



# Agri-News

October 18, 2010

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## **Growing Opportunities in Hemp and Flax**

Alberta Biomaterials Development Centre (ABDC) recently held a crop walk near Vegreville, Alberta to share flax and hemp feedstock development, evaluation and best management practices. Thirty people gathered at Alberta Innovates – Technology Futures (Tech Futures) to learn more about the Northern Adapted Flax Program, Viterra’s Flax Nursery and the Hemp Fibre Cultivars Program.

“The Northern Adapted Flax Variety Development is a 10-year breeding and agronomy project administered by SaskFlax,” says Patti Breland, project coordinator with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. “The breeding portion of the project is headed by Dr. Paul Dribnenki program leader and chief flax breeder with Viterra, and agronomy by Dr. Jan Slaski, crop and plant physiologist with Tech Futures, both based at the Tech Futures Vegreville facility. Research collaborators include Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) Morden, AAFC Melfort and the British Columbia Grain Producers Association. The project aims to develop flax varieties better adapted to the northern half of the Canadian Prairies; including central and northern Alberta as well as the Peace River region of Alberta and British Columbia.”

Canada represents approximately 80 per cent of world flax export trade, and the Canadian climate favours the production of high quality oil from flax seed. Currently, flax is primarily adapted to the southern prairie regions.

Alberta grows only three per cent of flax grown in Canada. “There is a critical need in Alberta for flax varieties to be developed for Alberta’s unique cooler climate to lower production risks and enhance competitiveness,” says Dribnenki.

In 2010, Viterra’s breeding project will evaluate over 12,000 flax strains to begin developing cultivars suited for northern climates and cool season zones across Canada. The study also is being conducted in Melfort, Saskatchewan, and Fort St. John, B.C.

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“Northern climate grown flax has a quality and yield advantage over that grown in southern prairies,” says Dribnenki. “The quality advantage is characterized by high oil content and significantly lower levels of saturated fatty acids, which translates into an unusually high level of Omega-3. The Northern Flax project is focused on developing flax varieties that are tolerant to early seeding (extended growing season), resist reflowering during cool, wet autumns, and have better synchronicity between boll and stem maturity. These northern strains will be incorporated in a suite of flax varieties from very early to regular maturity requirements. The bottom line is to develop varieties that are more farmer-friendly and higher yielding.

The progress of this Northern Flax Project can be followed online by visiting the Saskatchewan Flax website at [www.saskflax.com/](http://www.saskflax.com/)

Also during the crop walk, an exhibition plot of six hemp cultivars, including Alyssa, Crag, Carmen, Anka, USO 14 (registered for cultivation in Canada) and Tech Futures-owned cultivar Silesia, was toured. This demonstration plot is intended to demonstrate industrial hemp opportunities.

“Tech Futures started research seven years ago to determine if hemp could be grown successfully as a crop in Alberta,” says Slaski. “The program has led to the creation of one of the largest hemp research groups in Canada.”

Currently, there are 20,000 acres of hemp in Canada and demand for the fibre is growing. The passage of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA) in 1997, provided the legislative authority to allow commercial production of hemp in Canada with a license from Health Canada.

Presently in Canada, there is no herbicide registered to control weeds in industrial hemp, so in response to hemp industry requests, Tech Futures has initiated studies aimed at identification of suitable means of chemical weed control.

This project is ongoing, and ABDC will publish the results of the hemp trials online, when available.

ABDC is the link to capitalize on feedstock expertise and help turn biomass into sustainable opportunities. Visit [www.albertabiomaterials.ca](http://www.albertabiomaterials.ca) for more information.

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## **Reminder to Farmers: Protect Hay and Feed from Deer and Elk**

It's the time of year for animals to start preparing for winter. With high numbers of deer, elk and moose in many areas of the province, agricultural producers are reminded to take steps to prevent damage to stored hay and feed.

Producers can reduce or eliminate ungulate damage over the winter with these preventative measures:

- move bales from the field to a feed yard or protected storage area
- use straw bales as a protective barrier for feed stores
- fencing can be more effective if bales are stacked two tiers high
- use fencing or place posts before freeze up to prepare permanent stack-yard sites
- store grain only in protective storage bins
- monitor stored feed and promptly chase ungulates from feed stores

“Allowing access for hunting on your land can also reduce damage caused by deer and elk,” says Julie Desrochers, public information, education and outreach program officer with Alberta Sustainable Resource Development.

Antlerless Elk Special Licence hunting opportunities have been extended in January in numerous WMUs. Refer to the 2010 Alberta Guide to Hunting regulations for the Big Game Season tables for details on specific WMU season dates.

The Alberta government assists producers in protecting stacked and stored feed through the Ungulate Damage Prevention Program. Limited supplies of temporary fences are available. For more information, please contact the nearest Alberta Sustainable Resource Development office by phoning, toll free, 310-0000.

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## **Not Just Another Farm Tool – ATVs are Key Concern for Farm Safety**

ATVs are indispensable because of their ability to access remote areas when vehicles such as pickup trucks and tractors cannot. Farmers and agricultural workers often use ATVs to inspect and maintain crops, property, and their livestock. But, as useful as they are, ATVs can also be dangerous.

“Between 2002 and 2009, statistics show that, 10 per cent of deaths associated with ATVs in Alberta were directly related to farming activities,” says Kathy Belton, associate director of the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research. “These deaths occurred while performing ordinary tasks such as herding livestock, towing or hauling goods and checking fences.”

ATVs are often used on family farms and the line between work and recreation is sometimes blurred. While an ATV may have originally been bought for farm work, it may also be used for recreation.

“Whether an ATV is used for work or play everyone must remember these are powerful and heavy machines,” says Laura Nelson, executive director of the Alberta Farm Safety Centre. “ATVs can travel as fast as a truck, without the protection of a truck. You don’t have anything like a seatbelt, airbag or cab to protect you. Any loss of control can lead to injuries and lost productivity on the farm. And no one wants to live with the on-going ache of regret after a death.”

“Most fatalities from ATV crashes are the result of head injury,” says Belton. “Whether you’re making a quick trip to the barn or spending an afternoon on trails, one of the most important things to do is always wear an approved ATV helmet that has face and eye protection.”

Safety experts also recommend that riders refuse to carry or be a passenger on ATVs built for one person. A passenger on a single-rider ATV reduces the driver’s ability to stop, turn or shift their weight and makes the ATV unbalanced.

Organizations such as the Alberta Off-Highway Vehicle Association and the Alberta Safety Council offer hands-on training which provides riders with the special skills and practice they need. ATVs may look easy to operate, but it takes practice and experience to learn to navigate the terrain and situations that riders can come across.

When it comes to children and ATVs, the evidence is clear: children and youth do not have what it takes to ride safely. Children have less strength, control, coordination and judgment than adults which ultimately translates to a higher risk of injury and death.

“Kids are safest if they don’t ride ATVs of any size. But if kids under 16-years old are going to ride ATVs, they should only be riding machines made for their age, weight and maturity,” says Belton. “We urge parents to follow manufacturers’ recommendations regarding the proper size machine for their children.”

Nelson points to The North American Guidelines for Children’s Agricultural Tasks ([www.nagcat.org/nagcat/](http://www.nagcat.org/nagcat/)) for help with determining if children and youth are ready to use a youth-size ATV for chores. “This guide outlines a number of questions you can ask yourself to make this important decision – a decision that may have life-altering consequences.”

More information about ATV safety is available on the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research website at [www.acicr.ualberta.ca](http://www.acicr.ualberta.ca) or by calling 780-492-6019.

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## **Foraging On Change: Eating Up the Opportunities**

The Western Canadian Grazing Conference and Tradeshow is the premier grazing event for producers, industry leaders, and key stakeholders in western Canada. This year, the event takes place in Vermilion on December 1 and 2, 2010.

The change of venue for the 2010 conference to the Vermilion Regional Centre, which is right across the road from Lakeland College, made it possible to offer an afternoon of “hands-on” lab sessions for conference attendees.

“Through our partnership with Lakeland College, we have been able to tap into the expertise of college instructors, classroom and farm facilities to deliver a selection of lab sessions attendees can choose from. They will be able to experience everything from range and pasture health assessments, plant identification, ration balancing with the Cowbytes program, stock dog training, corn grazing, on-farm solar developments and electric fencing,” says Albert Kuipers, manager of the Grey Wooded Forage Association and co-chair of the conference organizing committee. “In addition to these lab sessions, producers will be able to get up-to-date with the latest and greatest innovations during the tradeshow. Numerous agri-businesses will be showcasing products and techniques to help producers stay profitable and sustainable.”

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Topics being addressed during the conference include: multispecies grazing; use of new technology in beef operations; management practices for extending the grazing season; stockpiled grazing; understanding land quality and capability; beef cow nutrition in the grazing season; mob grazing for pasture rejuvenation; and Grazing 101.

“Overall, the committee has developed a program that will address some of the current issues faced by forage producers and graziers of all levels,” says Kuipers. “We have tapped into the great resource that is Alberta and have placed extremely knowledgeable producers, in addition to researchers and extension staff, from across the province on the program to share their grazing experiences with everything from stockpiled to mob and multispecies grazing.”

“Featured speakers at the conference include Wendy Holm, a renowned Canadian economist, author, and journalist, who will discuss the sustainability of agriculture, and Dr. David Sauchyn, senior research scientist with the Prairie Adaptation Research Collaborative (PARC) and professor at the University of Regina, who will look at understanding climate cycles and what they may be telling us about the future,” adds Stephanie Kosinski, forage specialist with Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development. “As well, Don Campbell, an experienced Holistic Management Certified Educator and grazer, will delve into how to increase production without increasing land base.”

This conference is presented by the Agricultural Research and Extension Council of Alberta (ARECA), Lakeland College, the Government of Alberta and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, along with strong support from numerous agri-businesses. For more conference information and online registration forms, visit the ARECA website at [www.areca.ab.ca](http://www.areca.ab.ca)

Information is also available by calling ARECA at 780-416-6046 or the Ag-Info Centre at 310-FARM (3276). Registration is \$190 per person, and early registration is recommended. Producers who register by November 19, 2010, will be entered into a draw to win the cost of a single registration back.

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## **Alberta's Elm-Pruning Ban is Over**

Elm sanitation is essential to an integrated Dutch Elm Disease (DED) prevention program. To help prevent DED, elms in Alberta can only be pruned between October 1 and March 31, when there is no danger of spreading this disease.

“The deadly DED fungus is spread by three insect vectors: the banded, native and smaller European elm bark beetles,” says Janet Feddes-Calpas, STOPDED executive director. “Elm bark beetles feed on healthy elms during the summer, and breed and over winter in dead and dying elm trees.

“Between October 1 and March 31, these beetles are not active, and elms can be safely pruned. However, if elm trees are pruned between April 1 and September 30, these vectors of the disease will be drawn to the scent of the fresh pruning cuts, potentially attracting infested beetles and infecting an otherwise healthy elm.”

Having a tree pruned properly is important. A professional arborist can determine what type of pruning is necessary to maintain or improve the health, appearance and safety of trees. Improper pruning, topping or removing an excessive amount of live wood is not recommended, as this will weaken the tree's structure and shorten its lifespan.

It is essential that all elm dead wood be removed and properly disposed of by burning, burying or chipping by March 31. To prevent the spread of DED, do not transport or store elm firewood.

“While Alberta is still free of DED, its borders are being pressed from two sides, Saskatchewan and Montana, both battling the disease,” says Feddes-Calpas. “There is no cure once an elm is infected, but DED can be prevented. We must stay vigilant to keep our elms healthy.”

For more information, call the STOPDED hotline at 1-877-837-ELMS or check out the web site at [www.stopded.org](http://www.stopded.org)

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