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# Pask Farms Ltd.

## Spring Newsletter 2014

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### Spring, Where Are You?

The crew at Pask Farms are a positive bunch.....spring is just around the corner! We are nearing mid April with the snow just beginning to melt and the water starting to run. At this time we are way ahead of last year, and should be able to begin seeding at the start of May. Fingers are crossed.

#### Contracts and Pricing:

The price for alfalfa seed was up again for the 2013 crop. We paid \$1.85 per pound for good quality common seed. When we refer to good quality common seed, it is seed that will make 99.5% purity and 90% germination. We do our very best at blending up less pure seed lots with better quality lots. However, some lots just cannot be helped! Other crop seeds such as red, alsike, and sweet clover, are some of the worst.

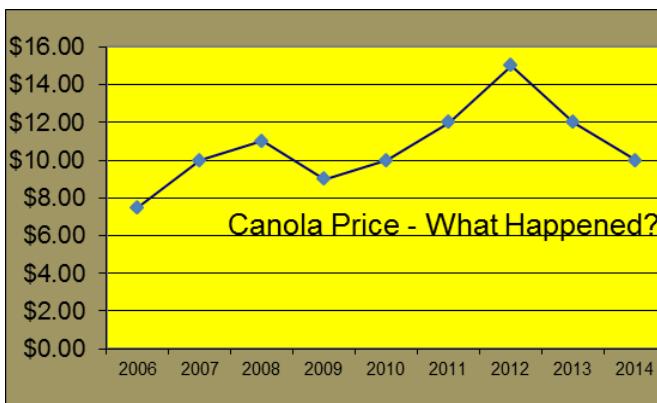
The yield and quality of alfalfa seed in most of SK was better than 2012. The yield is still less than what we would like, but if you had any bees to sell, both combined was acceptable.

We track all our contract production each year for a number of things, yield being the one most are interested in. The average yield of all our contracts was 205 lbs/ac, vs 125 lbs/ac in 2012. The average net price was \$2.16/lb and returned \$442/ac, vs \$2.02/lb in 2012. Coming from the guy who has been doing the dockage tests (keep in mind).....estimated average clean outs were 27.7%, and the actual was 29.4%, pretty close. I know to you guys it is still too high, but for the most part the seed cleaned much easier. Where we could, we salvaged any seed and we paid for that as noted on your final payments.

The new contracts we are signing for VNS or certified production are quite similar to the last few years, Pask common price plus a premium with a minimum. Prices range from 25 to 28 cents over our common with a \$1.45 minimum in your jeans. I am not alone in wondering when these high prices for common seed will come to an end, but does \$2.16/lb for contracts change your mind?

#### What Goes Up Must Come Down:

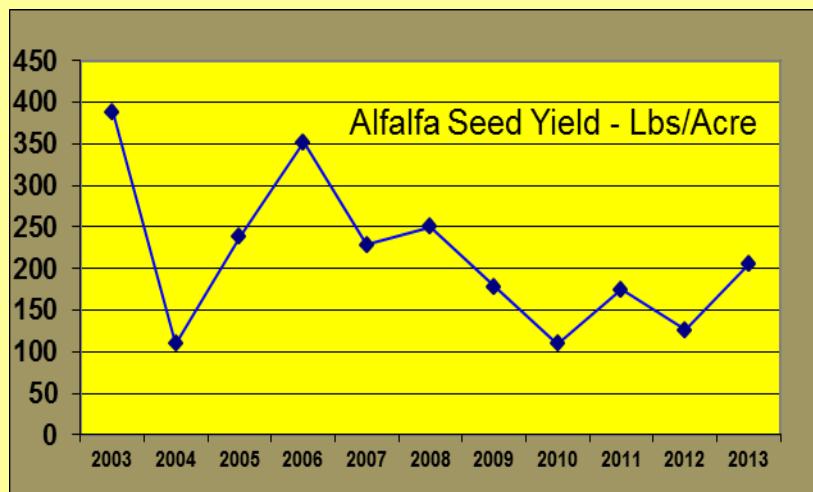
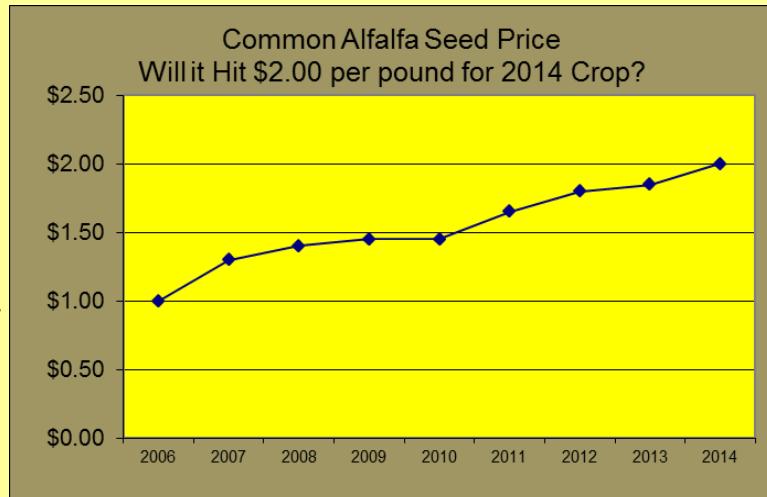
commodity prices were going through the roof. We were all questioning why we should continue to grow alfalfa seed and leafcutter bees. What a difference two short years can make. Here is the canola price chart, extended to reflect the new price reality.



**Suddenly, the profit in commodity crop farming has disappeared.**

# Alfalfa Seed Prices

What happened to alfalfa seed prices? First, seed production continued to decline, although this was offset a bit by the big inventory of RR alfalfa seed hitting the USA market. Now things have evened out, alfalfa seed inventories are low, and USA companies are trying to rebuild seed production acres. An equally big development that has taken place over the last few months is the change in US\$/Cdn exchange rate. We have moved from trading at par, to getting an extra \$.10 Cdn for every \$1.00 US that we sell. Last year we paid \$1.85 per pound for common alfalfa seed based on a dollar trading near par. If everything stays the same, we're looking at \$2.00 Cdn per pound of common alfalfa seed net to the grower.



## Alfalfa Seed Prices and Yields:

Price isn't everything, you also need to grow the crop. What has happened to alfalfa seed yields?

This is the average yields from all our contract production for the last ten years, including our own farm. The last four years were killers, with 2013 crop starting to show recovery from too many wet years.

Now another big problem is starting to hit home – we are not producing enough leafcutter bees to satisfy the market. Even with the hybrid canola guys selling bees, the prices moved higher.

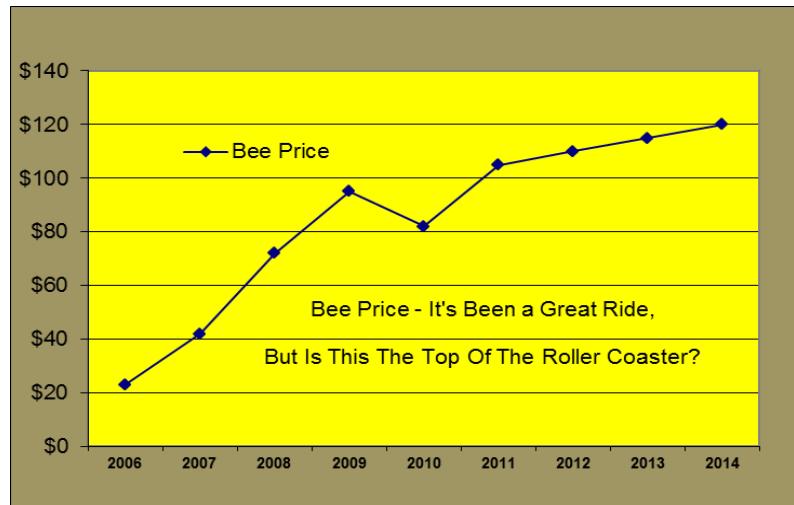
# Leafcutter Bee Prices

If you are getting even average yields of alfalfa seed and leafcutter bees, you are making money.

There is a number of farms that grossed over \$1000/ac between bees and seed in 2013.

Most people are talking a two-fold increase or better. How does your bee increase compare? What can you do to improve your bee increase?

Growers are doing creative things to grow more bees when they are a \$100 and more per gallon.



## Leafcutter Bee Production Ideas

One grower is hanging fresh cut buckwheat sheaves in each bee shelter each day the bees work. They will strip all the leaves from the wilting plants in a matter of hours. They aren't flying out in the field to get leaves, they aren't getting lost or eaten by birds. Does this make sense? Does this make money? The capped nest boxes sure look good.

Right now, alfalfa seed and leafcutter bees are making us serious money, BUT REMEMBER, What Goes Up Must Come Down.



**Fresh Buckwheat sheaf hanging in bee shelter.** Photo By Donna

## Early Season Disease Control



We prefer not to burn, but sometimes we have to. Typically as the stand gets older burning is more effective, as the disease pressure just continues to build if you do not remove the old straw. Burning provides a good way to control disease, insects, winter annuals, and seed chalcids. Removing the old crop residue blackens up the soil as well, so it warms up faster and the alfalfa starts growing sooner.

There are some risks with burning; fire is fire, and it needs to be respected. Be sure to make good fire guards and have firefighting equipment on hand.

Burning also dries out the soil. If you get strong winds after burning, soil erosion is possible, plants get cut off, and it delays the crop.

Other growers are using vertical tillage, such as a Salford for trash control. It burns more diesel, but saves some cover to prevent erosion.

**As you can see soil erosion can be an issue if it stays dry after a burn.**

# Weed, Disease, & Insect Control

To grow a good alfalfa crop we need to manage the weeds, disease, and insects. These are the possible applications we make on any given year across the alfalfa.

The alfalfa is seeded in rows with Clearfield wheat. We spray the wheat/alfalfa mix with straight Odyssey (Group 2) for in-crop spray. If we apply a fungicide to the wheat we tank mix it with Embutox or 2-4DB (Group 4) to control Canada thistle seedlings, sweet clover, and other broadleaf weeds.

In the fall after the wheat is harvested we apply Velpar

(Group 5) as long as the alfalfa is well established. We will apply Velpar every fall, but back off on the rate going into the last year of the stand. The Velpar has activity on dandelion, sow thistle, quackgrass, dock, sweet clover, night-flowering catchfly, and suppresses Canada thistle. We have also started to use Authority (Group 14) in the fall, it shows some promise. The Authority has control on kochia, lamb's-quarters, redroot pigweed, wild buckwheat, cleavers, and has activity on other broadleaf weeds.

When spring arrives we apply Edge Granular (Group 3) when we are leveling the mole hills and breaking down the alfalfa stubble. The Edge provides control on barnyard grass, green foxtail (millet), yellow foxtail, kochia, lamb's quarters, redroot pigweed, and buckwheat. It also suppresses cleavers and wild oats.

In May we spray Odyssey DLX, but sometimes we substitute this with Pardner (Bromoxynil) (Group 6) and Assure II (Group 1), the Pardner provides control of seedling kochia and buckwheat, and suppresses Canada thistle and russian thistle. The Pardner/Assure II combination is better for killing kochia, but it is a lot harder on the alfalfa than the Odyssey DLX.

In the first part of June the alfalfa is row sprayed with glyphosate (Group 9) between the rows, and the option to spray Odyssey DLX (Group 2 and 1) on the rows if not already done prior. The Odyssey DLX controls grasses and broadleaf weeds, the main one being cleavers (non- Group 2 resistant).



Mole Hill Plow with Valmar mounted on to apply Edge and level mole hills



Pask Farms custom built row crop sprayer version 2.0

During the third week of June (pre bloom timing), the alfalfa is sprayed to control insects before the bees are released. We quite often tank mix the insecticide with Assure II and Headline. The Assure II controls your grassy weeds and the Headline for plant disease.

## Weed, Disease, & Insect Control con't

In the first week of July, Pardner is applied to fields that have Canada thistle. Spray when it is hot and sunny.

In later July we may apply a second fungicide application. We have tank mixed Pardner with the fungicide at this timing too, and it doesn't seem to hurt the yield.

In August we usually have to clean up the aphids and plant bugs if they warrant it. You can add fungicide to this too if needed, and if you are counting, this is the third time for fungicide!

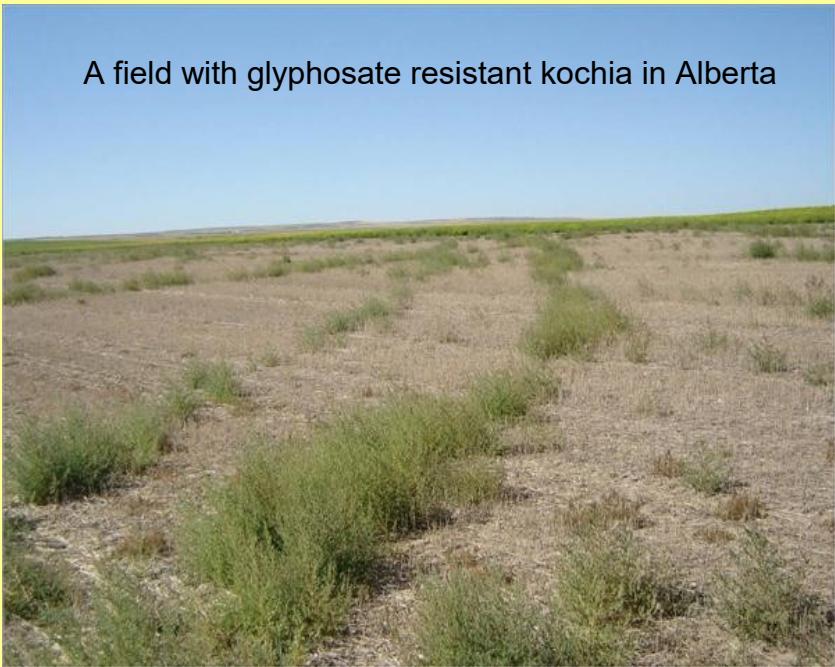
AS YOU CAN SEE, THERE IS NO ONE TIME SILVER BULLET SPRAY!

## Chemical Rotation and Glyphosate Resistance

By using different chemical groups to target the same weeds, we are delaying chemical resistance in those weeds. Soil residual chemicals will provide a different time of weed removal, by attacking the weed at the germination to two leaf stage. This helps with resistance because the weed never even gets close to setting seed, compared to a late, in-crop chemical application applied to out-of-stage weeds. These weeds will still set some viable seed. Starting this year when we row spray with glyphosate, we plan to tank mix another group of chemical in with it. Tank mixing provides a good strategy to delay weed resistance to glyphosate.

Glyphosate resistant kochia was first discovered in Kansas in 2007. In Canada it was first confirmed in the spring of 2012 in Alberta, then in the summer of 2012 in Saskatchewan, and suspected in Manitoba in the fall of 2013. The resistant kochia did not move from Kansas all the way to Western Canada. The kochia at each site is evolving separately; therefore it will not necessarily *blow* into your field, it will *evolve* in your field. This makes chemical rotation very important in order to keep glyphosate as a viable chemical. The glyphosate resistant kochia in AB and SK is resistant to Group 2 chemicals as well. Use Edge (Group 3) and Authority (Group 14) to control kochia and help delay resistance.

A field with glyphosate resistant kochia in Alberta



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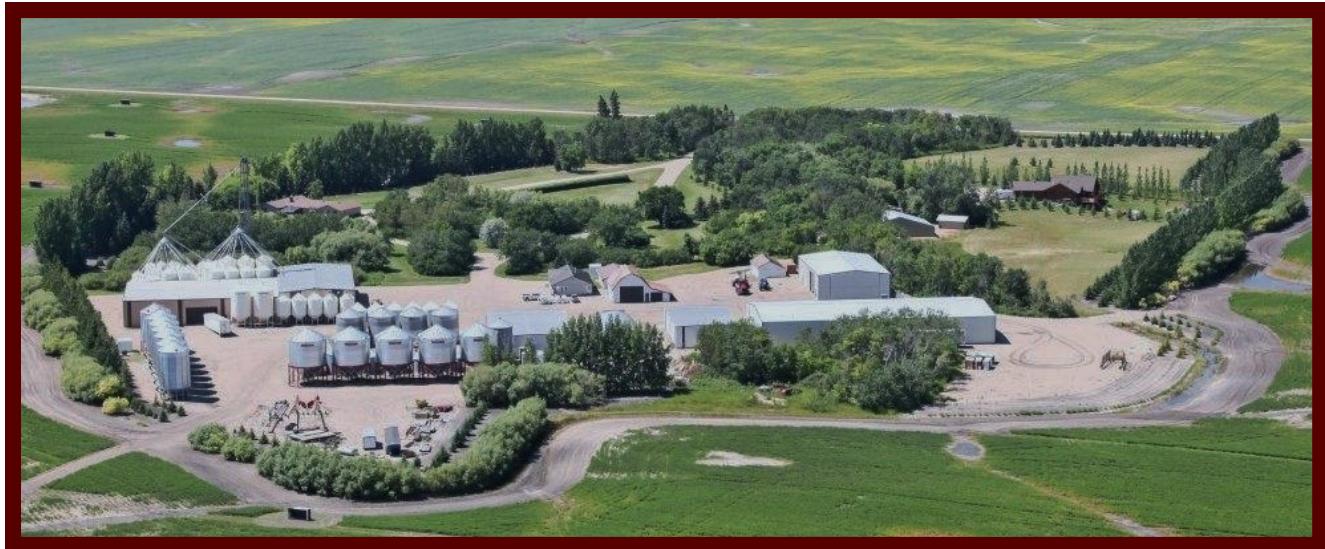
We hope our newsletters provide some insight on growing alfalfa seed  
and leafcutter bees.

Wishing you a safe 2014 and a harvest to match 2006,

Craig Newton

Gavin Leech

Murray Pask



***Safe Farming Everyone!!***