
Agronomy Network - Keeping the Farm Industry Informed

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The purpose of this industry-led initiative is to create **a new and pro-active** way to collect and disseminate agronomic information to the agriculture industry. The network connects knowledgeable people in order to enhance information services available to farmers.

Over the past decade, agricultural extension and information services have changed. Farm organizations have responded quickly and efficiently to address the information void. In 2003 the Alberta Pulse Growers created the Pulse Agronomy Network (PAN).

Pulse Agronomy Network 2003

- The original PAN concept was designed in Summer 2002 by a team of extension agronomists in Alberta. APG would like to recognize and thank these people and the companies that they work for, for their enthusiastic and constructive support of this initiative:

Louis Brossear	Philom Bios	Emile DeMiliano	Agricore United
Rick Taillieu	RT Linkages	Roger Andreiuk	NorWest Labs
Mark Olson	AAFRD	Josie Van Lent	Webb's
Denise Maurice	Westco	Randy Retzlaff	Syngenta
Sarah Foster Stubbs	20/20 Seed Labs		

- PAN was delivered to a group of 57 private and public agronomists and farmers starting March, 2003
- An industry survey was undertaken to glean the perspectives of chemical and seed companies, independent retailers, consulting agronomists and farmers and farm organizations.
- An evaluation of 2003 participants was conducted. The response was very positive.



Proposed Plan For 2004 and Beyond

- Step I** Expand the PAN Pilot Group to include all private and public agronomists and researchers in Alberta
- Step II** Deliver PAN Bulletins through the cropping season.
- Step III** Incorporate emerging technologies that better serve the industry
- Step IV** Co-operate with the agriculture industry to form an province-wide, crop-wide Alberta Agronomy Network.

Gordon Tuck

Farmers need to have access to agronomists that have the knowledge and expertise to provide timely “answers” to crop production issues as they arise. Agronomists need to provide answers to farmers in most cases within hours, so that decisions relating to logistics of product application can be made.

Using a proactive approach to field scouting versus a reactive approach is very important, because many times I am not looking for problems that could be effecting my crop. The main reason for this, I don’t want to spend more money on raising the crop. The local agronomist/salesman in most cases is the only agronomic expertise I have available today to scout my crops for potential problems. These are individuals with an agronomic background that I have come to trust and who understand my individual farm management style. They are not some experts on a 1-800 line trying to respond to my question after I have seen the production problem.

The decision as farmers that we need to make regarding pesticide applications cost us \$5/ac to \$30/acre, plus application fees. The last thing I want to do is spend money when I didn’t need to; or not spray when I should have and then suffer a severe crop yield loss. The decision to spray, timing of application, application itself and availability of product are major issues that I rely on my local agronomist to help me with.

The loss of expertise from the extension services in the crop production industry in Alberta is a major concern for me. The Pulse Agronomy Network allows for the two Pulse Specialists left in the province to be able to reach more agronomists with pulse expertise where it is required. Less experienced agronomists have access to more individuals with years of agronomic and research knowledge. An Alert system that warns agronomists to be on the lookout for production problems, can only help to improve the bottom line on my farm. Awareness of disease and insect outbreaks in my area is just one thing I do not have the time or ability to maintain. The strong relationship that I have with my local agronomist helps me to overcome production challenges I face on my farm.

Randy Saskiw

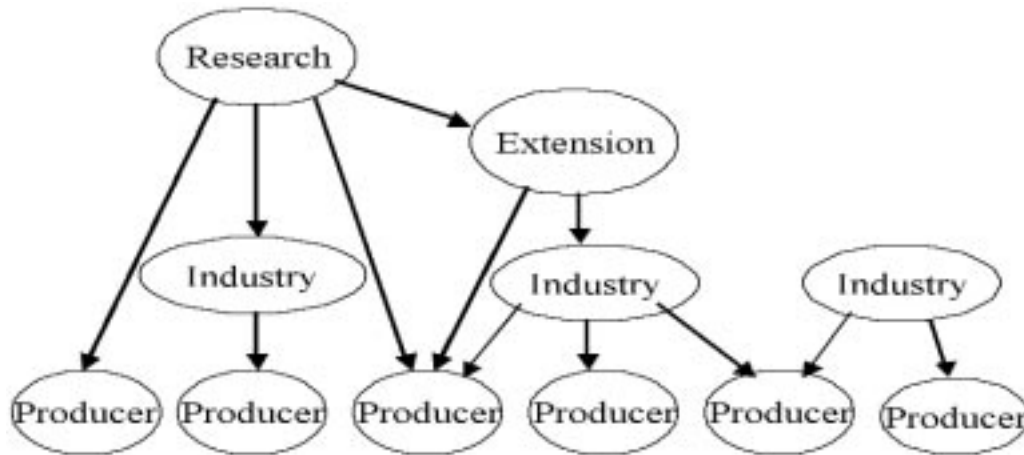
Extension Director, Alberta Pulse Growers

Agronomic Challenges

- The need to **strengthen communication links** between farmers, agronomists and agricultural researchers to allow for exchange of production information.
- **Proactive system** to assist agronomists in providing ‘timely answers and information’ to producers.
- 2003- Alberta Pulse Growers (APG) initiative to formalize an extension network for the pulse industry.



Current Agronomy System



Pulse Agronomy Network

- Pilot project- March to October 2003
- Limited participation of 57 Retail & independent agronomists, manufacturer reps, extension, research personnel and producers
- Email based system of Bi-weekly Bulletins, production Alerts and Questions-

PAN- APB (Example)

Pulse Agronomy Network~ Partnership in Industry July 15, 2003- All Pulse Bulletin

1. Mycosphaerella/Ascochyta

(Denise Maurice, Manager, Agronomic Information Extension, Westco)

Mycosphaerella has been observed in several pea fields in Central Alberta. Fields should be regularly monitored to determine if spraying a fungicide is warranted. It is often difficult to distinguish between these two diseases.

Mycosphaerella causes dark irregular shaped lesions on lower leaves and stems close to the soil surface. Leaves may dry up, but remain attached to the plant. Stem lesions are first found at the point of attachment and are brown to purple. For every 10% infected stem area it translates to a 5-6% yield loss. If lesions are found on flower stalks, this can cause significant blossom drop. **Ascochyta** causes lesions more towards the base of the stem. Early season infection leads to weathering of the stem which results in the plants collapse as the pods fill, causing premature lodging and yield losses

Factors that need to be monitored:

- Plant stand density - 8 plants/sq ft., the denser the canopy the greater the risk
- Rainfall within the last 2 weeks
- Anticipated rainfall in the next 5-days
- Percent leaf infection observed on inspection date
- Cropping history, varietal resistance, and seed infection are factors

**PAN-ALERTS (Examples)**

Powdery Mildew – was in a couple of fields today with high levels of powdery mildew starting to show up on the bottom 1/2 to 2/3rds of the pea plants. We have conditions that are prime for powdery mildew—warm dry days and humid evenings. As it is showing up so early it also has the potential to do quite a bit of damage to developing pods. Remember rains—half inch or more actually helps to wash the powdery mildew off the plants, but light showers help to spread it. A protectant type product called Kumulus (95% sulphur) is registered for powdery mildew control.

Josie Van Lent (Webb's Crop Services, Vermilion)

NOTICE...To all Retailers, Influencers & Aerials

Be advised that with the current size of grasshoppers, Dow AgroSciences is now recommending a mid-rate of 300 ml/acre, which treats 33 acres per jug for control of mid-sized grasshoppers. Once the grasshoppers become adults (are able to fly) please move up to the 355-ml/acre Lorsban rate.

- 235 ml/acre treats 43 acres per jug for control of small grasshoppers
- 300 ml/acre treats 33 acres per jug for control of mid-sized grasshoppers
- 355 ml/acre treats 28 acres per jug for control of adult grasshoppers.

Dale Steele (Dow AgroSciences- Lethbridge)

PAN-Questions (Example)

- Down by Keoma I have a pea grower who has had some problems in his peas. Two years ago we had these yellow patches show up in the field. They were everywhere. In the good land, poor land, high land and low land and about four feet in diameter. I tissue tested that year and we found nothing was deficient. There was nothing used in previous years for chemical injury and I went back three years. Last year his peas were fine but this year we are seeing them again. The yellow does go away, but the problem being so does the yield in those areas. We have looked at chemical again this year, but we cannot find anything that would leave a residual. I am lost. I have talked to other growers and they have not had this problem. If you could give me some advise or know of someone who might have an idea of the problem it would be much appreciated. Thank you in advance,

Garth Donald, DynAgra- Beiseker

What PAN participants said about 2003 Trial Project

"I do like the fact that we have a chance in the industry to get a heads up on what is happening in another area and which could potentially be a problem closer to home. "

"The PAN bulletins are very well structured and the information is very good and timely. This is very valuable information for agronomist."

"I found the Alerts gave us a "heads-up" to be looking for issues that may not have been considered in our area."

"Excellent use of resources- a must to continue!"

"I thought PAN was a good idea and I hope it continues next year."

"I believe the network is a very positive move in sharing agronomic information across the geographic regions. Content and delivery was very timely. Congrats to all involved."

"It has been a good year; we have built some momentum...great work..."



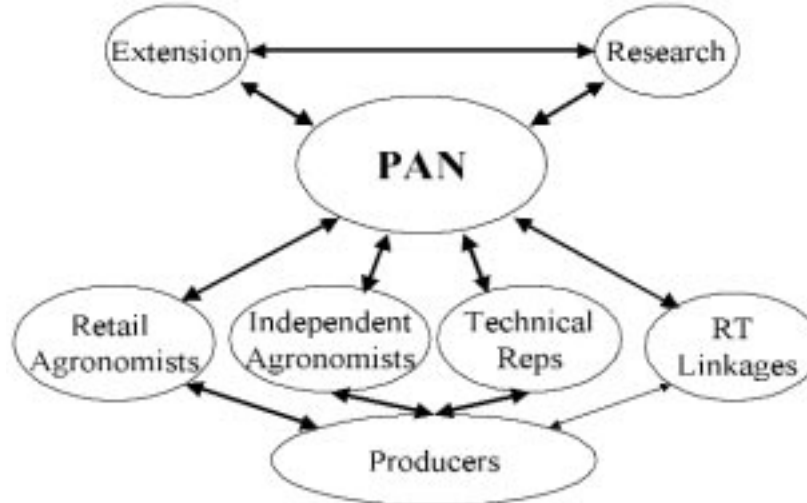
Very impressed and pleased with this first years effort. Information was relayed in a timely manner. PAN served as a great reminder to keep your eyes open! Great work. I hope the PAN continues and I can contribute.

It gives a good idea whether a problem you might find is general in an area or specific to a couple of fields. The “heads up” or reminder of what to be looking for like the information on beet webworm was particularly timely for me.

What Next?

- APG and its members are sold on the idea- we are running the Pulse Agronomy Network in 2004.
- Based on the successful pilot project in 2003 we have launched an industry wide campaign to include all crop advisors, agronomists, extension personnel, researchers, and retail agronomists.
- Central Registry~ industry events (meeting, tours, etc.)

Pulse Agronomy Network



Registering for PAN

- Contact: rsaskiw@pulse.ab.ca
- Contact APG office 1-877-550-9398