The FENCE POST

Fall/Winter 2026 Issue No. 13

MANITOBA CROP ALLIANCE







MADE IN MANITOBA

How local processing adds value to Manitoba-grown crops

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ARE YOU INTERESTED IN SUBMITTING A RESOLUTION FOR OUR 2027 AGM?

Manitoba Crop Alliance members can submit resolutions to be considered at our annual general meeting (AGM). Resolutions to be presented at our AGM held on Feb. 11, 2027, must be received by **Jan. 5, 2027**.

Resolution guidelines, template and additional information on how to submit a resolution can be found on our website at **mbcropalliance.ca/about-manitoba-crop-alliance/governance/resolution-procedures**.

The **FENCE POST**

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Navigating uncertainty

In my message in the last issue of *The Fence Post*, I wrote about adapting through change. Six months later, change continues to shape our industry, and farmers continue to make decisions, manage risk and plan for the future despite factors outside our control.



Trade is one example. Tariffs have not affected us on the product side as much as many other sectors in the Canadian economy, but they have affected the cost of goods and our cost of production. In Manitoba, the U.S. is one of our largest trade partners. We grow high-quality crops and many are destined for markets in the U.S. Maintaining strong trade relationships and access to markets remains important to our operations and our industry.

Global events are also influencing the cost of doing business. Uncertainty in the Middle East continues to create volatility and put upward pressure on fertilizer prices and other input costs. That uncertainty means elevated costs are something we will need to consider as we plan for the 2027 crop year. As farmers, we are constantly assessing events like these and making decisions with the information available to us.

As I write this, harvest is underway, and like most farmers, we are thinking about how the weather affected our current crop year. It was a year filled with significant rain events affecting large swaths of the province. Long-range weather forecasts are also indicating a significant El Niño event beginning later this fall, which could mean very different conditions next crop year. As agricultural producers, we may make some adjustments to our crop rotation with those conditions in mind.

Manitoba Crop Alliance (MCA) has a role to play in helping farmers navigate these changes. We work alongside our advocacy partners, Grain Growers of Canada and Keystone Agricultural Producers, as well as other industry stakeholders and government, to identify areas of concern and communicate impacts being felt by Manitoba farmers. By working together, we are trying to provide a unified voice for our members and our sector. MCA also invests in research that helps farmers better navigate weather variability and its effects on our operations.

Despite the uncertainty, there are also opportunities ahead. Canadian farmers produce some of the highest-quality crops in the world, creating opportunities to diversify our markets. There is also renewed focus on processing crops produced here into higher-value products, which could create additional value and economic benefits for our province.

Farmers are a very resourceful group. We will continue to invest in new technologies and genetic options that will help us navigate a changing environment, whether those changes are economic or climate related. I am convinced Manitoba farmers will continue to navigate these uncertain times as they always have, by utilizing innovation, learning new ways to tackle old and new problems, and working together. It only takes one early adopter to kickstart change that could lead to solutions for us all.



Jonothan Hodson
Chair
Manitoba Crop Alliance

Turning potential into performance

Manitoba Crop Alliance (MCA) takes pride in supporting research that drives innovation in the crops our farmers grow. But innovation only creates value when it is adopted and successfully implemented by farmers.

Agriculture is evolving rapidly. New genetics, biological products, precision agriculture tools and management practices are constantly entering the marketplace. While these innovations create exciting opportunities, they can also create uncertainty. Farmers must determine which technologies are worth the investment, how they fit within their operations and whether they will deliver results under Manitoba growing conditions.

Research may identify the next new innovation, but helping farmers understand, evaluate and adopt that innovation is what ultimately turns potential into performance on the farm. This is where agronomy plays a critical role. Agronomy brings together plant science, soil science and management to help farmers make informed decisions that maximize both productivity and profitability.

No single recommendation fits every farm. A variety that performs well in one environment may respond differently in another, and a management practice that increases yields in one season may have less impact in the next. Understanding these interactions is essential to helping farmers capture the full value of innovation.

At MCA, through investments in research, production and extension, we help farmers understand how



new varieties and emerging practices perform across Manitoba. Just as importantly, we help reduce some of the risk associated with adopting new innovations by generating practical, unbiased information that farmers can reference before making significant management or financial commitments.

Our Research on the Farm (ROTF) program is one example. Since 2015, MCA has supported ROTF trials at 432 locations across Manitoba, evaluating everything from new variety performance and fertilizer strategies to fungicides, biological products, plant growth regulators and seeding rates. By testing ideas at field scale under a farmer's own management practices, these trials help bridge the gap between research and the field.

I am also proud of MCA's role in the 2025 launch of the Prairie Spring Wheat Yield Enhancement Network (YEN), a partnership with Manitoba Agriculture. As the first initiative of its kind in Manitoba, the YEN combines on-farm data, weather information and management practices to help farmers better understand the factors influencing yield potential and identify opportunities to close yield gaps. Equally important, the YEN creates opportunities for farmers to learn from one another while accessing expertise from agronomy specialists.

This leads me to one of our most important investments, our agronomy extension specialists: Andrew Hector, Morgan Cott and Ashley Ammeter. They are the bridge connecting innovation with adoption, ensuring research results are translated into practical knowledge farmers can apply to their operations.

Whether discussing variety selection, fertility management, disease pressure or emerging production issues, they provide unbiased, science-based information that helps farmers improve production and profitability. Our new Ask Our Agronomists newsletter has also created another avenue for farmers to receive timely answers to production questions and stay informed on emerging agronomic issues throughout the growing season.

Innovation does not end with discovery. Its true value is reached when farmers have the confidence to adopt it and realize the benefit on their farms.



Pam de Rocquigny
CEO
Manitoba Crop Alliance



Meet our 2025–26 high school bursary recipients

Manitoba Crop Alliance (MCA) is proud to support agriculture's next generation. MCA's bursary program is designed to assist with the financial needs of students pursuing education in a field that will benefit the agriculture sector.

Six graduating high school students from Manitoba have been awarded with bursaries valued at $1,000 each. Our 2025–26 high school bursary recipients are:



Aiden Brunel
Ste. Rose du Lac, MB



Austin Dubyts
Stockton, MB



Ella Prejet
Notre Dame de Lourdes, MB



Julia McMahon
Inwood, MB



Katie Gulak
Gilbert Plains, MB



Keira Duguid
Gimli, MB

Congratulations to all the recipients!



Nominations and Elections

Nominations from farmer members to serve as delegates on Manitoba Crop Alliance's four crop committees started on July 1 and closed Oct. 1, 2026. For more information on the current status of the nomination and election process, please ***scan the QR code*** or ***visit our website*** at ***https://mbcropalliance.ca/about-manitoba-crop-alliance/governance/nominations-and-elections/***



Post-secondary bursary applications now open for 2026-27 school year

Manitoba Crop Alliance (MCA) offers six $2,000 bursaries each year to assist with the financial needs of students who are enrolled in a post-secondary agricultural program within Canada.

Applicants must submit an application letter and unofficial transcript. The application letter should be maximum of one page and should include the following information: (i) their connection to or interest in agriculture, (ii) why they decided to enroll in an agriculture-related post-secondary program, and (iii) how they hope to contribute to the agriculture industry once they have graduated and are in the workforce. The application should also indicate the name of the farm the applicant is from, which must be in good standing with MCA.

Successful applicants will be featured on MCA social media accounts and in MCA publications, including ***The Fence Post*** magazine and ***Heads Up*** e-newsletter.

Applications can be emailed to **Andrew Enns (andrew.enns@mbcropalliance.ca)** with the subject line ***"MCA Post-Secondary Bursary Application 2026-27"*** on or before **Jan. 8, 2027, at 4:30 p.m. CDT**. Successful applicants will be notified by **Feb. 5, 2027**.

This is an independent scholarship with a selection committee contracted outside of MCA.



To qualify for a bursary, students must:

1. Have completed a minimum of one year (two terms) of post-secondary education at the college or university level (diploma or degree) and are enrolled full-time for the 2026-27 school year in an agricultural program within Canada.
2. Have achieved a minimum cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.0.
3. Have an interest in wheat (spring or winter), corn, barley, flax or sunflower crops, or agriculture in general, as demonstrated in a brief, one-page letter.
4. Be from a farm that is a member in good standing with MCA (you can inquire about this at **hello@mbcropalliance.ca**).
5. Have not previously been awarded an MCA bursary.

Manitoba Crop Alliance

EVENTS

Visit **mbcropalliance.ca** to view our fall 2026 and winter 2027 event listings. While you're there, sign up for our ***Heads Up*** e-newsletter to be the first to know about upcoming MCA events.





Five questions

with Lauren Gislason

Research Program Manager – Cereal Crops

1. Why did you choose to work in Manitoba's agriculture industry?

*Although I didn't grow up on a farm, I grew up in the farming community of Arborg, MB. **I've always been drawn to science** and understanding the biological processes and interactions that shape our world. Agriculture gave me the opportunity to apply that interest to real-world challenges and give back to the agricultural community that has always been part of my life.*

2. What do you love most about Manitoba ag?

***The people!** Manitoba has a passionate and collaborative agricultural community. It's exciting to see farmers, researchers, industry and government bring different perspectives and expertise together to share ideas and tackle challenges.*

3. What do you think are the greatest challenges and opportunities the industry faces?

*Agriculture is constantly evolving, and farmers are being asked to adapt to everything from **extreme weather** and changing disease and pest pressures to rising production costs and shifting global markets. These challenges bring uncertainty, but they also drive innovation and create exciting opportunities for research, technology and new management practices that give farmers better tools to manage risk and help build a more resilient industry.*

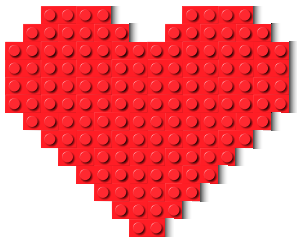


4. What is your favourite place in the world and why?

***Scotland**. From the incredible scenery of the Highlands to the energy and atmosphere of Edinburgh, it's hard to beat!.*

5. What's a fun fact about yourself that people might not know or that might surprise them?

*I love a good challenge, whether it's working through a difficult puzzle or tackling a big **LEGO build**.*





Local processors take Manitoba crops from field to finished product

by Alison Inglis
Public Relations Specialist, Freelance



Elie-based Prairie Flour Mills uses exclusively high-quality western Canadian wheat in all its products. *Image courtesy of Prairie Flour Mills.*

A truckload of Manitoba-grown wheat leaves the farm as kernels and can end up in a bag of flour in a Manitoba kitchen. A load of sunflowers can become birdseed for backyard feeders in Manitoba and across North America. A load of corn can become a bottle of whisky on a Manitoba liquor store shelf.

The journey from field to finished product is different for every crop, and local businesses play an important role in creating value along the way. At a time of uncertainty in global markets, the opportunities to grow, process and use more of what we produce here at home are worth examining.

According to Manitoba Crop Alliance (MCA) economic impact data, wheat (excluding durum), barley, grain corn, sunflower and flax together generate an estimated $6.9 billion in total economic impact and support more than 28,000 full-time-equivalent jobs in Manitoba.

"We know the grain we produce is of the highest quality, and that's why it's in demand throughout the world as a bulk product," says MCA chair Jonothan Hodson, who farms near Lenore. "But the more value we can add right here in Manitoba, the more it benefits the whole value chain. Farmers don't have the freight costs associated with shipping it thousands of kilometres away, and both rural and urban centres gain from good-paying jobs that circulate through the Manitoba economy."

The three businesses featured here offer examples of what that value can look like. Each works directly with farmers to source the varieties and quality they need, then turns Manitoba-grown crops into products that reach consumers across the province and beyond.

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Prairie Flour Mills

Looking for new markets to sell their wheat, a group of Elie-area farmers founded Prairie Flour Mills in 1998. They built the original mill and began working with local farmers and grain elevators to produce organic and conventional flour for retail, industrial and foodservice markets in North America.

In 2017, Prairie Flour Mills doubled its capacity by building a second mill. More recently, the company completed an expansion of its grain receiving facilities, including a new driveway, scales and offices.

"We work closely with local farmers and grain elevators, forging strong partnerships to source optimum-quality wheat for our flours," says Jay Bryson, vice president of sales and marketing at Prairie Flour Mills. "Building trusted relationships with our producers gives dependable wheat deliveries and grants us greater control over the quality of the grain we purchase. This enables us to deliver a consistent, high-quality product to our customers."

The company uses exclusively high-quality western Canadian wheat, he adds. "We have the world's greatest wheat available all around us."

Manitoba's growing conditions and well-established wheat varieties provide the protein quality, hardness and gluten-forming characteristics flour millers and bakers value. For Prairie Flour Mills, the quality and functionality of protein and gluten are extremely important. Commercial bakeries are looking for flour that performs consistently from one delivery to the next, with characteristics such as good dough strength, water intake, mixing tolerance and consistent finished-product volume and texture. The flour also needs to perform reliably on today's high-speed commercial baking lines, where consistency is especially important when producing everything from bread and buns to pizza, pierogies and other baked products.

"Ultimately, the quality and performance a baker sees in the flour



Prairie Flour Mills produces about 60 different types of flour and flour products. *Image courtesy of Prairie Flour Mills.*



MADE IN ST. CLAUDE

begins with the quality of the wheat coming into our mill, and Manitoba farmers provide us with the high-quality wheat we need to meet the demands of today's retail or commercial bakeries," Bryson says.

During wheat harvest, Prairie Flour Mills offers a pre-screening program where local farmers can submit samples of freshly harvested wheat for quality evaluation. They test key characteristics such as protein, moisture, test weight and falling number to determine whether the wheat meets their milling specifications. This gives farmers timely feedback on their crop while helping Prairie Flour Mills understand the quality of the new crop and maintain consistency in the flour they produce.

Once wheat arrives at the mill, each truck is tested again and the wheat is cleaned of any foreign materials before going through the milling process. The wheat kernels pass through a series of roller mills and sifters, separating the flour-producing portion of the kernel from the bran. Different flour streams are then carefully blended to create products for different applications, from all-purpose and whole wheat flour to flours designed for bread, pizza, pierogies or commercial baking. The finished flour is tested for quality and consistency before being packaged or shipped in bulk to customers.

Prairie Flour Mills produces about 60 different types of flour and flour products. Manitobans can find its retail flour on shelves at most Co-ops in the province, as well as Sobeys stores.

As Prairie Flour Mills continues to grow, so does its demand for Manitoba wheat. The company continues to expand its network of local producers and is always looking for more farmers growing conventional or organic hard red wheat.

"As our business expands, the list of farmers we work with has increased drastically over the years," Bryson says. "As we continue to grow, our demand for high-quality wheat will grow incrementally with our business."

R-Way Ag

R-Way Ag was established in St. Claude in 1979 by Roland Rouire. The company began with seed cleaning, but in 2005, Roland's son Guy and his wife Lise took over the family-owned business and expanded it into a full-service operation.

As grain buyer and seed sales representative, Ali Moneo works directly with farmers to determine what crops and varieties are a good fit for their operations. That relationship goes beyond buying and selling grain.

"I really get to know farmers being on the farm, not just a phone call, and understand what's important on their farm as often as I can," she says.

Sunflowers are grown on roughly 75,000 acres south of the 51st parallel in Manitoba, and almost all sunflowers produced in Canada are grown in the province. Manitoba has several advantages when it comes to growing sunflowers. They fit well in crop rotations, their deep roots help them perform well under both wet and dry conditions, and Manitoba has the heat units they need to reach maturity. Variety selection has also improved, giving farmers more options that produce the bushel weight needed for the bird food market while offering attractive yields.

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R-Way Ag entered the bird food market in 2019, but the market isn't necessarily what you might expect. While sunflowers are often associated with the oil market, R-Way buys black oil sunflowers specifically for bird food. High oleic varieties grown for the oil market can also meet the requirements of the bird food market.

"Some new farmers think it just goes for the oil market, but the bird food market is huge for black oils," Moneo says.

R-Way works with farmers to accommodate different delivery times, including taking sunflowers directly off the field when farmers may need the bin space or cash flow.

"It's not just making a sale, it's understanding the full picture of what their farm does," Moneo says.

Once sunflowers are harvested and meet moisture and bushel weight specifications, they are brought to R-Way's receiving facility in St. Claude. The seed is cleaned and stored before being packed into a range of sizes, from bags to bulk totes, depending on customers' requirements.

The seed is grown and processed in Manitoba, but the market extends well beyond the province. R-Way ships bird food across Canada and into the eastern United States, where birding is a popular hobby in urban areas.

"A surprise for a lot of farmers is how big the industry really is and how many places we ship to," Moneo says. "When you tell people that's where their product is going, they're kind of blown away."

That demand is important to maintaining and growing sunflower acres in Manitoba, she adds. "If the demand isn't there, then the sunflower acres aren't there. We need to have companies in the bird food market in order for sunflower acres to stay strong, and that's key for Manitoba farmers."

R-Way sees an opportunity to increase Manitoba's sunflower acres as improved varieties, stronger disease packages and a growing bird food market could make the crop more attractive to farmers.

"When I talk to guys who grew it 15, 20 years ago, they have it in their head they will never grow sunflowers again," Moneo says, but many are starting to change their tune, which is good news for R-Way and for the province.

"We need the acres in Manitoba. Sunflowers are very important for Manitoba, and for us."

Patent 5

Founded in 2017, Patent 5 set out to make spirits that celebrate Manitoba by using Manitoba-grown ingredients, but that wasn't always easy. When the Winnipeg distillery was starting out, it struggled to find a mill that could provide grain they knew was specifically grown in Manitoba.

"From the beginning, we were always on the search for somebody that could provide us with Manitoba products, and our goal was that whisky would be something that we would be known for across Canada and beyond, but our vodka and gin were very successful," says Brock Coutts, a member of the ownership team at Patent 5.

Today, Manitoba wheat and barley are used in

From Manitoba grain to MCA's 10th anniversary whisky

Manitoba Crop Alliance (MCA) is working with Winnipeg distillery Patent 5 on a special whisky to mark MCA's 10th anniversary in 2030. The base spirit was made from a blend of locally grown corn, wheat and barley and is now aging in barrels, where it will remain for the next few years before being bottled for the anniversary.

Patent 5's vodka, while Manitoba corn and barley are used in its whisky. The company also sources Manitoba-grown coriander and chamomile for its gin, while other botanicals, such as orange and lemon peel, are sourced elsewhere due to lack of local supply.

Patent 5 has experimented with a range of other Manitoba crops, including Kernza, buckwheat and heritage Red Fife wheat, which was one of the first widely grown wheat varieties in Manitoba. One of Patent 5's farmer partners grows Hazlet rye, allowing the company to produce a single-variety rye whisky.

"How could you celebrate craft distilling in Manitoba without using Manitoba ingredients?" Coutts says.

For Patent 5, using Manitoba ingredients helps create the character of the finished product. The company has experimented with multiple wheat varieties to find the right flavour for its vodka, which has a sweet, subtle character.

"Most people probably couldn't tell whether their vodka was made with corn, wheat or rye," Coutts says. "We can not only tell what it was made from, but there's a distinct taste difference even between varieties. It's about taste, not about yield."

Manitoba farmers are crucial to Patent 5's business. The rye, wheat and barley used in its spirits are grown by Manitoba farmers, then milled and distilled at Patent 5. That relationship has allowed the distillery to experiment with specific varieties and develop products around the characteristics of Manitoba-grown grain.

Once harvested, grain is dried and milled before being cooked, fermented and distilled. Patent 5 uses different distillation methods depending on the spirit. Its whisky, for example, is pot distilled to preserve more of the flavour and character of the grain before being aged in barrels.

"We decided we were going to use Manitoba grain from the beginning," Coutts says. "So, we need to make sure we can express the flavour of that grain in the products we make. After all, we grow and harvest some of the best grain in the world."

Patent 5's Manitoba-first approach has resonated with consumers in the province, while the unique flavours of its spirits have helped the distillery stand out beyond Manitoba. Its vodkas, gins and whiskies have earned recognition at Canadian and international competitions, including a Platinum award for its Canadian whisky at the 2024 SIP Awards and a Gold at the 2026 Canadian Whisky Awards for its 100% rye whisky. The recognition highlights how Manitoba-grown grain can become a high-quality finished product.

For Patent 5, that is the opportunity in value-added agriculture: Manitoba grain doesn't have to leave the province as a commodity. It can become a key ingredient in a uniquely local product that is made, marketed and sold from within Manitoba.



Patent 5 prides itself on using local ingredients in all its spirits, including Manitoba-grown wheat, barley and rye. *Image courtesy of Desa Desautels.*



How will events from the 2026 growing season impact 2027?

Each month throughout the growing season, our agronomy and extension specialists — **Andrew Hector (cereals), Morgan Cott (special crops) and Ashley Ammeter (whole farm)** — have been answering farmer-submitted questions and addressing timely agronomic topics in our Ask our Agronomists newsletter.

Now, with 2026 winding down, we asked them how the events of this growing season could shape the new crop year. Read on for valuable insights and advice to set your farm up for success in 2027.

Learn more about Ask our Agronomists at ***mbcropalliance.ca/news-and-events/publications/ask-our-agronomists/***



Ashley Ammeter
Whole Farm Specialist

Wind erosion concerns

Weather challenges are a part of every growing season, but 2026 felt especially unpredictable.

In May, strong winds affected large areas of the province, causing significant soil movement. Many farmers described it as the worst blowing soil they had seen in years, with some comparing it to conditions seen in the late 1980s.

Early spring is one of the periods when soils are most vulnerable to wind erosion. This year's conditions were close to a worst-case scenario: high winds, dry topsoil, limited vegetative cover and smooth, freshly disturbed soils. Visible damage to crop seedlings was concerning, but the impacts to the soil itself may have long-lasting consequences.



Blowing topsoil following high winds in May 2026. *Image courtesy of MCA.*

According to the Manitoba Agriculture Soil Management Guide, the maximum tolerable annual soil loss is approximately five tons per acre, equivalent to less than one millimetre of topsoil. The soil lost to erosion will have contained a disproportionate share of the nutrients and organic matter that support crop growth. When soil moves, it takes valuable fertility with it.

Along with the loss of nutrients and soil organic matter, eroded soils may have decreased water-holding capacity and negatively impacted soil structure. In severe cases, erosion can expose subsoil layers that are often less productive than the original topsoil. Even where crops recovered, or where crops seeded after the wind event established successfully, impacts to the soil can influence productivity for years to come.



Looking forward

Looking ahead to 2027 and beyond, it will be important to evaluate fields that experienced soil erosion and consider next steps. If soil testing wasn't completed this fall, sampling prior to the 2027 crop can help determine whether additional fertility is required and identify other potential concerns.

It will also be important to take steps to protect vulnerable soils from further erosion and to incorporate practices that help build organic matter and soil structure.

Reducing tillage intensity and frequency minimizes soil disturbance and leaves more crop residue on the soil surface. Maintaining residue cover is one of the most effective ways to reduce erosion risk.

Standing residue can be particularly valuable because it helps slow the wind at the soil surface. Where practical, shelterbelts, vegetative buffer strips or cover crops in vulnerable areas can provide additional protection.

Practices that increase organic matter can also help improve resilience over time. Examples include maximizing the return of crop residue to the soil, reducing straw removal, growing higher-biomass producing crops and applying manure.

The 2026 growing season served as a reminder of how quickly soil can be lost when conditions align. We cannot control the weather, but management practices that protect the soil can help reduce future risk and support long-term productivity, regardless of what future growing seasons may bring.



Morgan Cott
Agronomy Extension Specialist – Special Crops

Early season moisture stress

Crops in their vegetative stages generally cannot tolerate standing in water for several days. Mild temperatures during the heaviest rainfalls would have reduced stress on the flooded crops, but a plant simply cannot "breathe" when living under water.

Corn showed nutrient deficiency symptoms very effectively this spring, due to leaching and runoff. While split-applying nitrogen in corn is common, several farmers were topping up with more than just nitrogen. Phosphorous, potassium and sulphur were all discussed at some stage this spring because of deficiencies. The limited feedback I received was positive on the top-up applications.

Looking forward

Soil sampling will be necessary prior to the 2027 season. Denitrification and/or leaching were very probable in many areas, but it is also possible nutrients were redistributed in the field given the flooding and water movement. Sampling will also identify pH and salinity changes important for 2027 crop decisions.

Disease pressures due to rain events

Downy mildew pressure in both corn (Crazy Top) and sunflower was highly likely due to wet conditions in 2026. The pathogen overwinters on crop residues and in the soil and may infect seedlings prior to them reaching about 6" tall, particularly in saturated or flooded

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Corn in flooded conditions following a significant June 2026 rain event. *Image courtesy of MCA.*

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conditions where the growing point is waterlogged. Corn smut was also prevalent due to the vegetative crop growing in saturated soils.

Looking forward

Depending on how the end of the season went for corn and sunflowers across the province, we can make some predictions about the 2027 crop year regarding disease pressures.

Sunflower:

- **Phomopsis Stem Canker:** Very common and causes stem breakage, affecting yield by plant loss and potentially seed fill. It overwinters on residue and spreads via rain splash and wind.
- **Sclerotinia:** Wilt and basal stem rot infections frequently occur early in the season via sclerotia bodies infecting root systems. Head rot and mid-stalk rot occur later in the season when ascospores are released into the air, landing on the plant surfaces. All sclerotinia infections produce new sclerotia bodies that are returned to the soil. Sclerotia can survive in the soil for several years, infecting various crops.
- **Sunflower Rust:** Occurs only in sunflower and overwinters on residue. Like other pathogens, it can survive for several years and rotation is a must.

Corn:

- **Goss's Wilt:** Overwinters on residue, so manage residue with tillage and crop rotation.
- **Gibberella Stalk Rot:** Spores develop in wet conditions and are easily spread. Infections cause shredding and disintegration of the stalk tissues. Gibberella is *Fusarium graminearum*, the same fungal pathogen causing Fusarium head blight in wheat and barley, so crop rotation is crucial.
- **Ear Rots:** Manage with rotation and tillage. Early harvest and immediate grain drying are important to stop vomitoxin development as soon as possible. Toxins can continue to develop within infections until grain moisture reaches 20 per cent, but toxins are not reduced past that point.
  - **Gibberella Ear Rot:** *Fusarium graminearum*, begins at the ear tip or via wounds and moves downward, forming a pink-reddish mold.
  - **Fusarium Ear Rot:** *Fusarium verticillioides, F. proliferatum* and/or *F. subglutinans*, appears more whitish-pink and occurs more sporadically across a cob.



Andrew Hector
Agronomy Extension Specialist – Cereal Crops

Early season stresses

This spring was marked by extreme wind, precipitation and hail events, with varied impact across Manitoba and within individual fields. Strong winds led to crop damage on wheat and barley seedlings, which was characterized by shredded leaves, dry/brown leaf tips or exposed seeds and roots from eroded soil. Most plants recovered, but a few farmers reseeded entire fields or select affected areas.

Intense precipitation also led to excess moisture and waterlogged fields. Wheat is more tolerant to waterlogged soils than barley, but prolonged exposure reduces yields in both crops. The extent of plant damage is determined by growth stage, temperature and flooding duration.

Excess moisture also likely led to nitrogen (N) loss from denitrification on fine-textured soils or leaching on sandy soils. The magnitude of the N loss depended on soil type, temperature and duration of excess moisture. N loss can impact overall wheat yield and quality parameters like protein. This may have occurred in a few fields in 2026 where "piebald" was observed. This occurs when there's inadequate N during grain fill leading to starchy, light-coloured spots on wheat kernels. It is typically associated with lower protein.

Looking forward

Due to potential N loss from excessive moisture, farmers should investigate final yields and quality factors to determine if adequate N was supplied to high-protein spring wheat. Grain protein below 13.2 – 13.5 per cent may indicate insufficient N was supplied to the crop. Where this occurs, determine whether it was caused by N loss, inadequate fertilizer application or another cause.

Additionally, soil test to determine residual soil N levels for the 2027 growing season. This will help guide N application rates and product choices to maximize yield and quality of spring and winter wheat and barley.

Fungal leaf diseases

Environmental conditions, including wind, rain, relative humidity and temperature, led to increased disease pressure in wheat and barley. Symptoms of tan spot (*Pyrenophora tritici-repentis*) and the Septoria/Stagonospora leaf blotch complex (SLBC) were observed in wheat canopies. These fungal diseases first appear on lower leaves, but as conditions for disease development continue, symptoms will move up the mid and upper canopy. Glume blotch, caused by *Parastogonospora nodorum*, was also reported on wheat heads in 2026.

Looking forward

As tan spot and the SLBC were found in multiple fields, disease carryover may be higher in 2027. Since these diseases are mainly residue-borne, avoid seeding wheat after wheat. Seed non-host crops (e.g., canola, soybean and corn) for at least two years to reduce inoculum load. Foliar fungicides can help manage these diseases; if needed, application to protect the upper canopy is the most impactful. In fields not prone to erosion, burying wheat straw/residue can also reduce inoculum sources.



Kernel with piebald (left) and kernel without piebald. *Image courtesy of MCA.*

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Understanding soil health

There is no one-size-fits-all definition of healthy soil

By Ashley Ammeter
Whole Farm Specialist, Manitoba Crop Alliance

Soil is more than just the medium in which plants grow. It is a dynamic ecosystem made up of mineral particles, air, water, organic matter and living organisms. Together, these components form the foundation of crop production and influence everything from water movement and nutrient cycling to yield stability and weather resilience.

Soil health is frequently discussed in agriculture, yet what it means and how to measure and manage it are not always straightforward. A common definition of soil health is the one used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service: "the continued capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans." In the context of crop production, we often focus on the soil's ability to function well to support crop growth today, while preserving the soil's continued productivity for future generations.

A healthy soil stores and supplies water, cycles nutrients, resists erosion and supports plant and animal growth. More broadly, healthy soils contribute to ecosystem services such as storing carbon, water cycling and supporting an array of wildlife. Ultimately, a healthy soil is one that can perform the essential functions required of it, while continuing to support productive and resilient agricultural systems.

One challenge with discussing soil health is that it is strongly context-dependent,

Building soil health is best viewed as a long-term process of improving soil function, rather than trying to achieve a specific score. *Image courtesy of MCA.*

relying on factors such as climate, soil type, topography, cropping system, management goals and land use history. A clay soil in the Red River Valley will not have the same soil health characteristics as a sandy soil in western Manitoba. Likewise, a soil under annual crop production will behave differently than a soil in a perennial forage system. Even within the same farm, what qualifies as a healthy soil may vary from one field to another.

Building soil health is best viewed as a long-term process of improving soil function, rather than trying to achieve a specific score. We cannot create a

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"perfect" soil. Every soil has strengths and limitations, many of which are outside of our control. What we can do is implement practices that improve a soil's ability to function within its natural capabilities.

The concept of soil health is widely understood and accepted, but measuring or quantifying it can be a challenge. One of the most straightforward ways of assessing soil health is to consider the concerns you face on your farm:

- Is the soil able to support crop growth?
- Is the soil prone to surface crusting?
- Are there signs of compaction restricting root growth?
- Can the soil resist wind and water erosion?
- Can water infiltrate into the soil well after a heavy rain?
- Does the soil hold enough water to support crops during moderately dry conditions?
- Are soil test levels adequate and are nutrients being used efficiently by crops?
- Are there areas of the field that consistently perform poorly?

This is not an exhaustive list. Every farm faces different challenges, so start by asking yourself what issues you've observed over time. Rather than trying to determine whether a soil is "healthy" or "unhealthy," consider how well your soil is performing the functions that matter most to your operation.

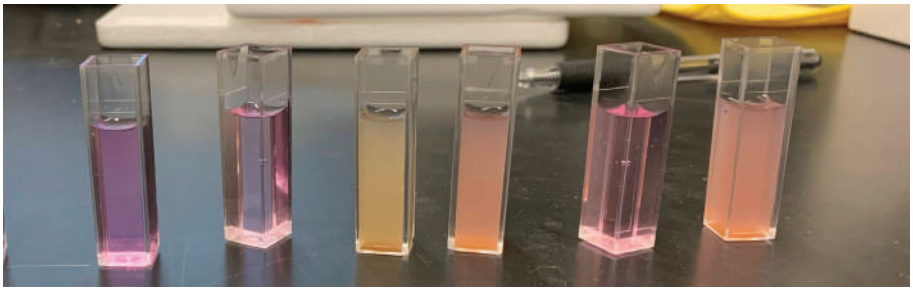
When we describe a soil, we can do so using physical properties such as texture, density, porosity and aggregate stability. We can also describe it based on chemical properties such as pH, nutrient availability and salinity, or by biological properties such as microbial activity, soil respiration and active carbon. When we think about measuring soil health, our minds often jump straight to the biological indicators. These are important, particularly as interest in soil biology continues to grow, but soil health is not defined by a single property. It is the result of physical, biological and chemical properties working together.

Interest in soil health has led to the development of a wide variety of tests designed to measure various soil health indicators. While these tests can provide useful information, interpreting the results and applying them to management decisions can be difficult. Many soil health indicators are influenced by environmental conditions, sample collection, sample handling and laboratory procedures. Efforts are underway to improve standardization among laboratories, but significant differences do exist.



A healthy soil stores and supplies water, cycles nutrients, resists erosion and supports plant and animal growth.
Image courtesy of MCA. Illustration by Hilary Bowman.





Interest in soil health has led to the development of a wide variety of tests designed to measure various soil health indicators.

(Above) Samples removed from a muffle furnace, used to determine soil inorganic carbon.

(Below) Active carbon reactions on different soil types. *Images courtesy of MCA.*

There is also limited local calibration data available for Western Canada for many soil health measurements. This means that translating soil health test results into actionable management decisions can be difficult. Traditional soil fertility tests have well-established interpretations that provide localized recommendations, but many new soil health indicators lack local reference values. Research is being undertaken to develop Prairie-specific, evidence-based recommendations.

This does not mean that soil health tests lack value. Rather, it means that soil health tests are best used to benchmark soils and track changes over time, in the context of your cropping history and field observations.

Managing soil health looks different on every farm, in every field, in every year. The key question is: what practices can help you achieve your soil health goals, while balancing other production challenges and the economic and logistical constraints of your operation? Many soil health-building practices focus on increasing soil organic matter levels by returning more crop residue to the soil, reducing soil disturbance and keeping continuous living roots in the soil.

Reducing soil disturbance from tillage can help maintain soil structure and allows crop residues to protect the soil from erosion. For some farms, this could mean adopting no-till. For others, it might involve reducing the frequency and intensity of tillage or adopting practices such as strip tillage.

Incorporating fall or winter cereals, perennial crops or cover crops keeps continuous living roots in the ground, captures nutrients that may otherwise be lost, returns organic matter to the soil and reduces fall and spring erosion.

It's also worth considering how other management practices support these soil health-building practices. Can your crop rotations and weed management programs be diversified to reduce reliance on tillage? Are your pest management strategies controlling diseases and insects as well as possible to support productive crop growth and residue return? Is your nutrient management plan aligned with crop need and field conditions? The most effective strategies are those that fit your farming operation and can be implemented as long-term solutions.

As research continues and soil health tests become more standardized, our ability to measure and monitor soil health will likely improve. In the meantime, farmers can learn a great deal by simply observing how their soils respond to weather conditions, management practices and production challenges. The most useful measure of soil health is not a number on a report, but how a soil performs.

Healthy soils will look different from one farm to the next, but the goal remains consistent: building resilient soils that can support productive and sustainable agriculture today and for the future.

Advancing agriculture

CWRC leads the way on wheat breeding innovation

By Tyler Difley
Communications Advisor, MCA

Canadian wheat has a sterling reputation at home and abroad, and among both consumers and farmers, for high quality, consistency and strong agronomics. Together, these characteristics make it one of Canada's most highly exported crops, as well as a mainstay of Manitoba farmers' rotations. However, none of this would be possible without a robust plant breeding system, which is responsible for the productive and adaptable wheat varieties that farmers depend on, year after year.

The Canadian Wheat Research Coalition (CWRC) invests over $9.5 million per year into variety development on behalf of western Canadian farmers through core breeding agreements (CBAs) with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), the University of Saskatchewan Crop Development Centre, the University of Manitoba and the University of Alberta. Since the introduction of the CBA model, farmers have become a key funding partner for public wheat breeding in Canada, with their contributions representing almost half of the estimated total public varietal research and development costs.

For the latest information on the breeding innovation project, visit ***wheatresearch.ca/wheat-breeding-innovation/***

These CBAs, and other investments in public plant breeding in Canada, have generated significant returns for both farmers and the public over the last several decades. CWRC CBAs have resulted in the registration of more than 40 new wheat varieties across multiple wheat classes, and a recent University of Saskatchewan study found that farmers received $33 in benefits for every dollar they invested in wheat breeding from 1995 to 2020.

As these figures indicate, to date, Canada's wheat breeding innovation system has been extremely productive for farmers across the country. But due to historic and recent budget reductions that have eroded long-term investment in this valuable research, cracks are beginning to show. Recognizing the need for swift action, the CWRC recently embarked on an ambitious journey to safeguard those gains and reimagine Canada's wheat breeding system on behalf of western Canadian farmers.

In September 2025, the CWRC launched a review of the Canadian wheat breeding innovation system in an effort to protect its ability to serve the evolving needs of Canadian farmers. The review was designed to identify and address potential risks and opportunities in the Canadian system, ensuring it continues to generate elite varieties for farmers across the country. As part of the review, the CWRC tasked Synthesis Agri Food Network with interviewing 29 industry stakeholders, many of whom expressed concerns about the limitations of the current variety registration system. There was broad support for the system's objectives, but many participants identified opportunities for improvement to ensure it remains accessible and continues to serve farmers effectively.

In February 2026, the CWRC announced

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The CWRC hosted an industry visioning workshop in April featuring stakeholders directly engaged in wheat and barley plant breeding across Western Canada.
Image courtesy of the CWRC.

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the conclusion of the review and released its findings in a public report titled, "Securing the Future of Wheat in Canada," which highlighted three crucial facts about the current wheat breeding landscape in Western Canada: 1. the AAFC wheat breeding program is an integral part of western Canadian wheat variety development; 2. the current wheat breeding system is at risk from recent and historic budget cuts, especially at the variety development and pre-market evaluation stages; and 3. wheat breeding is a long-term process and decisions made today will impact agriculture decades into the future.

"It's clear that the status quo is not a viable path forward," CWRC chair Jocelyn Velestuk said. "Our system has been incredibly productive for farmers and for the sector but it's no longer working. Securing the future of wheat in Canada requires a reimagining of our wheat breeding innovation system."

In April 2026, the CWRC hosted an industry visioning workshop featuring stakeholders directly engaged in wheat and barley plant breeding in Western Canada. The goal was to co-develop a shared vision of the optimal future of western Canadian wheat and barley plant breeding. When the dust settled, all participants were united in the following shared vision for the future:

"The western Canadian wheat and barley plant breeding system is thriving and innovation driven, where collaboration and competition coexist to attract diverse investment and provide farmers with choice in superior, field-ready varieties that meet the needs of our end use customers."

According to the CWRC, the path forward to achieving this shared vision is still fluid, but the stakeholders who attended the workshop identified nine guiding principles to evaluate the options and decisions that will lead the sector into the future.

Armed with the results of its review and this new shared vision for the future of wheat and barley breeding, the CWRC is currently exploring options to transform Canada's wheat breeding innovation system. Discussions with AAFC are ongoing, including several productive meetings during the first half of 2026, and the CWRC continues to engage industry stakeholders throughout the process. The goal is a system that works for farmers, works for the industry and works for Canada.

9 PRINCIPLES FOR THE OPTIMAL WHEAT AND BARLEY PLANT BREEDING SYSTEM

At the CWRC's industry visioning workshop in April 2026, the convened stakeholders identified nine guiding principles for the optimal future of western Canadian wheat and barley plant breeding:

1. **Deliver Superior Field-Ready Varieties**
2. **Technology Driven Innovation**
3. **Leverages Farmer Investments**
4. **Enables Competition & Collaboration**
5. **Provides Stable Long-Term Investment**
6. **Enables a Return on Investment**
7. **Attracts Investment & Talent**
8. **Connected Across the Plant Genetics Improvement Continuum**
9. **Supportive Regulatory & Commercialization System**

The CWRC is a collaboration between Manitoba Crop Alliance, Saskatchewan Wheat Development Commission and Alberta Grains aimed at improving the profitability of wheat for western Canadian producers. The organization facilitates a collaborative approach to farmer-funded regional and national research projects in variety development and agronomy.

To learn more about the CWRC's wheat breeding innovation project and stay up to date with the latest news, visit wheatresearch.ca.





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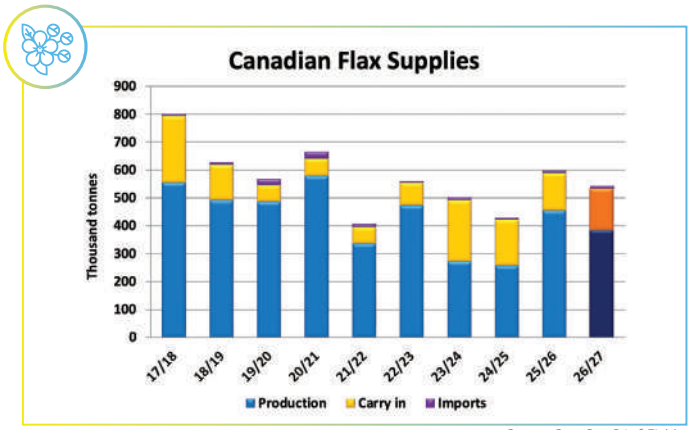
Supply outlooks for 2026–27

By LeftField Commodity Research

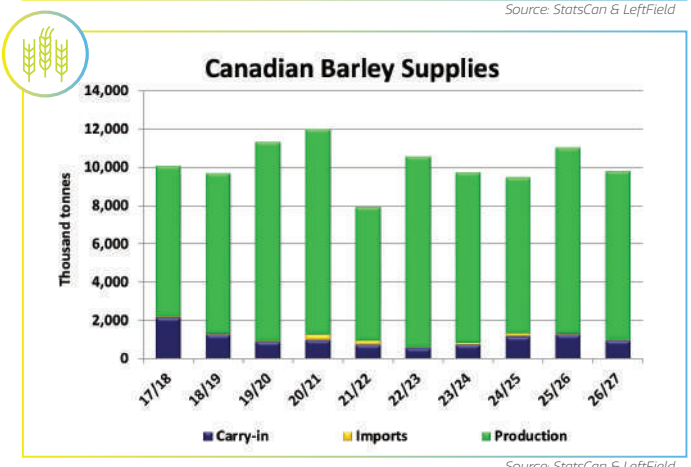
The 2026 growing season was a story of two halves in Western Canada. Excess moisture early on in most parts of the Prairies gave way to an extended stretch of hot, dry weather through late July and August. Combined with smaller seeded area for several crops, 2026–27 supplies will be tighter than last year, a sharp change from the record and near-record harvests of 2025. The early harvest is starting to provide answers on yields, with quality becoming the bigger question after the hot finish. Adding to the mix, unusually strong late-season exports drew old-crop inventories down further than normal and disruptions to Black Sea shipping have injected fresh uncertainty into world grain markets.

Smaller flax crop meets crowded export lanes

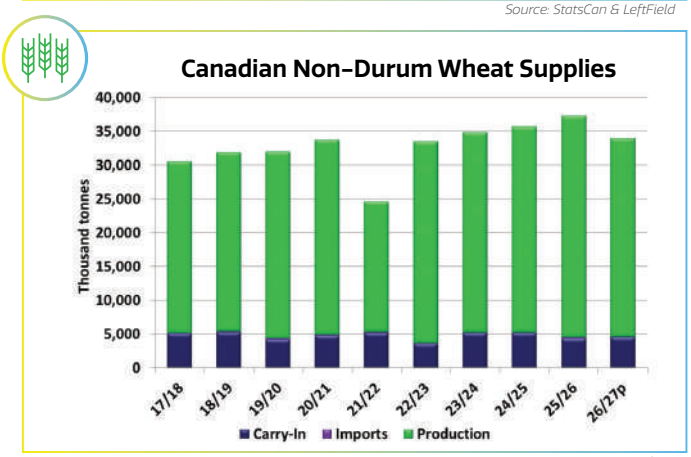
Flax acres in Western Canada edged up about six per cent in 2026 and crop ratings held well above average through the summer, but yields are still expected to fall short of last year's record. A yield near 24 bu/acre would put the crop around 385,000 tonnes, roughly 15 per cent smaller than in 2025. The carryover coming into the year was drawn down by the strongest export program since 2020–21, so total 2026–27 supplies are expected to be 13 per cent smaller than last year. Adding the U.S. harvest, North American production sits just over 500,000 tonnes, toward the higher end of recent years but hardly burdensome.



Source: StatsCan & LeftField



Source: StatsCan & LeftField



Source: StatsCan & LeftField

The challenge for the coming year sits offshore. Kazakhstan expanded flax acreage 41 per cent on top of record July stocks of 484,000 tonnes, while Russian area slipped only modestly. Offer prices into China have been sliding from all origins, with Kazakh flax now the cheapest supply in that market. The same competition is building in Europe, where record EU imports were the backbone of Canadian demand late in 2025–26. With the export lanes this crowded, the price outlook for 2026–27 leans steady to softer.

Tight barley balance sheet

Canadian barley production is estimated at around 8.8 million tonnes for 2026, down close to a million tonnes from last year despite higher seeded area, as a period of hot and dry weather in summer will result in lower yields. Very early harvest results are mixed, but a better indication of both yields and quality will be known once more of the crop has come off. Total supply will fall even more after a big export program of almost 3.6 million tonnes drew 2025–26 ending stocks to just over 900,000 tonnes. The smaller old-crop carry-in means total Canadian barley supplies in 2026–27 are about 1.2 million tonnes below the previous year.

Demand is where the story gets interesting. Most major global exporters will see smaller crops this year. In addition, some countries have specific factors that may limit exports. Shipments from Ukraine and Russia will remain uncertain as long as Black Sea movement is disrupted. EU exports will be reduced after a sharp drop in corn production, which means higher barley feed demand. This could push more business to Canada, despite lower supplies. China is the world's largest importer,

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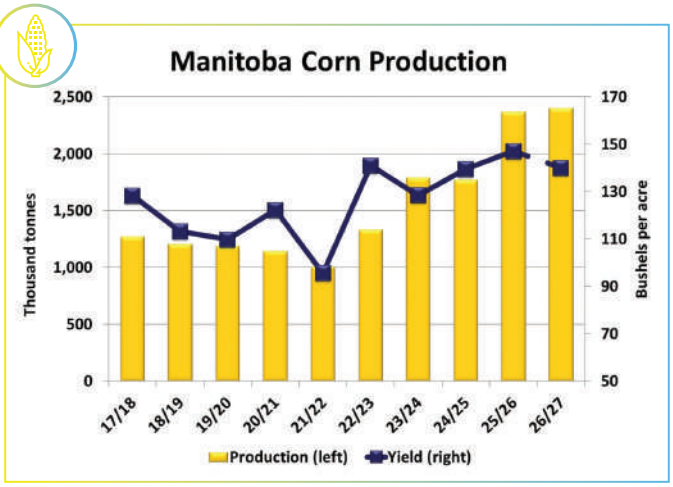
but early indications are for lower purchases in 2026-27 due more to availability of supply than a lack of interest.

Domestically, the feed market will keep taking its cue from U.S. corn, where a tightening balance sheet sets a rising floor under prairie feed grain prices. Barley values were cheaper than corn into the main feed demand regions in Western Canada through late summer and early fall, which encourages more barley feeding for now, but any shift in the price spread could change that. Malt premiums were relatively soft going into harvest, but whether that remains the case will partially depend on the quality of this year's crop.

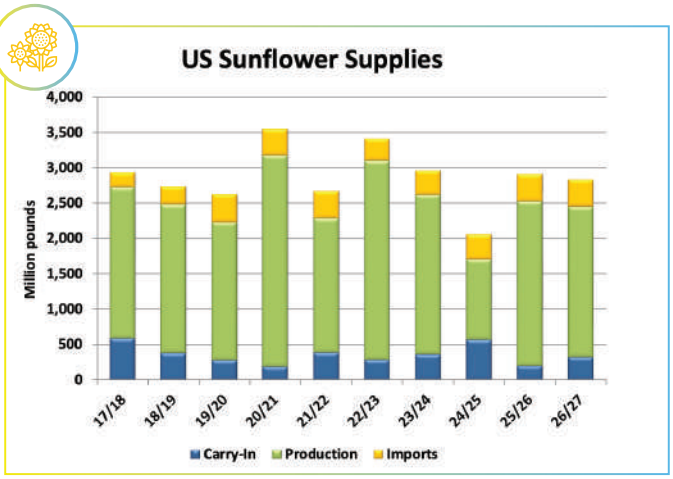
Record wheat exports followed by lower production

Canadian non-durum wheat production is expected to be around 29.3 million tonnes in 2026, down from last year's record 32.8 million due to fewer acres and lower yields. In addition, massive exports in 2025-26 allowed the market to work through the huge harvest, leaving a tight old-crop carryout. Heavy farmer deliveries late in the season further reduced inventories. Total Canadian non-durum supplies for 2026-27 are forecast at roughly 34 million tonnes, down nine per cent. The quality of the harvest will be watched closely after this summer's weather.

World markets are doing their part to support the outlook. The U.S. hard red winter crop came in 42 per cent below last year. European production and exports have both been cut, and more wheat is likely to be fed after their small corn crop. Disrupted Black Sea movement keeps reducing Russian and Ukrainian export forecasts during a key shipping window, with the situation getting increasingly dire the longer the targeting of grain ships and export facilities continues. Canadian exports in 2026-27 will be limited by supplies rather than demand, likely near 22 million tonnes, which points to another year of low ending stocks and firm prices.



Source: StatsCan



Source: USDA & LeftField

Manitoba corn expansion meets tighter U.S. market

Manitoba is heading for another corn crop that will be near or above last year's all-time high, with production potentially reaching 2.4 million tonnes as record acres combine with good yields. A harvest of that size will likely result in low U.S. corn imports again in 2026-27 and may keep some relative pressure on local bids.

Manitoba corn prices will largely track U.S. values. The U.S. corn balance sheet has tightened as yield expectations come down. Production may still be the second largest ever, behind only the record 2025 crop, but big demand will see 2026-27 ending stocks shrink. The global outlook is also supportive, as EU imports increase due to their small crop and Ukraine's exports are expected to fall sharply. At the same time, South America's harvest is record large in 2025-26 and China's import demand is expected to be subdued again, but the overall backdrop remains friendly.

Sunflower prices supported by shrinking supplies

Manitoba sunflower acres recovered a bit more in 2026, with Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation reporting insured area up 14 per cent and the mix continuing to shift back toward oil types, which gained about 20 per cent while confection acres declined. With decent conditions through most of the season, the crop is pegged at just over 75,000 tonnes, about nine per cent larger than last year. That increase is welcome because the carryover coming into 2026-27 is near historical lows. Even with the bigger harvest, Canadian supplies will stay on the snug side through the marketing year.

The situation south of the border is what's driving prices. North Dakota's sunflower crop ratings dropped midway through the season to the worst levels since the 2021 drought. This prompted cuts to the U.S. yield estimate, with an oil-type crop at least 10 per cent smaller than last year while confection production could be up slightly. At the same time, heat damage in western Europe sent sunflower prices there sharply higher, making imported supplies more expensive for North American users. A shrinking U.S. crop and costlier imports are a friendly combination, and the price outlook leans steady to stronger once the usual harvest-time dip passes.

Strategy spotlight

MCA maintains momentum heading into final year of 2024–27 strategic plan

2024–27 STRATEGIC PLAN

In 2025–26, Manitoba Crop Alliance (MCA) completed year two of its 2024–27 strategic plan, building on the successes of year one and setting a strong foundation for year three. MCA staff have been working hard over the last year to achieve the organizational vision laid out by MCA's directors and delegates.

Year Two highlights

In year two, notable wins included:

- Connecting with farmer members to create two communication initiatives that build trust and engagement in MCA, while addressing communication gaps outlined by members.
- Developing and implementing a targeted advocacy plan to ensure Manitoba farmers' research and innovation needs are met.
- Creating the Roots to Results Webinar Series, which provided in-depth knowledge of topics such as grain marketing, farm finances, crop insurance and tax strategies.
- Hosting the LeaderShift Insight program for farmer members, which covered the "human" side of agriculture, performing under pressure, farm transition, business planning and improved self and social awareness — helping participants build leadership skills they could take back to their farms and communities.









Year Three: Maintaining momentum

The third and final year of MCA's 2024–27 strategic plan has now begun! New Step Goals have been developed, and strategy execution is ongoing. MCA directors and staff worked collaboratively to make the updated strategic plan.

For year three, MCA developed and approved nine new Step Goals. As this is the final year of the 2024–27 strategic plan, the new Step Goals are designed to fulfill the three Big Goals' objectives and ensure MCA continues its positive impact as an organization.

There was also one tweak to the wording of Big Goal #3 to better align with the original intent of the goal and ensure it meets organizational needs:

2024–27 STRATEGIC PLAN
BIG GOAL #3

Inspire areas for bold investment that facilitate historic initiatives.

View our full strategic plan and stay up to date on the latest news and wins from year three at mbcropalliance.ca.

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