



A PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL FARMERS UNION, 2717 WENTZ AVENUE, SASKATOON, SK S7K 4B6

PHONE: 306-652-9465 • FAX: 306-664-6226 • E-MAIL: NFU@NFU.CA

union farmer newsletter



Seed Synergy update:

Seed industry groups are preparing to consolidate power in one big organization

—by Cathy Holtslander, NFU Director of Research and Policy

In 2018 Canadian farmers paid close to \$3 billion for commercial seed, while realized net farm income was just \$3.9 billion. The seed companies now are receiving close to the same amount of the farmers’ revenue as the farmer keeps. This, of course is not enough for the seed industry. The Seed Synergy collaborators are coming to a consensus that they prefer Trailing Contracts (making farmers pay a royalty on farm saved seed if using a UPOV ’91 Plant Breeders Rights protected variety) – which could only be enforced by requiring farmers to provide details of what they are planting, where, every year. Seed Synergy collaborators are not satisfied with adding tens of millions to farmers’ annual seed costs through added royalties. They are working to increase their ability to extract value from the food system by consolidating into a super-organization that would make and enforce seed regulations.

On November 20, 2019 the Canadian Seed Growers’ Association (CSGA) will hold a special general meeting at 4:00 p.m. at the Sheraton Hotel in Saskatoon where its Executive will ask for members’ endorsement to proceed with plans to further the Seed Synergy agenda by dissolving itself in a merger with the Canadian Seed Trade Association (the

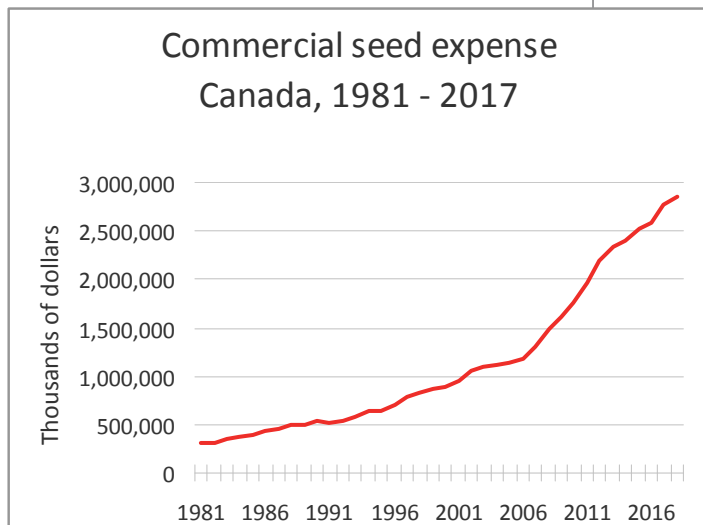
lobby group dominated by Bayer, Corteva, Syngenta), the Canadian Plant Technology Association (the private “GMO trait/PBR police”), the Commercial Seed Analysts Association (professional association of seed testers) and the Canadian Seed Institute (delegated by the CFIA as official accreditation body for seed labs).¹

The CSGA’s role is to ensure pedigreed seed meets official standards of quality and purity. It has been delegated government authority to certify pedigreed seed since the 1930s. Today, CSGA members are seed growers, whose annual dues are \$200. Across Canada there are seven provincial or regional affiliates with their own boards and representation on the CSGA board.

November’s CSGA special general meeting will also seek support for changing its membership structure so that the business unit (as opposed to the individual) is the entity to which a crop certificate is issued, to which certain voting rights are assigned and to which fees associated with crop certification are charged. It will seek approval for increasing annual dues substantially to raise an additional \$1 million per year for each of the next three years. Half of the fee increase would provide

\$500,000 per year to support the Seed Synergy agenda and rest would cover the costs of eliminating employees (and/or their pensions). Shifting to businesses as voting members and imposing a big fee increase would likely eliminate most, if not all, independent seed growers – that is, farmers – from the CSGA and the proposed super-organization.

A presentation given at the Saskatchewan Seed Growers Association (SSGA) annual meeting outlined the CSGA Executive’s support for a three-step process to fundamentally change how seed is



Source: Statistics Canada: Farm Operating Expenses and Depreciation Charges (x 1,000), Table: 32-10-0049-01

(continued on page 2...)

(Seed Synergy update, from page 1)

regulated in Canada.² First, they want amendments to the Seeds Regulations to allow for incorporation by reference (giving certain third parties' documents the force of law) and other unspecified changes. Second, they want seed certification to be delegated to a consolidated industry body. This industry body would be the proposed super-organization created by merging five of the six Seed Synergy collaborators (CropLife Canada will carry on as a lobby group for the biotech and agro-chemical industry). And third, they want to create a "single window" for all seed regulatory services, which would collect all the data for the seed regulatory system.

In short, the CSGA is seeking to restructure itself to be the voice of seed companies rather than seed growers, and lobbying the federal government to hand over public authority for seed regulation to these companies. The "fox guarding the henhouse" would become the law of the land. Their plan to name the proposed super-organization "Seeds Canada" also seems designed to mislead the public into assuming it is a government body. The CSGA says "Combining Advocacy and Regulatory functions is challenging now, will continue to be, but is worth effort." Indeed. ■

¹ Seed Scoop, August 2019 <https://seedgrowers.ca/magazine/august-2019/>

² Seed Synergy Deck for CSGA Branches 1.5(Sask) <http://saskseed.ca/news-and-publications/seed-synergy-deck-for-csga-branches-1-5sask-2/>



Get Involved!

To get involved with the
NFU's seed campaign,
please visit:

www.nfu.ca/campaigns/save-our-seed/

The NFU Seed Committee also urges all farmers to fill in the Producer Survey on Seed Royalties at www.seedroyaltysurvey.com/ that the Alberta Federation of Agriculture (AFA), the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan (APAS) and the Keystone Agricultural Producers (KAP) of Manitoba are conducting.

GM Herbicide-Tolerant Crop Concerns

Monsanto Canada (now owned by Bayer) has applied to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency for approval of MON 87429, a genetically modified corn tolerant to four herbicides: dicamba, 2,4-D, quizalofop, and glufosinate. The Canadian Biotechnology Action Network (CBAN), of which the NFU is a member, and Prevent Cancer Now (PCN) are calling for a review of herbicide tolerant (HT) GM crops.

In their submission to the CFIA's consultation, the groups argue that these crops increase the use of herbicides, which promotes the evolution of herbicide resistant weeds. A strategy of adding more herbicides to the tank and engineering crops able to resist multiple herbicides creates a vicious circle that increases farmers' risk of exposure-related health problems while making herbicide resistant weed problems worse.

CBAN and PCN request "a systematic review of the environmental, health, agronomic and economic impacts of the use of herbicide tolerant crops in Canada, and the development of an appropriate response to the failure of HT cropping systems. This process should include consultation with farmers and weed scientists, and experts in human and environmental health, and lead to the development of a national pesticide-reduction strategy, bringing us closer to building resilient, sustainable agriculture in the face of climate change."

See www.cban.ca/MON87429submission for the full submission.

Getting beyond *Beyond Meat*

—by Cathy Holtslander, NFU Director of Research and Policy

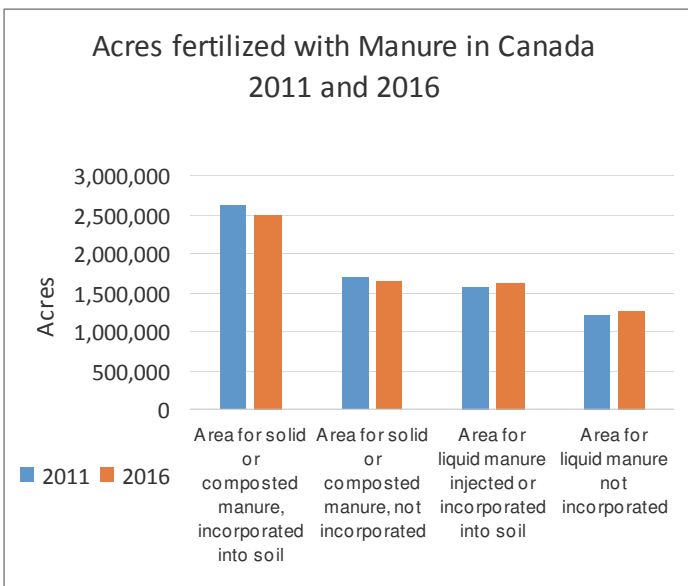
The two largest sources of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the agriculture sector are nitrous oxide from synthetic fertilizer and methane from livestock. A lot of recent public attention has been focused on increasing the proportion of plant-based food in our diets as a way for individual consumers to combat climate change. In some quarters, the issue has been simplified into heated debates for or against meat. Meanwhile, very little attention has been paid to reducing the quantities of synthetic fertilizer use in crop production.

Manufacturing synthetic fertilizer emits a lot of GHGs because it is a very fossil-fuel energy intensive process. When applied to the land, not all of the nitrogen is taken up by plants. Instead, it off-gasses from the soil into the atmosphere as nitrous oxide (N₂O). N₂O has about 300 times more climate impact than carbon dioxide. In 2016, 86% of Canada’s seeded acres had commercial fertilizer applied, over 2.6 million metric tonnes of nitrogen fertilizer was shipped to our domestic agriculture market, and Canadian farmers spent \$5.9 billion on fertilizer and lime.¹ Reducing total synthetic nitrogen use is a necessary climate change measure. Farmers still need to maintain soil fertility, but how?

This is where vegetarians and cowboys could shake hands and work together to save the planet.

Both manure and nitrogen-fixing crops can supply needed fertility. By growing more legumes in rotation, crop farmers reduce their need for synthetic fertilizer –

but this is only an effective strategy if there is a market for these crops. The good news is, nitrogen-fixing crops also supply plant protein (peas, lentils, chick-peas) to the human consumer and nutritious forage for livestock (alfalfa, clover, vetch).

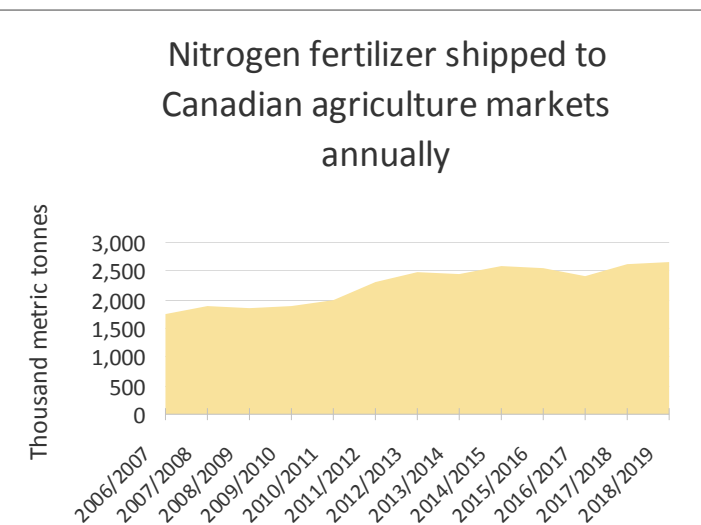


Source: Census of Agriculture: Manure and manure application methods in the year prior to the census, Table: 32-10-0410-01

An increase in the popularity of plant-based protein in the consumer’s diet will help crop farmers market soil-building crops. Meanwhile, greater consumer awareness of health and environmental benefits of grass-fed and pastured livestock should increase the demand – and raise farm gate prices – for meat raised using agroecological practices that build soil carbon and enhance biodiversity. Mixed farms, as well as partnerships between neighbouring crop farmers and livestock producers, would enable more grazing (and manure delivery) and/or nitrogen-fixing hay in rotations to help reduce GHGs from synthetic fertilizer use.

Making food choices that are right for our own health, tastes and personal values is an important part of who we are. To make the kind of difference our world needs, we have to tackle bigger issues of power and policy change collectively. This is the essence of food sovereignty. Our desire for a livable future for ourselves, our children and future generations is something we can agree upon and work towards together over lunch – whether it’s beef stew or lentil soup.

¹ Statistics Canada Table: 32-10-0136-01- Farm operating revenues and expenses, annual.



Source: Statistics Canada: Fertilizer shipments to Canadian agriculture markets, by nutrient content and fertilizer year, cumulative data (x 1,000), Table: 32-10-0039-01

The digitalization of food

Condensed from the September 2019 edition of the Nyéléni Newsletter

Digital land registries; gene sequencing and editing; sensors in robotized agricultural machines; fruit picking robots; blockchains ensuring traceability in global value chains; 24-hour health control of livestock; intellectual property rights (IPR) protection through digital platforms; artificial intelligence (AI) in plant breeding; satellite-supported location of fish resources and allocation of fishing rights; automated trade and distribution; e-commerce of food products; personalized nutrition and fitness with smartphone apps – the brave new world of digital technology is transforming our food systems. This list is a small sample of the range of application of digital technologies. Over the past decade, digitalization has become increasingly visible and influential in food production, processing, storage, packaging, retailing and trading.

Actors, initiatives and narratives

Governments, corporations and policy institutions present digitalization in food and agriculture as a solution to the main problems the world is facing. Corporations and financiers see it as an enormous opportunity to generate profits.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) organized international events on digitalization and technology and “e-agriculture” was on the official agenda of the regional FAO conferences for Europe and Central Asia in 2018. The World Bank hosted panels on digitalization and blockchain technology for land administration at its Land and Poverty Conferences. In several countries, e-commerce giants such as Amazon, have expanded into online food retail. Corporate competition over food retailing and the battle for control over 5G technology show there are large amounts of money at stake in digital technologies and infrastructure.

Corporations in the World Economic Forum are pushing the “4th Industrial Revolution” as a “fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres.” Digital technologies and big data enable the consolidation of corporate control over the global food system.

Digital agriculture refers to the integration of advanced technologies (AI, sensors, robotics, drones, etc.), devices and communications networks into one system, and applying them to production, management, processing and marketing. Its narrative promises greater efficiency in food production and resource and energy use, sustainability, transparency, accuracy and the creation of new markets and economic opportunities. Developing countries are lured by promises from donors, international agencies and corporate foundations that digitalization will enable them to “leapfrog” their way to

progress with climate friendly pathways. However, the technology and infrastructure for this rosy scenario will come from corporations, who are in it for profits, not public benefit.

Implications for people and the environment

Proponents of digitalization claim it will benefit for marginalized people and small farmers: digitalized land administration will increase tenure security; satellite-supported allocation of fishing rights will ensure transparency and security for small-scale fishers; blockchains will link producers to consumers directly, eliminating exploitation by intermediaries; digital agriculture will reduce input costs and increase the efficiency of irrigation and production. E-commerce is widely touted as the gateway for creating new markets and ways of marketing agricultural products.

Certainly, small farmers can benefit tremendously from digital technologies. But we must remember that these technologies are deployed in a context of high national-global inequalities of access to essential goods and services, as well as to information and digital technologies (the digital divide). Unless these inequalities are effectively addressed, new technologies will reproduce and deepen discrimination.

The manufacture and use of digital technology hardware such as microchips, semiconductors, batteries, etc., have large environmental impacts. These include impacts from mining, emissions of volatile compounds, acid fumes, solvents and metals into the air and water, high energy consumption, waste generation/ disposal and greenhouse gas emissions from transportation and storage. ▀

For the original article including references, please visit: https://nyeleni.org/DOWNLOADS/newsletters/Nyeleni_Newsletter_Num_37_EN.pdf