

Innovation on the horizon for oat farmers

Oat Advantage: “Amazing future potential for oats”



Jim Dyck, oat breeder and farmer from Saskatchewan – Photo credits to Shaun Haney, Real Agriculture.

June 2014, Partners in Innovation - Jim Dyck is excited about oats. From his breeding operation and farm in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan he says, “It’s good to eat oats. It has such a value for human health and the future is amazing. Oats has a wide range of appeal that I don’t think we have explored.”

Oats is a crop with smaller acreage that competes for research investment dollars with corn, soybeans, and canola. But independent breeder Dyck has big dreams for oats – like 200 bushels per acre oats, or oats that appeal to very large markets like China, and a vision for new marketing opportunities in cosmetics.

Dyck’s company, Oat Advantage, is not only a much needed service to Canadian oat farmers but also an entrepreneurial opportunity. “Oats is not a main crop. Oats research has been declining. So there is an opportunity here at this time to make something happen in a small crop that has been a little bit forgotten and on the fringes,” Dyck explains.

Dyck started Oat Advantage in 2008, as a new business venture and a “creative outlet.” He works with partners like SeCan and the Prairie Oat Growers Association and enjoys his work improving genetics for western Canadian farmers who grow oats. This mission and the breeding operation behind it are sustained by his and his wife Laura-Lee’s, “blood sweat and tears.”

“Laura-Lee and I are partners in the process and she is a very accurate driver on the tractor at seeding,” says Dyck.

But Dyck points out that it is a costly endeavour:

“I have lots of ideas and there are lots of ideas in the oat breeding community that we can do but it does take funding. I have to dig deep to make this operation happen and I am on my seventh season now. I am existing in part on the hope that there will be a return on my investment in oats. Some of these changes with UPOV 91 will help make that happen and farmers will receive the benefits.”

Bill C-18, *the Agricultural Growth Act*, passed second reading before the House of Commons adjourned for the summer. The bill will update Plant Breeders’ Rights within the legislation, bringing it into compliance with the most recent international plant variety protection convention, UPOV 1991, which will help plant breeders like Jim Dyck conduct more research.

Raising the dietary fiber content of oats for human consumption is just one achievement of ongoing breeding programs. But Dyck can envision more. To maximize the oat advantage, he says the next wave of innovation needs to focus on agronomic strengths, improved physical grain quality, and making oats a more profitable and higher yielding crop for farmers.

Dyck speaks with pride of his personal entrepreneurial journey, “It is a long process from the start of breeding to when a variety is released. Earning revenue on varieties and innovations that I develop is an important thing.”

“If Plant Breeders’ Rights help me develop innovation that I can deliver to the oat community then it is something that will be of great value for me and also for the farmers that I work for.”

And the future belongs to oats. “Oats is a small crop, but when dollars are returned to a breeder, big things can happen.”



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