

Pask Farms Ltd.

Box 40
Atwater, SK
S0A 0C0

Pask Farms Ltd.

Spring Newsletter 2015

craig@paskfarms.com

gavin@paskfarms.com

murray@paskfarms.com

Phone:

306-745-2571

Fax:

306-745-2564

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Hope For An Early Spring

So far this spring is shaping up to be more normal than the last few we have had. Hopefully we are all able to get some spring field work done before seeding starts.



**Third year alfalfa stubble March 31, 2015
Spring we have found you, it only took a year**

Contract Production

We have never paid as much per pound for contract production as we did this year. It is just unfortunate there was not more of it! The average price per pound we paid out was \$2.42, with a range from \$2.24 to \$2.49. Seed yields were down for most growers from 2013, ranging from zero to 217 pounds/ac, averaging 83 pounds/ac. This average includes all of our VNS and certified production fields, even the ones that had zero yield.

Most of our contracts are now based on a premium over the common seed price. The common seed price is based on the average we pay for seed in the fall. That average price was up, and so were your contract settlements. On the majority of our settlements we paid a price adjustment bonus on your final payment, some quite significant. The strength of the US dollar helped make this possible.

We are seeing more interest from farmers wanting to sign a contract again. Growing common seed for the open market has been, and still is, a good option for producers wanting that freedom and flexibility. Some growers are seeing more interest and an increase in alfalfa seed acres, and fear that if we get too much supply the price may soon drop. Signing a contract with a minimum price takes some risk out of growing this volatile crop.

The contracts that we are signing this spring are again priced over common seed. At the low end for less pure contracts the premium starts at \$.10/lb for non-certified. Squeaky clean certified production that allows zero noxious weeds bring a premium of \$.28/lb.

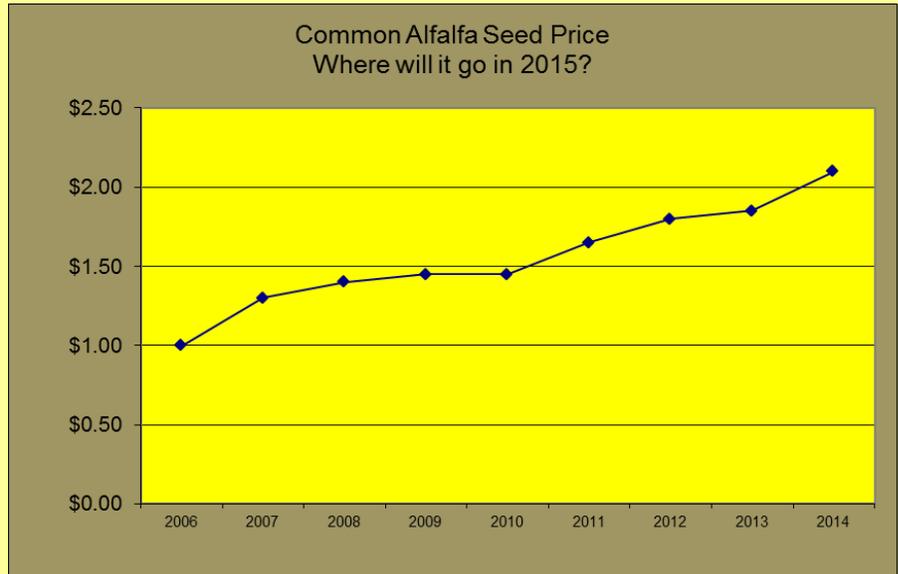
Alfalfa Seed Market

All of North America produced generally poor alfalfa seed crops in 2014. Inventories in Canada, the USA, and much of Europe are historically short. Demand for seed is steady. Beef cattle prices are through the roof, dairy is okay, and the export hay market all drove the market over the winter.

At this time last year our price in your jeans for common seed was about \$2.00/lb. The US-CDN exchange rate was 1.10 then, today it is almost 1.30. As exporters this is great. For common seed last fall we paid \$2.10/lb FOB your farm. VNS seed with good traits was \$2.20/lb. Where is it heading in 2015 you ask?

The USA is still trying to rebuild their alfalfa seed production acres, high bee prices and other crop options don't help that (+). The chance for an earlier spring in the US Midwest will allow more alfalfa hay to be planted (+). AB and MB have been increasing their acres the last couple of years more than us in SK. The acres in SK will be up in 2015 (-). Prices for commodity crops in western Canada are mediocre, and the price for leafcutters are really attractive (-).

Will the cure for high prices be high prices?



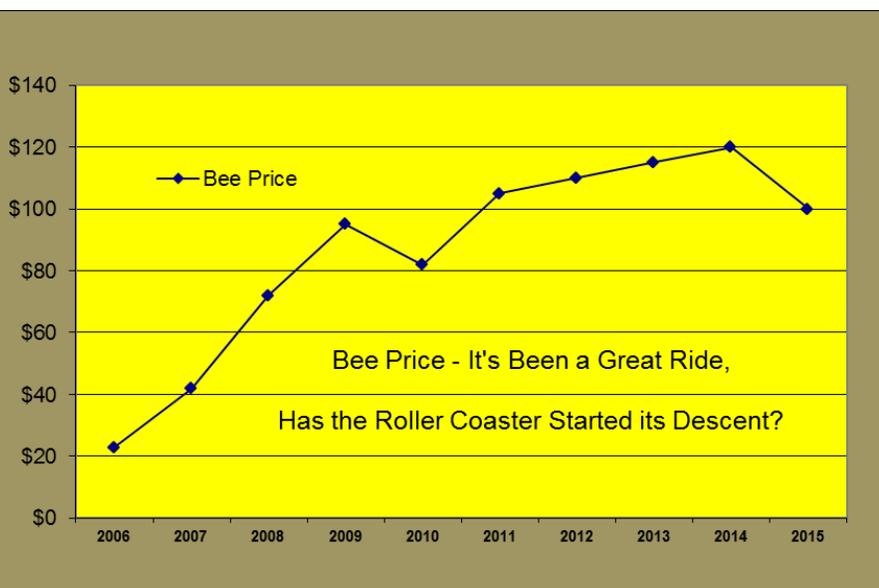
Leafcutter Bee Market

What the heck happened here? There was no way Canada could supply enough bees for the three major leafcutter bee users: 1. USA alfalfa seed production, 2. Alberta's hybrid canola seed production and, 3. the east coast low bush blueberries.

Producers were getting \$125 per gallon. Then along came February and the entire bee market just

stopped. Sellers holding out for the best price suddenly had no price, and buyers were backing out on deals. Why? Southern Alberta's hybrid canola acres for 2015 were cut back some. Regions in California are extremely dry and there is no water for irrigation. More bees suddenly became available than originally forecasted. All good reasons, however no one saw this coming, or at least not this quick.

The price for bees in the fall may very well start out softer, especially if we have a hot summer and good reproduction. \$100 per gallon bees and a two fold increase is what most producers shoot for; let's hope it will be there.



Leafcutter Bee Production Ideas

For the upcoming year we are going to try a few different crops to seed around the bee shelters in addition to the Buckwheat that we already seed. We are hoping that a different crop type may increase the bee return and keep the bees at home. The first kind of crop we are going to try is Fababeans. The Fababean stands well, takes water ok, and fixes its own nitrogen.

The other crop we are going to seed is Austrian winter peas. We have heard of growers in the U. S .A. planting Austrian winter peas. The bees are supposed to like this leaf. We are not sure how they stand or if they can take the wet conditions, but the one bonus is they can fix their own nitrogen. We will know more by this fall if these different crop types are used by the bees and have any affect on their increase.

Lets Fill These Holes Up



Vertical Tillage in Alfalfa Seed Production



We have looked at a few different options over the years for vertical tillage on alfalfa seed fields. Since it does not look like it is going to dry out in the near future, we need to adapt to these wet growing conditions. For spring of 2015 we have bought a Salford 2100 RTS vertical tillage machine. We have a number of trials planned for the Salford and we will learn a lot by this fall. The one benefit we have observed is the later development of disease in the growing alfalfa. With the disease pressure being delayed this should make the fungicide more effective when applied. This will not replace a fungicide application, but it will complement it.

The Salford ready to roll for this springs vertical tillage trials.

Canadian Seed Growers Association (CSGA)

CSGA released an update on the alternative service delivery program for crop inspections on February 26, 2015. For the 2015 growing season, certified alfalfa seed crops can still be inspected by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). We used the CFIA last year and are planning to use them again this year. Their office is close, fees are reasonable, and it worked well for us last year. There should be a new list of inspector services available around April 15 on the CSGA website.

By the end of April you should receive annual membership renewal from CSGA that you will need to complete. You will also receive a renewal for crop inspections on current alfalfa seed fields in production. For fields under contract to Pask Farms, we can do that renewal for you, we just need to know who your inspector will be. We can also assist in the application for inspection on new production acres. We will continue to monitor the situation with the crop inspection program and how alfalfa seed inspections will be affected. If anyone needs help with signing up for the online services with CSGA, or with applying for crop inspections, please call Gavin and he can help you through it.

S & W Seed Acquisition of Dupont Pioneer's Alfalfa Research and Production Assets

It was announced on December 19, 2014 that S & W Seed of Five Points, California had acquired Dupont Pioneer's alfalfa research and production assets for \$42 million dollars. This acquisition creates a very large company in dormant and non-dormant alfalfa seed. We will wait and see where this takes the alfalfa seed industry.

New Plant Operator at Pask Farms

Willem Boogaard started with us six years ago stripping bees in the fall. Each year Willem worked more and his part time employment slowly turned into full time. Last winter Lloyd took Willem under his wing and began to mentor him in the entire alfalfa seed cleaning process. Willem is a quick learner and is very capable. This winter Willem shared the plant operator duties with Lloyd. We are very pleased and fortunate to have Willem sharing this position.



Chemical Rotation in Seed Alfalfa Production

As you can see by the Table Insert there are very few options for weed control in alfalfa. This list gets even smaller when you start targeting harder to kill weeds that have chemical resistance to one or more groups. We created this table here at Pask Farms based on what we have used, It has been updated with new experiments and with the new chemicals that are available now. Remember to check and always follow label directions. The product may be registered on another crop where we have noted weed control or lack of control as compared to the label. These products may work differently in different soils and different crop and weed staging, so proceed at your own risk.

Group Two Resistant Cleavers !!!

While cleaning seed this past winter we saw a large increase in the amount of cleavers in grower's alfalfa seed. We decided to send a sample of cleaver seeds away for group two resistance testing. We just received the results. The cleavers came back highly resistant to **group two chemical**. That means that the cleavers were 76%-100% resistant to **group two chemicals**. This now eliminates the use of **group two chemical** for the control of cleavers. From now on it should be assumed if you see cleavers in your field, they are resistant to **group two chemicals**.

From the large amount of cleaver seeds in the dockage this year there will be lots of them to contend with this spring as well. A few options that can be used are Velpar, Authority, Valtera, and Edge. All these products can be applied in the fall when the alfalfa is dormant. We do a fair amount of spring Edge application and it suppresses the cleavers. We do not have much experience with spring Velpar application but some alfalfa growers do it every year with good results. The Velpar would suppress the cleavers as well. We have never used Authority or Valtera in the spring, but these would be your best options if you are facing high populations of cleavers. The Authority and Valtera will provide control of cleavers at high rates. The Authority and Valtera also have good activity on other broadleaf weeds such as kochia. Valtera also has activity on volunteer canola. Again, these products may work differently in different soils so proceed at your own risk.

Moving forward it will be beneficial to use more than one chemical group to target the resistant weeds. For example you could apply Authority in the fall when the alfalfa is dormant, and then in the spring apply Edge. By using two different groups of chemicals to target specific weeds this will significantly delay or prevent resistance from occurring. The last thing we want to have happen is to create Group 2 and Group 14 resistant weeds. Once the weed population becomes resistant it does not lose resistance, so even if 10 years down the road you spray a group two chemical on the



field 76% to 100% of the cleavers will not die. The one key to controlling the cleavers is the fact that their seed does not stay viable in the soil for a very long time. Therefore if you can control the cleavers and stop them from going to seed, you can get them under control.



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

Wishing you a safe and prosperous growing season for 2015. Hopefully seeding is early, and you have to read this newsletter in the tractor!

Craig Newton

Gavin Leech

Murray Pask

Pask Farms Ltd.

Box 40
Atwater, Sk.
S0A 0C0

Phone: 306-745-2571

Fax: 306-745-2564

craig@paskfarms.com

murray@paskfarms.com

gavin@paskfarms.com

Safe Farming Everyone!!