Agri-News

August 17, 2009

Safety Comes First When Conducting Burns on Your Property

In Alberta, Fire Permits are required during the fire season. If you live in or near the province's forested areas, you are encouraged to take extra care while conducting any type of burning. Warm, dry summer days with strong winds can fuel wildfires, which have the potential to damage your property and the properties of your neighbours.

Over the past five years agricultural burning has started more than 1,200 wildfires across Alberta.

"Like a lot of my neighbours, I take great pride in running a safe and sustainable farming operation," said Wes Nimco, wildfire prevention officer with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development. "One of the ways I help protect my family's property and the safety of my neighbours is to make sure I only burn when the conditions are right and to completely extinguish my fire before calling it a day."

You can help keep your burning effective and safe by taking the following precautions:

- avoid burning in windy or gusty conditions – even a small spark can travel a long way in blustery conditions
- when possible, burn later in the day (after 6:00 p.m.) – generally, the fire will burn slower during this period, which will help you contain the fire
- ensure all brush piles that are burning at the same time can be adequately monitored – if necessary, have additional manpower and equipment on site to help ensure the fires are contained
- ensure the fire is properly extinguished – fires can smoulder underground and reappear much later as wildfires

Remember, during the fire season (typically from April 1 to October 31) fire permits are required to conduct any type of burning – except lighting a campfire – within the Forest Protection Area of Alberta. Permits are free and available at any Alberta Sustainable Resource Development office. To find the office nearest you, call 310-0000.

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This Week

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Alberta AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

If you are outside the Forest Protection Area, contact the local municipality for information about local fire permit requirements.

Contact: Geoffrey Driscoll
Community Relations Coordinator
Forestry Information Unit
Sustainable Resource Development
780-644-4552

Maintaining Green Pea Quality at Harvest

There are currently 28 grading factors for field pea under the official grading guide of the Canadian Grain Commission. However, under primary and export grade determinants – colour, adherence of ear tag (soil), immaturity, staining, other classes (admixtures or off types), bleaching, and foreign material are the main determinants of grade. Seed that is damaged or cracked can also have an affect on marketability.

(Different grade names and determiants are listed online at www.grainscanada.gc.ca/oggg-gocg/16/oggg-gocg-16f-eng.htm)

To meet the highest grade there must good natural colour, no more than 0.5 per cent of other classes and no more than 2.0 per cent bleached seed for a total of less than 2.0 per cent. The total foreign material (ergot, excreta, and insect parts) must be no greater than 0.1 per cent. As well, there can be no more than 5.0 per cent cracked seed coats and no more than 3.0 per cent total damage (nil = heated, 0.3 % = insect damage, other damage = 2.0 %, shrivelled =2.0 %, 0.5 % = splits). The only caveat here is that buyers may have more stringent or less stringent determinants in purchasing green field pea and assigning a grade or price for that crop.

"To ensure the best grade and maintain quality during the harvest is most often the question on producers' minds at this time of the year," says Mark Olson, provincial pulse industry development specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. "There are number of agronomic practices at the start of the growing season that would have been of major benefit, and should be kept in mind for next year. At the start of a season, select uniform fields, use clean seed that does not contain admixtures such as yellow pea or maple pea, roll the pea field just after seeding to minimize earth tag, and have good control of weeds in the fields to prevent sticky sap from weeds getting onto the pea seed which will cause dirt will adhere to.

"It is important to control difficult weeds, especially perennials such as Canada thistle, dandelion, sow thistle, quackgrass and toadflax in the crop prior to the year you will be growing field peas. An application of glyphosate pre-harvest is highly recommended as well (ie. Roundup WeatherMax®, Touchdown Total®, Roundup Transorb HC®, Touchdown iQ®, Factor 540®, T/R 540®, Roundup Ultra 2®, Vantage Plus Max II)."

At harvest, the options are more limited, but there are number of things that farmers can do to enhance grading:

- **Colour** - green material (either green weeds or green pea material) will increase the susceptibility of the seed to earth tag. Using a desiccant that contains diquat (Reglone®) to assist in drying down green material (including slower maturing areas of the field and weeds) will help get the green pea crop off the field faster. The timing of the application of diquat is important since too early could affect quality and yield. The bottom third of the plant should have pods that are dry and ripe – seeds are detached from pods and will rattle. The middle third of the plant will have pods that are shrunken and leathery – seeds are full size and soft, but not juicy and the seed will split into two halves when squeezed between the fingers. The top third of the plant will have pods that are fleshy and green or starting to turn yellow – seeds are immature. As well, combining the field pea crop when the moisture content reaches 18 to 20 per cent moisture for the first time and aerating down to dry is essential. Natural dry down of the green pea crop in most instances will lead to lower grade.
- **Admixtures** - if growing both yellow and green field pea, remember to thoroughly clean combines, trucks and augers when switching between types.
- **Bleaching** - field pea is considered bleached if one eighth or more of the surface area is bleached to a distinct yellow colour which is in marked contrast to its natural colour. If three peas out of 100 have a bleached area, the sample will grade a No. 3 Canada or lower. Bleaching is due to the maturing seed being exposed to wet and drying conditions as well as sunlight. The grower's goal with green pea is to harvest as quickly as possible once the crop is mature.

For further information on bettering the chances of grading high and maintaining green pea quality at harvest, call Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development's Ag Info Center toll-free at 310-FARM (3276).

For information on the product, Reglone®, contact a local Syngenta Crop Protection representative.

Contact: Mark Olson
780-968-3556

Ag-Info Centre
310-FARM (3276)

Three Steps to Building a Profitable Grazing System

Focussing management efforts on the grazing resource can contribute significantly to improving profitability in beef cow/calf operations. It does, however, require managers to go beyond grazing yield and examine the economics of the grazing systems. Whether evaluating the current system or charting forward a new combination, taking a planned approach reduces unknowns and focuses the process on the economics.

"Local forage or research association field days can be the place to take stock of grazing systems and learn about options to make profit-driven improvements to individual operations," says Dale Kaliel, senior economist: production economics with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Edmonton. "While touring plots and demonstrations, producers should ask for each option they view, is it 'doable' on their operation, will it pay, will it make a grazing system better and will it improve a beef enterprise's costs."

When evaluating their grazing system, the first thing producers need to do is shed the old mind-set of grazing as a cost centre. When grazing is viewed as a cost center, the tendency is to minimize expenses and directly or indirectly shorten the grazing season.

"A recent AgriProfit$ economic analysis showed that cow herd feed costs per animal unit day (AUD) commonly exceeds the daily cost of grazing. This provides motivation to seek opportunities to extend the grazing season," says Kaliel. "When the grazing system is viewed as a profit center, a more effective balance is struck between productivity and cost per animal unit month (AUM). Grazing is then treated like any other crop, and as a result, the land can earn a profit relative to its productive and economic potential."

A systems evaluation involves assessing what each of the system elements contributes to improved profitability. Each element must be profitable in its own right, and the sum of the elements should reduce overall costs, improve overall value of production, or a combination of both.

The three steps to building a profitable grazing system are:

Step 1 – assess individual grazing elements – whether evaluating an existing system or considering changes, the starting point is to assess each field's basic unit costs, returns (at a reasonable market value) and resulting profit. In this step the producer needs to know the unit costs per AUM (not per acre). With the expected costing and productivity information, decisions on continuing a grazing application, taking on a new practice or bringing in a new crop become more effective.

For crops they've grown in the past, producers can build their assessments based on their historical costing. If they don't have their own cost information, or are looking at a new practice or grazing crop, local benchmarks are a good starting point.

The goal is to define the full costs and returns, going beyond the primary costs of seed, fertilizer and chemicals and including operating costs such as machinery operating and labour value, and overheads such as taxes, depreciation and capital interest. A share of the cost for establishing perennial crops may also need to be included.

"At the end of this step, the decision point is fairly straight forward," says Kaliel. "A specific grazing option would only be entertained if it will be profitable over the long term."

Step 2 – grazing system assessment – involves accounting for the quantity, quality and timing of grazing dry matter delivered to livestock over the course of the grazing season. A system assessment that incorporates economics requires that the costs and value of grazing produced be tallied, including key measures such as:

- profitability of the whole grazing system
- total cost per AUM raised (again, not per acre)
- the flexibility buffer the system delivers

"An economic assessment of a grazing system provides the manager with an enterprise plan that is profit-driven, not production-driven," says Kaliel. "Its strength is that it shows the value of balancing intensity, crop options and timing of delivery in dollars and cents. Grazing system profitability is seldom achieved when the focus is to minimize expenses."

Step 3 – herd and grazing combined –a simple tally of the current herd plus grazing enterprise costs and returns. The intent is to show net profit for the use of the herd and grass production assets combined. This is the "base case" against which change options will be compared.

"This step offers opportunity to entertain complementary actions within each enterprise," says Kaliel. "Using this three step process to take stock of current performance and to evaluate opportunities will put you on the path to business success. Remember that each field, practice or crop in the farm plan must be profitable and any change must add to field profitability. The grazing system must be long-term profitable and again, any change must add to enterprise profit. Also, the combined herd and grazing enterprises must be profitable and any change within either must be shown to improve overall profitability."

Contact: Dale A. Kaliel
780-427-5390

Take Some Garden Notes During the Summer

Planning perennial beds, borders and edgings can be an exciting process that rewards with beauty and colour for years to come. Taking a look at what is in the flower beds now, and noting what needs to be added or changed or replanted will come in very handy when it's time to split some of those overgrown perennials or choose new plants next spring.

Annuals are chosen each year, making it easier to experiment with colour combinations and plant height variations. When choosing perennials, however, keep in mind that they will occupy their space for a longer time.

While perennials provide colour with little maintenance for years, many have a short bloom time. With a little forethought, a well-planned border can give a yard a changing vista from spring to summer to fall.

An important step in planning is to identify any trouble spots in the yard since it is easier to match the plants to the growing conditions. While viewing the yard, be sure to notice and jot down which areas are in full sun, full shade or part shade. Remember that the sun will be in a different location in the summer than it is in early spring, and what is in full shade in April, may not be in June. If there are white coloured buildings or windows by an area, reflected heat can cause isolated burning to plants.

Most plants hate "wet feet," so note whether the soil is wet, normal or dry. Soil that retains moisture for a week is considered normal draining soil. West-facing hillsides or spots under trees tend to be drier than others. Notations made ahead of time will help when picking plants that can thrive in specific soil conditions.

Be sure to note soil texture – clay, sand, silt, or a mixture. Clay soils tend to be wet and are often slow to warm in the spring, while sandy soils are drier and warm-up quickly. Adding organic matter, such as well rotted manure, peat moss, leaf mould or compost can help sandy soils hold moisture and help clay soils open up and drain better.

Note the direction of the prevailing winds during summer and winter. Summer winds can cause damage to heavy and taller perennials such as peonies and delphiniums, and can bruise or tear delicate flowers. Winter winds can effect where the snow lays in the yard, usually the place where the snow stays the longest in the spring.

Finally, note any physical structures in the yard that can be incorporated in the design or challenge the design. Think about fences, out buildings, trees or flowering trees and shrubs that need to be tied-in with the flower colour of the perennials.

Drawing out a blueprint of the garden area complete with notes on the style of border (traditional or mixed), the shape and location of formal or informal gardens, can be very helpful during spring planting.

A few tips to add a little convenience to the beds and borders are:

- have a 45 to 60 cm path between walls or buildings and a wide border. to allow air circulation to the plants and make maintenance easier
- painting a fence may have to be done eventually, so leave a bit of space between the fence and the plants
- stepping-stones through out a border or bed will allow for walking among the plants and easier maintenance

Information on yard, garden, turf, shrub and tree care is included in the Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development publication, ***Alberta Yards and Gardens: What to Grow***. This book contains information to help Albertans successfully grow ornamental trees and shrubs, small fruits and berries, flowers, vegetables, herbs and water plants. Cost of the publication is $15 (plus GST). Copies are available at the Alberta Agriculture Publications Office, 7000 - 113 Street, Edmonton, AB T6H 5T6, or by calling toll-free 310-FARM (3276). Include $2 (plus GST) for shipping and handling. VISA and MasterCard are accepted.

To view this publication and print a faxable order form, visit www.agric.gov.ab.ca/publications and click on *Yards and Gardens*.

Local garden centres can also provide information for gardeners on perennial plant choices in their area.

Contact: Ag-Info Centre
310-FARM (3276)

Do Not Treat Canola Storage Bins with Malathion

As canola growers prepare for harvest, the Canola Council of Canada (CCC) reminds them to keep the insecticide malathion far away from bins slotted for canola storage. Malathion is not registered to treat bins that will store canola or to control insects in stored canola.

Malathion attracts to the oil in canola seed making it easy for this insecticide to move into canola seed from storage bin walls.

The countries that buy Canadian canola set limits on pesticide residues. Exceeding those limits can mean rejected shipments and increased monitoring. Because of Canada's bulk grain handling system, every load of canola delivered needs to meet the requirements of all export customers.

Canadian canola seed exports amount to over $3.1 billion. Detection of residues could cost the industry, including farmers, millions of dollars in business.

Bins that have been treated recently with malathion, should not be used for canola storage this fall. A minimum of six months must pass before a malathion-treated bin can be used to store canola.

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To harvest and store canola to keep it insect-free:

- adjust combine settings to harvest sound seed and to minimize chaff and weed seeds in the sample
- chose bins in good condition and sweep out thoroughly before harvest; make sure the bin is free of chaff, seeds and foreign material
- if considering a bin treatment, a registered diatomaceous earth product can be used to treat empty bins but should never be used directly on canola seed as the product will not be effective

Canola that is sound and reasonably free of chaff, volunteer cereal, weed seeds, foreign material and insects of concern, should store well and remain insect-free if kept below 15°C and eight per cent moisture.

More information on proper canola storage and keeping canola export ready, is available online at www.canolacouncil.org/

Contact: Ag-Info Centre
310-FARM (3276)

Beefing Up Competition and Fun

More than 100 beef heifer project members descended on the Olds Agricultural Society Grounds on July 6 to 9, 2009 for the 33rd Annual Provincial Beef Heifer Show.

"We were concerned that the dry conditions affecting many producers in the province would impact the Provincial Beef Heifer Show, but thankfully the skies opened up and we received some much needed moisture," says Rob Smith, 4-H regional specialist and Provincial Beef Heifer Show coordinator. "It is outstanding to see the commitment of the youth and their parents to both the cattle industry and 4-H, despite the challenges they have been facing."

One of the highlights of this year's event was a visit from Maria Stevens, Denver National Judging Competition High Point Champion, who traveled from her home state of Kansas to attend the show as a judge.

The show team judging class, where two competitors are paired-up and one acts as the judge and the other as the ring person, was an intense competition. **Riley Sharp** (East Lacombe 4-H Multi) and **Zane Bennett** (East Lacombe 4-H Multi) took first place in the junior division, **Tyler Dietrich** (Hastings Coulee 4-H Beef) and **Andie Hadway** (West Didsbury 4-H Multi) won the intermediate division, and **Anthony Murphy** (Lakedell 4-H Beef) and **Tyson Hertz** (John Ware 4-H Beef) took home top honours as the senior team judging champions.

For the senior member, personal development activity "You're Hired!" session, 32 of 46 members participated. Twelve outstanding members were selected for an interview-based challenge that tested their skills.

At the end of the show, two Supreme champions were crowned. Taking home the ultimate top prize for Supreme Purebred Champion was **Rhianna Congdon** (Nebraska 4-H Multi), and the Supreme Commercial Champion honours went to **Tyson Hertz** (John Ware 4-H Beef).

Sponsorship for the Provincial Beef Heifer Show was provided by Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development, Alberta Beef Producers, AMA Insurance, Apache Canada Ltd., Gas Alberta Inc., Kubota, Lammles, Penn West Energy Trust, and WestGen Endowment Fund.

For more information and full results from the Provincial Beef Heifer Show, visit the 4-H website at www.4h.ab.ca

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Agri-News Briefs

Greenhouse Business Newsletter Available Online

The Greenhouse Business Newsletter, a resource that many industry members rely upon for good decision making information, has recently been revived. Dr. Mohyuddin Mirza and Nabi Chaudhary will be working with the Alberta Greenhouse Growers Association (AGGA) as part of the Greenhouse Resource Extension Assistance Team (GREAT) to publish this newsletter on a quarterly basis. The January to April, 2009 issue has been posted to Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development's website and includes these articles:

- The Greenhouse Industry Show & Conference
- So What is Going On Around The Industry?
- Scientific Research and Education Development Tax Incentive Program
- Factors Affecting pH and E.C. of the Growing Media
- Growing Forward
- Direction of Natural Gas Prices?

To view the newsletter, visit www.agriculture.alberta.ca and search *The Greenhouse Business*.

WaterEDWest

WaterEDWest is a unique conference focusing on water education where delegates will have opportunities to share, network and investigate the current issues and best practices facing those who work to meet the growing need for effective water education. The first conference solely dedicated to evaluating, advancing and promoting water education is being held at the Banff Centre in Banff on September 10 to 13, 2009. Registration fee is $400. More information and an online registration are available online at www.wateredwest.ca/ For more information, contact Jason Toner at 780-421-1497 or e-mail jtoner@insideeducation.ca

Dine Alberta - Cook's Harvest Tour

Dine Alberta and Food Lovers Guides Judy Schultz and Mary Bailey are inviting restaurateurs to join a harvest tour of several farms in the Edmonton area. The tour will raise awareness of local vegetables, showcase what is in season and grow possibilities for custom and contract growing. The tour will also be an opportunity to network with other cooks, chefs and growers. This full-day event is being held on September 8, 2009, beginning at 8:00 a.m. and concluding at approximately 3:45 p.m. The event, which includes lunch, snacks, product sampling and transportation, is free but seats are limited and must be booked by August 26, 2009. One two people per restaurant please. For further information and to register contact Marlene Abrams at 780-963-4709 or e-mail marlene.abrams@gov.ab.ca