



FORMER DISTRICT AGRICULTURIST KIRSTY ROSS HONOURED WITH 2019 ALBERTA PULSE INDUSTRY INNOVATOR AWARD



Kirsty Ross is presented with the 2019 Alberta Pulse Industry Innovator Award by (left to right) Ron Wirsta of St. Paul Seed Processing, APG Chair Don Shepert and APG former Chair D'Arcy Hilgartner.

The Alberta Pulse Growers (APG) selected Kirsty Ross (Piquette), who was instrumental in building the field pea industry in northeastern Alberta, as the winner of the fifth annual Alberta Pulse Industry Innovator Award.

“Each year, APG recognizes a person or organization whose progressive thinking and tireless efforts helped build Alberta’s pulse industry into the flourishing sector that it is today,” said APG Chair Don Shepert. “Kirsty became a visionary for the

pulse industry in northeast Alberta. She introduced a new crop that had no history in the area. She persevered using grower groups to advance the crop to a place of prominence in rotations in our area. Kirsty’s commitment to the farming community is not forgotten, and it is very well appreciated by all of us affected by her work. We’re pretty proud of some of our people, and Kirsty is one of them.”

As a provincial district agriculturist for the St. Paul area in the mid-

1980s, Ross started to look for another option to add to the area’s crops and generate more cash flow for farmers. She began to organize field trials after becoming intrigued by the nitrogen cycle and nutrients that pulses provide to the soil. Add to this that the St. Paul area was also home to a high concentration of hogs, and the result was that an increasing number of producers started to grow field peas. The St. Paul Seed Cleaning Plant became involved as they saw a future for cleaning dry peas for human consumption.

“St. Paul was barley growing country, but I always felt that there had to be something else they could grow that would generate more cash flow,” Ross said. “In conjunction with the local ag service board, I began to organize local trials on various specialty peas, and others became interested. In 1988, I brought a number of growers together and we began discussing how to grow field peas.”

Ross noted that growing the field pea industry in what became Alberta Pulse Growers’ Zone 5 was a collaborative effort that was successful because of the work of producers, grower groups, agricultural service boards, plant breeders, and many more.

Ron Wirsta, General Manager of St. Paul Seed Processing, explained the impact Ross had on many lives as he helped Shepert to present the award at the APG annual general meeting on January 30.

“Your drive and dedication for new crop development for pulses is in major use today and much appreciated,” Wirsta told Ross. “A lot of growers that you mentored are still growing pulses in northeastern Alberta today and we’re still convincing new ones to grow. You were instrumental in changing producers’ lives, along with mine. Listening to your research information and in-field demos helped start my career in knowledge and persistence.”

Ross said that she was honoured to learn that she was chosen as the recipient of the fifth annual Industry Innovator Award.

“I was very stunned and humbled – it was really quite special,” Ross said. “I had a lot of support from the St. Paul Agricultural Service Board, especially from Dennis Bergheim, Agricultural Fieldman, who worked with me in organizing local trials on different pea



This year's Alberta Pulse Industry Innovator Award winner Kirsty Ross is now a certified executive coach in Edmonton.

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Kirsty Ross organized local trials on various specialty peas and shared the knowledge with producers in northeastern Alberta at many crop walks and other events.



varieties. By proving the crop could be grown and marketed successfully in the area, growers became interested. It was a team effort, but I guess I was the catalyst. I was able to bring everyone together. I always wondered what else we could grow up there (near St. Paul) and peas seemed to be a great fit.”

Ross hailed from Stonewall, Manitoba, graduating with a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture from the University of Manitoba in 1978. She worked for the Government of Alberta from 1985 until 2002 as a district agriculturist, then as a pulse specialist. She also spent time with the Farm Business Management Initiative as a north eastern region coordinator of business management programs. Later she moved into management with the Government of Alberta and worked in the bio-industrial and economic development areas. Ross now uses some of the skills that she developed as a provincial district agriculturist and in other positions with the Government of Alberta as a certified executive coach in Edmonton. Her business focuses on executive coaching, leadership development, group coaching, building effective teams and organizational design. She also enjoys spending time with her family including two adult children and a grandson.



Kirsty Ross worked with APG’s Zone 5 and others to prove that peas were a viable crop for the St. Paul area.

Alberta Pulse Growers celebrated its 25th year as a commission by launching the Alberta Pulse Industry Innovator Award and presenting the organization’s founding president, Lud Prudek, with the first annual award in 2015. Since that time, the award has been presented to esteemed pulse researcher Ken Lopetinsky in 2016, life-long pulse supporter Blair Roth in 2017, and Dr. Hans-Henning Muendel, who was instrumental in developing numerous bean cultivars, in 2018.