CHAIR'S REPORT

CELEBRATING 35 YEARS OF PROGRESS FOR ALBERTA PULSES

Shane Strydhorst, APG Chair

Wow, 35 years! Alberta Pulse Growers and the pulse industry have grown and changed significantly over this period! This issue of *Pulse Crop News* is devoted to looking back at the past 35 years and the many changes that have occurred, as well as some of the things that remain the same.

Back in 1989, the small group of farmers that were planting less than 100,000 acres of peas and dry beans probably didn't even dream that a million acres was possible. And yet, here we are, with Alberta's 5,400 pulse farmers currently planting around two million acres of pulse crops including peas, various types of dry beans, lentils, chickpeas, faba beans, and lupins.

APG's beginnings as an organization were equally as humble. We started with a single part-time staff person working with a microscopic budget that was largely devoted to on-farm demonstrations, and a vision to sustain research to assist the pulse industry. We now have a fantastic team made up of nine staff members who are very well-known and respected in the industry and, like our farmer members, they are extremely innovative and use cutting edge ideas and technology.

Research is a constantly changing field that remains a high priority for APG as we continue to invest strategically in carefully considered projects, collaborating with other organizations and leveraging grower dollars. We will never lose sight of the original vision to sustain research that benefits the pulse industry, even if these activities are generating smaller incremental gains when compared with some of the giant yield jumps that were enjoyed by farmers in the early 1990s. Most importantly, we are determined to solve the root rot puzzle, arguably our industry's most significant hurdle.

In today's social and political climate, advocacy is more important than ever, so APG has expanded its focus (rather than thinking of it as a shift away from research) to include more policy and advocacy work to meet these challenges.

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APG continues to partner with Team Alberta Crops, Pulse Canada, and Grain Growers of Canada to amplify our voice and provide effective communication with all levels of government, the public, and overseas buyers. This work likely seemed unnecessary in 1989, but today it is critical to ensure that pulses keep moving to markets and that we farmers maintain our social license to operate.

Methods of communication with farmers are continually evolving, currently including printed reports and virtual reality YouTube videos and everything in between. One thing that hasn't changed is APG's grassroots connection and commitment to farmers. APG staff,

directors and industry experts have always been and continue to be very accessible and available to farmers. They can be found participating in small plot tours and other farmer-focused events, and good advice is always easy to find. I benefitted from many meaningful interactions with several past Alberta Pulse Industry Innovator Award winners (see separate article) at these events, including Ken Lopetinsky, Mark Olson, and the late Cliff Cyre. I learned a great deal about growing pulse crops from these industry giants, and I really appreciate what they have done for our industry.

My close connection to APG goes back to the early 2000s. My wife Sheri, another pulse industry powerhouse and a very familiar name to many of our readers (see separate article), conducted small plot research in Zone 3. Sheri later served APG as Executive Director from 2008-2011, so I was very familiar with the organization when I accepted the nomination to be an advisor in 2017. Sheri encouraged me to decline a nomination to serve as an Alberta Barley delegate and wait for the nomination to join APG, stating that "Alberta Pulse Growers is the best commission." I tend to agree!

Are three million acres possible? We need our investment in research to solve the root rot issues currently plaguing lentil and pea growers. We need to reach more farmers through our increasingly diverse grower engagement efforts to increase lentil acres in the Peace, increase faba bean acres in central Alberta, and continue to bring strong leadership to our board. We need our advocacy efforts to produce dependable transportation and more local value-added processing. If we can accomplish these things, anything is possible!

I don't know what APG or Alberta's pulse industry will look like 35 years from now, but I am certain that both will continue to be leaders in growth and innovation.

Shane Strydhorst's favourite pulse dish is rice & lentil salad.