most growers are reporting good fruit set. If mother nature cooperates, this should translate into some easy picking."

Most of Alberta's berry producers sell pick-your-own, many sell pre-picked berries at the farm, and some sell at farmers' markets.

"Take advantage of availability early," says Hausher. "Because the plants got off to a late start, and if the weather happens soar above average for this time of year, production may "flush" very rapidly. Growers are hoping for normal or cooler that normal temperatures over the next month which will spread out the harvest, but one never knows what mother nature has in mind."

Consumers are advised to call or visit their favourite berry farm as early as possible to ensure easy picking. For a listing of berry farms, call toll-free 1-800-661-2642, check out the Alberta Farm Fresh website at www.albertafarmfresh.com, or visit Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development's website at www.agriculture.alberta.ca and look in the maps section.

"Albertans are encouraged to visit a number of farms this summer to obtain a real taste of Alberta as many berry farms also grow other commodities," says Hausher. "Talk to the growers that are producing your food, they are more than willing to answer questions. If you are interested in becoming a part of this exciting industry they will be very happy to share their experiences, secrets, and know how."

Contact: Lloyd Hausher
403-362-1309

Water Supply Expansion Applications Now Being Accepted

The Canada Alberta Water Supply Expansion Program (CAWSEP) is now accepting applications for the 2008/09 year. This continuum is part of the one-year extension for environmental programs under the Agricultural Policy Framework (APF) to allow federal, provincial and territorial governments to negotiate, develop and implement the next phase of agricultural policy and programming, ***Growing Forward***.

An information package explaining the Canada Alberta Water Supply Expansion Program is available on Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's website at www.agr.gc.ca. This package includes a fact sheet that outlines program details, an application form and application guide.

Through this initiative, rural municipalities, incorporated producer groups, agricultural and conservation groups, along with others, have access to support – both technical and financial – for the planning and development of projects that will improve their ability to develop and enhance long-term, sustainable agricultural water supplies.

NOTE: The application deadline date for the 2008/09 fiscal year is **July 25, 2008**.

Two types of projects are eligible for CAWSEP assistance:

1. **Multi-user infrastructure projects –** larger scale projects which provide water to a number of water users, such as tank-loaders and regional pipelines, and that will lead to growth in the agricultural sector.
2. **Strategic work projects –** activities that enhance the understanding of operational and developmental limitations to water resources in Alberta's rural agricultural areas; and projects that promote the development of information and technologies or the dissemination of information, including but not limited to regional groundwater studies, groundwater exploration or testing, regional water management planning, water supply planning, feasibility studies and information extension activities.

Proposals must clearly indicate the ability to complete the project prior to March 31, 2009. If the proposal does not clearly indicate this, it will be screened out.

Please take some time to review the package. For further information or if there are questions about the program, contact Jim Craig at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada/ Agriculture et Agroalimentaire Canada, Westlock, 780-349-3916 or e-mail craigj@agr.gc.ca.

Contact: Jim Craig
780-349-3916
craigj@agr.gc.ca

Chicken Baseline Project a First for Alberta

A baseline study conducted by Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development's Food Safety Division (FSD) has determined the presence of food-borne pathogens and bacteria in Alberta chicken carcasses is similar to that found in other jurisdictions.

The study, which involved collecting 1,474 samples from poultry carcasses in 65 provincially inspected abattoirs, is the first one conducted in the province and will be used to assess procedures introduced to improve food safety.

"We intend to do another study to see if these procedures (interventions) have made a difference. If you don't have this baseline, you cannot measure improvements," says Dr. Valerie Bohaychuk, a FSD scientist for Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development.

Although the levels of bacteria found during the study are comparable to other jurisdictions, there is always room for improvement in the chicken production chain to reduce those levels, Bohaychuk says.

Efforts are already underway in the province to improve good manufacturing practices and to put into place Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HAACP) based processes in the abattoirs.

HACCP is recognized around the world as a science-based system to ensure food safety by preventing potential hazards before they can impact food safety. Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development can provide some funding to eligible processors under a federal program to improve food safety systems. The department also offers some technical guidance on the development of food safety systems.

It took a little more than a year to collect the samples during 2004 and 2005. The project was a collaborative project with FSD and the Regulatory Services Division, involving more than 30 people including scientists, lab technicians, veterinary epidemiologists and inspectors.

The rinsed chicken carcasses were tested for non-food-borne disease-causing bacteria (total aerobic bacteria, coliform bacteria and E. coli) and food-borne disease-causing bacteria (shiga toxin-producing E. coli, salmonella and campylobacter).

The study is part of a comprehensive system of government projects looking at many types of food from farm to fork.

Contact: Ag Info Line
310-FARM (3276)

Emerald Ash Borer - Latest Information

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has confirmed the presence of the emerald ash borer (EAB) in the Montérégie region of Quebec.

EAB does not spread quickly on its own. In fact, it is most commonly spread when people move materials that are infested with this pest. Moving infested materials, even just a few kilometres away, can spread the emerald ash borer to new areas.

Residents of known infested areas can play a key part in helping to control the spread of EAB by not moving the insect or materials such as firewood, logs, branches, nursery stock, chips or other ash wood.

"The Society To Prevent Dutch Elm Disease (STOPDED) is also very concerned about Emerald Ash Borer and the hazards of transporting firewood," says Janet Feddes-Calpas, Alberta's STOPDED coordinator. "Just as residents in infested areas are being asked to help, especially during the summer months, travellers can help by not transporting any firewood, logs, branches, chips or ash wood from one campsite to another."

The Government of Canada is working with provinces and municipalities to limit the spread of the emerald ash borer and protect Canada's valuable forests.

The CFIA will be carrying out increased surveying of trees in the infested area to determine the extent of the infestation and affected property owners will be notified. Regulatory measures to control this pest will be taken based on information obtained through the surveys.

The CFIA continues to work with its partners and stakeholders toward the goal of slowing the spread of this destructive pest.

Contact: Janet Feddes-Calpas
403-782-8613
Toll-free in Alberta by dialling 310-0000 first

Multi-Location Abattoir Study

An exciting project is underway in Alberta to test a multi-location abattoir (MLA). The project is looking for four bison farms/feedlots to be part of the unit testing project.

The abattoir was built by Trivan Truck Body LLC. in Washington and was delivered to Olds College in January 2008. It is a 53' foot long, 8' wide and 14' high unit pulled by a semi tractor and is a totally self-sufficient slaughter plant with its own power, water, holding tanks and cooler. It is designed to have a cooler capacity of approximately 10 finished beef steers.

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Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Olds College and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada are collaborating in a project called ***Optimizing slaughter strategies to manage antemortem stress, carcass and meat quality. Phase I Bison Study***. Field-testing for the MLA unit is taking place during the summer and fall 2008, and will provide additional information to the larger study that is investigating the technical and business feasibility of the MLA unit.

The project's purpose is to compare indices of physiological stress, carcass characteristics and meat quality attributes of animals slaughtered traditionally in permanent facilities following a period of transport, overnight holding, and pre-slaughter handling to animals slaughtered in a multi-location abattoir at their home locations.

The benefits to the bison industry include an understanding of the extent pre-slaughter handling and transport can impact meat quality and animal stress. Data on bison meat characteristics will also increase the limited body of knowledge in this area. If it is demonstrated that an MLA is practical and is adopted by industry, it will provide an option for producers to market their animals through niche opportunities such as locally-grown, humanely-raised and natural.

The study requires participation of four bison farms/feedlots willing to have the unit come to their location tentatively in September to November 2008 and slaughter 12 to 16 bison bulls between 18 and 36 months of age at each farm.

The benefit to the cooperating farm is that there would be no kill fees. Half of the animals will be processed in the mobile unit and their carcasses will be provincially inspected. The producers will be asked to transport the other half of the animals to the Lacombe Research Centre to be slaughtered at the federally inspected abattoir there. At the owner's option, these carcasses may be processed to sub-primal cuts (vacuum packaged) and trim (boxed).

Further processing of the MLA carcasses and all meat will be the responsibility of the cooperating farms. The project will require the entire rib and loin from one side of each carcass for muscle quality evaluations. Compensation will be paid for the meat used in the trial.

Interested bison producers are asked to contact Wayne Robertson, meat quality biologist with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Lacombe, at 403-782-8124 or Jayson Galbraith, elk/bison specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Camrose, at 780-679-5171 for more information.

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Agri-News Briefs

Enjoy Some Summer Sunshine at a U-Pick or Market

Fresh fruit and vegetables can be found at Alberta's farmers' markets, u-pick and farm gate operations throughout the province. Strawberries are one of the most popular fresh picked fruits. June-bearing strawberries are only in season for a short few weeks, but the day-neutral strawberry varieties will produce fruit until the fall frosts. Whether you are looking for strawberries, saskatoons, raspberries, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, carrots, potatoes or cabbage, finding Alberta farm markets is easy, just call 1-800-661-2642 for a free copy of ***Come To Our Farms*** or visit the Alberta Farm Fresh website at www.albertafarmfresh.com. When you go picking remember:

- call ahead to see if the produce is ready and to find out what time the field is open – most farms have regular hours, but there are some where an appointment to pick is needed, so take a moment to check first
- be sure to ask how the farm wants payment
- be a good guest – be respectful and follow the rules whether written or verbal
- leave pets at home and keep your children close to you
- wear a hat, sunglasses and sunscreen, and bring some mosquito repellent
- wear loose, comfortable clothing such as a long sleeved shirt and pants
- bring your own pails (or plan to buy them from the operator, but only if they have them for sale)
- bring a picnic cooler with ice packs to keep berries and vegetables cool until you get home – don't put produce in a cooler without an ice pack – it will just get warmer
- use the product quickly – for fruit two to three days is a maximum, and the fresher the better, whether eating out of hand or preserving.