

From the ground up

Producer discusses future of agriculture

By Rob Vogt
Local Press Writer

Technology will continue to play a vital role in the future of agriculture, only limited by the producer's access to broadband and high-speed Internet service.

That was one of the messages Josh Fankhauser, one of the owner-operators of Lamb Farms, east of Claresholm, and member of the Agricultural Service Board of the Municipal District of Willow Creek, brought to a crowd of about 70 people at the Claresholm branch of the Royal Canadian Legion on March 26.

It was the second installment in Claresholm: Opportunities for Growth, an education presented by the Claresholm and District Chamber of Commerce and Claresholm Economic Development.

Fankhauser opened by describing his own operation, where he is fifth generation on the farm, raising everything from cattle and hay to oats, corn, canola, sunflowers and much more. They also have an 85-kilowatt solar project to power irrigation, and have dabbled in crops as diverse as hemp.

He said the future is dependent on the past and the present, with the primary resource in agricultural being soil.

"It's incredibly complex,"

he said, noting soil has physical, chemical, and biological properties.

Moreover, everything producers do affects the soil.

Activities that can decrease the productivity of soil include tillage; overgrazing; mono-culture, that is growing one crop only; compaction; over-application of nutrients and pesticides; and lack of soil cover.

Activities that can increase soil productivity include no tillage; proper grazing; diversity in crop type; and more.

Mixed effects come from the application of herbicides, fungicides, and pesticides.

"They need to be used with extreme caution," Fankhauser said.

He turned his attention to the future.

"The holy grail of agriculture is to do more with less," he said.

That may mean intercropping, which is growing two crops in the same field at the same time.

There is potential to reduce the use of pesticides and fertilizer, with a higher yield than monoculture.

Examples include peas and canola; wheat and cover crop; sunflowers, faba beans and crimson clover; and flax and lentils.

Another technology is satellites providing steering and information.

This can limit compaction, that is the amount of soil compacted by the tires of equipment in fields.

It can also provide real-time data about crop health. Producers can then vary the amount of chemical or fertilizer they apply, which is more cost-effective than blanket application on an entire field.

Data can also be gathered to compare the yield of a particular field over a number of years to see how it produces historically.

Another example Fankhauser used was how his irrigation person can use his smartphone to change pivots, instead of moving them by hand. It has reduced the amount of time needed from a half a day to about an hour a day.

There are also autonomous tools, better testing tools, and much more that will make agriculture more and more precise.

However, Fankhauser concluded with the challenges to agriculture that are out there.

Balancing economic sustainability with soil and ecosystem sustainability is a challenge; as are dealing with the bad actors in agriculture; and dealing with conflicting messages from input suppliers and commodity producers about products.

In some cases, there are no incentives to grow the

traits buyers want such as canola, where the price is per tonne, but buyers want high oil content which is inversely proportional to tonnage.

The lack of good quality rural broadband mobile signals makes conducting business and keeping track of employees and equipment difficult.

Other challenges include retaining employees; a high reliance on exporting which exposes commodities to trade wars and tariffs; the former Soviet Union becoming an agricultural exporter therefore competition now; and the ecological damage that can be done by having too much intensive livestock agriculture in too small an area.



FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE - Josh Fankhauser, one of the owner-operators of Lamb Farms, was one of the speakers at The Future of Agri-food, put on by the Claresholm and District Chamber of Commerce and Claresholm Economic Development at the Claresholm Legion on March 26. Photo by Rob Vogt

From the ground up

Fieldman discusses weed control

By Rob Vogt
Local Press Writer

Weeds can cause a variety of problems, so it is important to keep them under control.

One of the weeds the Municipal District of Willow Creek deals with is leafy spurge.

Gary Murray, assistant agricultural fieldman for the Municipal District of Willow Creek, talked about weeds in general, leafy spurge in particular and how the M.D. deals with them with a crowd of about 70 people at the Claresholm branch of the Royal Canadian Legion on March 26.

It was the second installment in Claresholm: Opportunities for Growth, an education presented by the Claresholm and District Chamber of Commerce and Claresholm Economic Development.

Murray said the M.D. wants to improve agriculture. One of the ways it can do that is through weed control.

There are two types of weeds: noxious and prohibited noxious.

Noxious weeds can only be controlled, while prohibited noxious weeds have to



GARY MURRAY

be eliminated, eradicated, and destroyed.

One noxious weed the M.D. controls is leafy spurge.

This weed is 2.5 to three feet high, but its roots go down 26 feet and can spread out 15 feet underground.

It has yellow flowers and seed pods that have 140 seeds in each one. Each plant can produce 130,000 seeds.

When the pods mature, they explode and can shoot seeds out 15 feet from the mother plant.

It can also remain dormant for 28 years.

Leafy spurge releases a toxin, so other plants will

not grow near it. That means it can wipe out 75 per cent of growth where it is located.

When the stem is broken up, a milky white substance comes out. That too is toxic to animals, although sheep and goats can eat it.

The M.D. takes an integrated approach to dealing with leafy spurge.

They use beetles along the river that can eat the weed, as well as sheep who graze it, and early and rapid response when a staff member sees leafy spurge.

Because leafy spurge is noxious, the M.D. can control it but won't be able to eliminate it.

However, Murray said the M.D. has had good results using bio-control, that is bugs, to deal with leafy spurge.

CREATIVE INDUSTRIES
4915 -2 Street West
Claresholm

Locally made, hand-crafted gifts!

- Home Decor • Childrens Furniture
- Furniture • Quilts • Jams & Jellies
- Planters • Crafts • Buzzards Lawn Rentals
- Cool Choice Water ... and more!



Did you know we make kids furniture?



Mon - Fri: 11am - 4 pm
403-625-3811

COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT SERVICES
139 - 43 Ave. W.
Claresholm


Vehicle Detailing

Level 1
Interior
\$55

Level 2
Interior/Exterior
\$65

Level 3
Interior/Exterior & Waxing
\$110

Gift Certificates Available



Mon - Fri
9 am - 4 pm
403-625-0774

Thank You!



The Fort Macleod Midget Mavericks would like to thank all the sponsors, volunteers and fans for their support in the 2018 - 2019 season. We hosted the Midget D Provincials March 22-24th. With a first game loss 3-4 vs Horse Lake, 2nd game 4-1 win vs Edson, 3rd game win 1-0 vs Rimbey to advance onto the Semi Finals. They played Redcliff. The boys were unable to beat the team all season but came out to play Sunday morning taking down Redcliff 4-1. They advanced onto Finals where they played Horse Lake, taking a big win 7-1, becoming Midget D Provincial Champs! On behalf of the Midget players, parents, coaches and Provincial Committee Thank you Claresholm for all you have done to make this year and weekend memorable!

LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD
FAIR COMPETITION HELPS
KEEP PRICES LOW

ASK YOUR LOCAL CANDIDATE IF THEY WILL
SAY "NO!" TO HIGHER POWER BILLS




StopThePowerMonopoly.ca

Authorized by EQUS REA LTD. | EQUS.ca