

DASHING THROUGH THE SNOW



Art Gibson of Brookdale, Man., drives his Belgian-cross horse team with help from Alec Christianson. The Manitoba Agriculture Museum near Austin, Man., ran its Christmas Wonderland at the Homesteader's Village each weekend in December. There were light displays and horse-pulled sleigh rides through the forest and around the site. At the end of the tour, visitors were treated to hot chocolate and roasted hot dogs. | SANDY BLACK PHOTO

CLIMATE CHANGE

Canadian canola has carbon advantage

Studies have found canola increases soil organic carbon, resulting in a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions

BY ROBIN BOOKER
SASKATOON NEWSROOM

The recent Paris climate accord will likely increase world attention on the carbon footprint associated with crops.

This could be good news for Canadian canola producers, who produce lower amounts of greenhouse gas than producers in other canola and rapeseed regions.

"Canola is unique in terms of the amount of soil organic carbon (SOC) that it puts into the soils, and increasing the amount of SOC in the soils benefits crops," Agriculture Canada researcher Brian McConkey told a recent canola industry meeting in Saskatoon.

"It's all kind of a nice story. Canola is good for carbon and carbon is good for canola, from a production

level as well as from marketing."

Studies have found that soil organic carbon decreases rapidly when forest and grassland are converted to cropland but then stabilizes as pastures and cropland become established.

However, studies have also found that soil organic carbon increased in prairie soil when producers moved to zero tillage, reduced summer fallow acreage and rotated between annual and perennial crops.

Soil organic carbon levels have been rising in many parts of the Prairies by 35 kilograms per acre per year, which is significant when taking the size of the region into consideration, said McConkey.

The increase in soil organic carbon accounts for 11 million tonnes of carbon dioxide per year in Can-

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BRIAN MCCONKEY, AGRICULTURE CANADA

da, which reduces Canada's net greenhouse gas emissions by 1.5 percent.

The benefit is reduced to 7.4 million tonnes of CO₂ when the carbon emitted from the creation of new cropland is considered, which brings Canada's net greenhouse gas emissions down only one percent.

He said a comparison of canola production in Germany and the Prairies found fewer emissions on the Prairies.

"(It) gives us a competitive advantage," he said.

"It's also becoming more important in the American market. Millions of tonnes of canola could potentially be sold into the California market for vegetable oils for biodiesel."

California ranked Canadian canola as the lowest emission among oilseeds, McConkey said.

"Those jurisdictions with cap and trade systems are desperate for immediate GHG reductions and biodiesel from Canadian canola can provide that."

Biodiesel may become a big future market for canola as economies shift away from fuel with greater net carbon emissions.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE >>