

# The Potato Minute

October 1, 2021

**PGA**  
POTATO GROWERS OF ALBERTA  
Est. 1966

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT - Terence Hochstein

When I was much younger, I never understood or appreciated the wisdom of the elders of our community. My grandparents were just old people who didn't understand why the youth of the day did what we did. My parents were just old fashioned, just like the generation before them, and we were all smarter than any of them. Fast forward the years, and I am now that grandparent who is rapidly counting the years, watching and enjoying life pass us by at breakneck speed. History tends to repeat itself, so I am sure a poll of my kids and grandkids would result in the same thoughts. Hours turn into days, days into weeks, weeks into months and suddenly another crop is behind us. It seems like only last week the crop was going into the ground and everyone was looking forward to a bountiful growing season...good weather, and another couple of weeks will wrap up the 2021 crop. Autumn is definitely here, once again.

***"Two sounds of autumn are unmistakable.... the hurrying rustle of crisp leaves blown along the street... by a gusty wind, and the gabble of a flock of migrating geese." – Hal Borland***



*Terence digging out probe sensor in sample field, east of Taber.*

After enduring what seemed like a never ending hot dry summer, so far, the fall weather has been more than cooperative with the fall harvest. For some, harvest started in early August and was virtually done before it ever started. Cereal crops were disastrous to say the least, and with commodity pricing being at all time highs, many producers had very little to take advantage of the pricing. The same holds true in the potato industry with demand from the

processors being extremely high and crops across the west being short in quantity. The extreme heat and drought from the past several months have left growers short on quantity and the quality in some lots will be variable. Our seed yields will also be off somewhat compared to the last few years. One of the bright spots this year is our chip growers and creamer growers are having a good yielding year. For reasons unknown, these varieties were not affected as much as some of the fry varieties, by the extreme heat, at the end of June/early July. It will be another month before we will know how the crop turned out, once all the harvest reports are in.

Normally following harvest, we hold our annual fall meetings in the North and South. We are still unsure what format these meetings will follow, but the dates have been set for Tuesday, October 19th in the South and Thursday, October 21st in the North.

Due to the current situation around COVID-19, the regular format of the 2021 PGA Conference and Tradeshow scheduled for Nov 22-24th, in Red Deer must be altered. Unfortunately, there will not be a tradeshow and live line-up of speakers as we know it. However, we are still working on a format for our Seed Grower meeting and AGM Business meeting on Tuesday, November 23rd. More information in the weeks to follow

*Until next month,*

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## SEED COORDINATOR UPDATE - Stacey Bajema

Seed Growers in Alberta were, once again, blessed with a beautiful harvest season with very few weather concerns. There was a lot of anxiety among growers going into this harvest season as Alberta experienced a severely dry growing season. Early August predictions were dire. However, we did see some timely rainfall late in the season. Driving through northern Alberta this harvest season, there was a renewed sense of optimism. Although this is undoubtedly a below average harvest, Alberta seed growers recognize that yields could have been much worse and there will be a healthy demand for our 2021 crop.

### Seed Directory

As Seed lot certification information is being finalized, growers can expect to be contacted regarding the upcoming 2021 Seed Potato Directory. We expect the directory to be posted on the PGA website in November.

### Regional Agricultural Master Plan

The Edmonton Regional Metropolitan Board, consisting of 13 municipalities in the Edmonton Area, approved the new Regional Agricultural Master Plan (RAMP) on August 12, 2021. This new policy framework is meant to identify and preserve prime agricultural lands in the region to ensure a sustainable future for food production in the region. RAMP provides certainty to producers, protecting valuable, productive agricultural lands throughout the Region, and secures these lands to ensure a local food source for future generations. (Rod Shaigic, Mayor, Parkland County)  
To read more: Regional Agriculture Master Plan (RAMP)

As always, if you have any questions, contact me anytime.

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### Seed Harvest



### Storing Heat Stressed Potatoes

So far this fall, we have been blessed with good harvest weather and cooler temperatures. Driving around the country this last week, I think it is safe to say that this year's potato harvest is well under way. I have stopped by quite a few farms and have looked at the potatoes going into storage. I am sure that everyone has realized that the extreme heat we had this summer has had a negative effect on the potato crop. Although potato domestication and variety development have come a long way, the potato is, after all, a plant species native to the high, cool Andes in the Peruvian and Bolivian regions of South America.



The photo above are Russet Burbank potatoes, which shows an extreme and very visible example of how the heat stress affected the size and profile of this year's potato crop. The heat in late June and early July did more than affect the size and profile of the tubers. "High temperatures during tuber initiation increase the respiration rate using up energy and reducing tuber set. A high respiration rate mid-season or later may cause the production of a second set of tubers which never size up – high temperatures during the bulking slow down tuber bulking resulting in yield losses" - Eugenia Banks (Revisiting the Impact of Heat Stress on Potatoes, Spudsmart). Another very visible sign of the heat stress that we observed this year was the tremendous canopy growth, as the potato plants put more energy to vegetative growth rather than to tuber set and bulking.

The heat stress has also impacted the health of the tubers, as there is a long list of other physiological disorders that these potatoes can develop in storage. Such physiological



issues may include tuber deformations, sugar ends (also called translucent ends or jelly end rot), growth cracks, heat necrosis, internal brown spot, secondary growth, blackheart and physiologically old tubers. The important question now, as we are

harvesting and storing this year's crop, is what does this mean for the medium to long-term storage of these spuds?

One issue that is already apparent is sugar end disorder. Tubers that are affected by sugar ends cannot be healed through conditioning in the storage. These potatoes will not improve as the sugar end development happened as a direct result of the heat stress at tuber initiation and early tuber bulking. The storage management issue is to keep these potatoes from breaking down and to maintain acceptable color for the portion of the potato not affected by sugar ends. It is important to be aware that the collapse of tissue in the sugar end rot area provides an opening for other pathogens to infect the tuber. Therefore, regular and diligent management of the potato storage is crucial in spotting potential problems, while still manageable - Nora Olson & Mike Thornton, (Review of the Sugar End Disorder in Potato).

The old expression, 'a potato storage is not a hospital,' may prove to be more relevant than ever this year. In addition to sugar ends, the top storage diseases (late blight, pink rot, pythium leak, fusarium dry rot and bacterial soft rot) may well all be of more concern this year. This is of course due to the stress that this year's potato crop has been subjected to. "We had a lot of cycling between extreme high and more normal, cooler temperatures" says Dr. Neilson, "This is very stressful on plants. For storage what this means is that the tubers are going in compromised and any further stress experienced is going to be magnified." Such stress will make the stored crop more susceptible to all storage issues. All the usual best management practices apply: ensuring good air flow, carefully managing temperature and regular monitoring for sugar spikes will be the key strategies to limiting any further losses. New research at the Lethbridge Research and Development Center, AAFC-AAC is looking into interventions to prevent or lessen the impacts of extreme weather on potato crops. "We have a couple research projects that are beginning this year to see what can be done to address weather related damage to potato canopy and tubers. The first part is to lessen the impact in the field and the second is to remediate the tuber physiological problems in storage."

I hope that we continue to have favorable weather conditions throughout the rest of harvest and, as always, take the time to work safely! I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Jonathan Nielson and Dr. Dmytro Yevtushenko for their assistance in writing and reviewing this article.

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# Alberta Young Speakers for Agriculture

By: Craig Lester

The winners of this year's virtual Alberta Young Speakers for Agriculture (AYSA) event have roots that run deep in agriculture.

Alyson Katerenchuk and Christopher Mills took home top honours in the Senior and Junior divisions, respectively.

Their wins come in a year where the event saw more participants than ever before.

This was the sixth year the event was held, and the second straight year it was held virtually due to the pandemic.

Katerenchuk was pleasantly surprised to place first as she did not know much about the event before entering.

You wouldn't know it if you watched her speech on 'How a global pandemic changed Canadian agriculture – or has it?'

After having to do a year of post-secondary studies in Engineering at the University of Alberta from the farm, she felt personally connected to the subject.

"Being a part of the farm, I started to see a lot more shifts in it, so I felt a huge connection to that topic, and I was very happy to see the kinds of shifts that I have seen in agriculture because of the pandemic," Katerenchuk said.

Her family's farm, located in the Smoky Lake area in northern Alberta, has been in the family for over 100 years.

She says her family was very proud to hear her speak on a subject that is part of their livelihood.

In the Junior Division, Christopher Mills from Retlaw AB took home first place with his speech on 'Food waste, food security, and food policy: What is agriculture's/aquaculture's role?'

"I hope that food policy can be changed for the better; that everybody can have food and that we will be able to have food security, and our food won't be endangered," Mills said.

Mills' farming background also stretches back generations as his family has farmed in Manitoba and Alberta.

He says there are a lot of career possibilities in agriculture, both for himself and others.

"There's a lot of different aspects of farming, and there are lots of different types of farming,"

AYSA Chair, Eric Dalke, says it was really amazing to see all the competitors deliver excellent speeches in a live virtual format.

"Thank you to the competitors and their families for joining the competition and bringing your passion for agriculture to the forefront," Dalke said.

Dalke says the competitors this year did not make it easy on the judges, but after careful deliberation, this is how it broke down:

### Junior

**1st Place - Christopher Mills, Taber, Alberta**

**2nd Place - Jason Price, Acme, Alberta**

**3rd Place - Austin Noirot, Caroline, Alberta**



[Read Christopher's speech here...](#)

## PROVINCIAL NEWS

### Senior

**1st Place - Alyson Katerenchuk, St. Albert, Alberta**

**2nd Place - Sarah Strick, Blackie, Alberta**

**3rd Place - Riley Sharp, Lacombe, Alberta**



This year participants had the following topics to choose from for their speeches:

- 1. How a global pandemic changed Canadian agriculture – or has it?**
- 2. What it means to be a woman in agriculture in 2021**
- 3. Food waste, food security, and food policy: What is agriculture's/aquaculture's role?**
- 4. Canadian aquaculture: Opportunities in a growing industry**
- 5. Does a changing climate mean opportunities or headaches for Canadian agriculture?**

Junior Judge Cathy MacKenzie from AdFarm says the competitors showed that there are a lot of great orators in our future.

“They all did really well selecting their topics and developing their content. They made very strong arguments to support their key messages,” MacKenzie said.

Senior Judge Rob Smith says there is no better way to spend any part of any day than hanging around with young people and hearing their thoughts and opinions.

“The youth in this competition took the gumption to step forward, prepare and share their speeches with us, and for this, they need to be applauded for their courage,” Smith said.

On top of having the most competitors ever in its six-year history, the event also had the most significant support ever seen.

To view Katerenchuk and Mills’ speeches and the presentations of all the other speakers, visit the Alberta Young Speakers for Agriculture Facebook page.

Both Katerenchuk and Mills are now looking forward to competing on the national stage at the Canadian Young Speakers for Agriculture virtual event on November 6, 2021. There, they hope to have the same success as they did on the provincial level.

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### *Tidbits of Alison’s Speech...*

*Almost a year and a half ago, the world as we knew it suddenly came to a halt. COVID-19 drastically altered how we came to know our daily lives.*

*But how has it changed the agricultural discipline specifically? I want to talk about two key reasons for the shifts we have seen in agriculture today.*

*Just as vaccines have defined who the global powers are, and are greatly shaping policies and trade networks, food commodities have also played a defining role in relation to global power projection due to rising food scarcity. I believe the global pandemic has shaped agriculture because of these networks within technology and international relations.*

*In March 2020, people were sent home from work, schools went on an ambiguous ‘break,’ activities stopped. It seemed life itself had taken a pause. When the pandemic first hit, the lack of connection between communities and families was felt abruptly in our private and public lives. Productivity slowed; face-to-face contact was now via video calls. Life had experienced a massive shift.*

*Now I want you all to reflect. Had life stopped in agriculture? Had it kept on going? Aside from the outbreaks in meat-processing plants or dairy farms, agriculture workers are already ‘naturally socially distancing.’ Therefore, production continued on, with our shared responsibility to meet the food demand from across the globe.*

[Read the rest of Alison’s speech here...](#)

Source: for Alison and Christopher’s speeches-  
[albertafarmexpress.ca/news](http://albertafarmexpress.ca/news)



## SAFETY CORNER



This month's letter is A:

## Animal Handling

**Where:** Barns, pens, pastures, animal areas

### Do:

- Check handling areas for sharp edges, slippery floors, poor lighting, or damaged gates prior to starting work
- Use sorting sticks, paddles and livestock boards to create distance between yourself and the animal(s)
- Approach animals slowly and calmly while keeping a safe distance
- Always have an escape route planned
- Avoid working alone with animals wherever possible
- Practice good hygiene during and after handling livestock

### Ask yourself:

- Am I trained to recognize the behaviours of this specific livestock and what certain actions mean?
- Can I recognize signs of stress, fear, and aggression in the livestock?
- Are the people I am working with trained to handle this type of livestock?

### Hazardous Conditions:

- Staff members who are unfamiliar with the livestock type and behavior
- Getting too close to animals or not leaving yourself an exit route
- Handling areas with sharp edges or damaged gates
- Slippery or uneven terrain
- Working with animals alone

**What Can Result:** Exposure to zoonotic disease, infections from bites, fractured bones, blunt trauma injuries from being kicked or stepped on, pinned/crush injuries, death

Source: [agsafeab.ca](http://agsafeab.ca)



## ANIMAL SAFETY BASICS

Animal handling safety starts with knowing that animals typical behaviour. Slow and deliberate movements are generally best. Be mindful of avoiding blind spots and kick zones. Animal behaviour can be unpredictable, so it is important to stay alert. Use extra caution when handling animals that are injured, sick or are new mothers.

## FROM THE OFFICE



### FARMER PESTICIDE COURSE:

MANDATORY FOR FARMERS WHO WISH TO USE RESTRICTED PESTICIDES SUCH AS THIMET FOR POTATO PRODUCTION OR PHOSTOXIN FOR GRAIN BIN FUMIGATION. USEFUL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL FARM PLANNING, AND FOR HACCP, CANADA GAP COMPLIANCE.



 **ONLINE COURSE**  
via ZOOM

#### Course dates available:

January 19, 2022  
February 9, 2022  
March 9, 2022  
April 6, 2022



#### To register, you must:

1. Be 18 years of age or older.
2. Prepay a **\$40.00 registration fee** prior to course date. *Fee includes course manual.*

#### How to register:

Please send registration form complete with payment payable to:



**MD of Taber**  
4900B - 50th St  
Taber, AB T1G 1T2

Forms available online at [mdtaber.ab.ca](http://mdtaber.ab.ca) or call and register by phone at 403-223-3541.

For more information contact **Jason Bullock**, Director of Agricultural Services at 403-634-4429.

# Save the Date

## Licensed PGA Growers Only

**October 19th, South Area Fall Meeting**

**October 21st, North Area Fall Meeting**

**November 23rd, Seed Growers Business Meeting  
&  
Annual General Business Meeting**

**More details coming soon...**

**Please submit your harvest records upon completion.  
The PGA office will be closed October 11th for  
Thanksgiving holiday.**



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