



# ALBERTA PULSE GROWERS CELEBRATES 35 YEARS AS A COMMISSION

Teamwork was essential in establishing the Alberta Pulse Growers Commission 35 years ago, and it continues to take many hands to work towards the current vision of pulses on every farm and every plate.

“In any of these major accomplishments, you always have to have an enormous team to make it work,” said Lud Prudek, the first president of Alberta Pulse Growers (APG) in 1989. “If you don’t have that team and someone to inspire them, you’re not going to get anywhere.”

Prudek was interviewed for *Pulse Crop News* in 2015 when he was named the winner of the first annual Alberta Pulse Industry Innovator Award, which was launched in celebration of APG’s 25th anniversary.

Prudek said that he and other Alberta farmers introduced pulses into the rotations on their farms to restore soil fertility for their grains and oilseeds. He grew beans near Bow Island and hauled them to a plant in Lethbridge until he and three other producers were approached around 1970 by the plant owners to take over the assets involved with the bean side of the plant.

“It was a matter of keeping the industry alive,” Prudek recalled. “Essentially, it was an industry on the verge of bankruptcy.”

The group expanded the Alberta Bean Growers Ltd. plant, and eventually took on six additional shareholders to carry out the expensive proposition. Due to financial challenges, Prudek and his partners sold the plant to the Alberta Wheat Pool in 1978.



Former APG presidents at a 1995 convention: (Left to right) Frank Spanbauer, Craig Shaw, Lud Prudek, Renald Lamoureux and Jerry Bartosek.

“People were very upset with us,” Prudek explained. “They said, ‘we trusted you and we need a growers’ organization because you aren’t there anymore.’”

Prudek noted that it was suggested that a growers’ organization should include peas, lentils and chickpeas as well as beans and be called pulses, which wasn’t immediately accepted by the bean growers.

Lacombe’s Craig Shaw planted his first pea crop in 1984 to feed to his brother’s hogs. He served as the organization’s first vice-president.

“When I look back, I can’t believe our commitment betting on a basically new industry,” he remarked in an interview when he received the Innovator Award in 2021. “The collaboration between producers and some good industry support people meant we were able to tackle endless challenges. Our goal was to provide some cropping options and gain a presence in the protein industry.”

The pulse industry exhibited significant growth over the past 35 years, and much of that success is due to the investment in research and development that enables Alberta growers to address the issues and challenges that arise.

In 1989, grower investment was used primarily to showcase on-farm demonstrations, but the collection of producer service fees, or check-off, was already being explored to ensure market development and research were key priorities.

Shaw said that it is interesting that in the beginning, APG relied primarily on the federal and provincial governments for research funding, and more recently the commissions have been considered a source of funding for research projects.

“The big push was to get newer and better varieties suited to our conditions,” Shaw said. “It was an exciting time to get the industry off the ground.”