

Leading the Way

A Saskatchewan couple's belief in the future is leading to new opportunities.



rod & cathy fedoruk

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By Stephanie Fehr

ROD AND CATHY FEDORUK are attracted to trying new things on their farm. The couple farms 4,000 acres in northeastern Saskatchewan, with two-thirds devoted to seed production and the remainder to commercial production of canola or other grain.

They became seed growers about 15 years ago in order to diversify their production and have kept forging ahead. Three years ago they even built their own seed cleaning plant.

"We realized we're going to be staying in the industry for the longer term and we wanted to control our own work and timing," says Rod. "It was also for quality control," adds Cathy. "We can slow the line down if we need to or run the seed through again, especially for the higher generations."

In addition to establishing their own seed plant, the Fedoruks have branched out into other types of seed – namely potatoes, an interesting choice for seed growers. "It's definitely another ball game," says Rod. "It's specialized equipment and techniques." To get started, Rod and two partners bought older equipment from Manitoba to use on the farm. "It works for us because we're still smaller scale in terms of seed potato production and we can fix our own equipment if we have to."

The partnership formed Assiniboine Valley Seed Potatoes. "We mainly did it as a way of diversification," says Rod. "One of the partners worked in the potato industry and saw an opportunity to produce seed." Rod also saw seed potatoes as a way to break up the cereal rotation, helping to ease disease pressure.

After a couple of years of intense learning and a weather curveball – an early frost in 2004 – the partnership is seeing

results. "We were very successful this year," says Rod. "We got a good crop and are increasing our knowledge of the industry."

Rod and Cathy are also introducing other new crops to the area. "We've dabbled in bean seed production," says Rod. "Beans are new to the area and we're working on propagating a variety developed at the Crop Development Centre in Saskatoon, an early maturing variety called Pintium." Rod notes that they've also grown onions for the retail market.

"We've set the bar high for ourselves," says Cathy. "Every year our customers are asking 'What have you done different this year?' It's a very steep learning curve here most of the time."

"That's the exciting part of what we do," adds Rod, "learning and trying new things."

The Fedoruks are optimistic about the future, which is why they've expanded their options. But the optimism also has to do with their family. They have four children, two of whom are already studying agriculture at university. "The expansion is our way of looking into the future," says Cathy. "We want to provide something for our children if they choose to come back to this."

"We're pretty excited about the future," she adds. "A lot of the things the seed industry does now with quality control are going to happen, probably sooner than later, in the whole grain industry." The Fedoruks point to the increasing popularity of identity-preserved programs, on-farm food safety programs, and the concern for traceability. "As seed growers, we can lead the way. The rest of the industry is just learning and trying to keep up, but we're already set up for segregating different crop kinds." 