

STEPS TO SUCCESS

AdvancingAg mentorship program enters year two

Having a mentor is an invaluable asset for young professionals in the agricultural sector, especially when it comes to networking. To facilitate the relationship building that is key to success, the Alberta Wheat Commission and Alberta Barley have created a crop-industry mentorship program.

The AdvancingAg: Future Leaders Program pairs mentees aged 18 to 35 with established professionals in their chosen field. The program was launched in June of 2017, and in its first year, eight mentees were matched with mentors in areas including research, crop advising and primary cropping.

“The first year of AdvancingAg has been a success, and we’re eager to build on that momentum,” said Shannon Sereda, Alberta Barley market development and policy manager and selection committee member.

Through introductory events, mentors and mentees created a roadmap with the help of a program co-ordinator and laid out their goals and objectives for the upcoming 10 to 12 months. Over the course of that time, mentors had at least five hours of contact with their mentees each month, either in person or over the phone.

In addition to co-ordinating mentorship pairings, program co-ordinators host events for mentees and mentors. These include leadership conferences and networking events. Mentees also receive a stipend to cover the cost of program-related trips, agricultural shows and other industry events.

To graduate from the program, mentees are required to complete a number of tasks such as writing blog posts and speaking at an agricultural event. These activities are largely designed to share the AdvancingAg experience while giving mentees the opportunity to improve their communication skills.

Applications for the 2018/19 program are now open. To be considered, please submit a completed application form and updated resumé on or before Feb. 28, 2018. Application forms are now available at advancingag.ca.



AdvancingAg mentee meet-and-greet participants include: (L-R) Hua Chen, Jason Lenz, Jolien Witte, Tom Steve, Megan Hall, Dave Bishop, Ellen Cottee and Laura Anderson.



Tom Steve speaks to mentors and mentees at the Advancing Ag kickoff event in Red Deer.

MARKETING WHEAT TO THE WORLD

New crop missions connect international buyers with Canadian value chain

Connecting with buyers is important, no matter the industry. Customers want to know as much as they possibly can about the product they are purchasing and understand the value chain connecting their end-use product to its origin.

Agriculture is no exception, and as one of the country's top agri-food exports, Canadian wheat is especially prone to the scrutiny of international markets. Providing information is an integral part of maintaining these market relationships.

Ensuring such accurate, unbiased information reaches buyers is key. Misinformation can result in a lack of trust and even the loss of key markets. To communicate the story of Canadian wheat accurately and honestly, new crop missions led by Cereals Canada and the Canadian International Grains Institute (Cigi), with support from the Canadian Grain Commission, contribute to ensuring the continued marketability of Canadian wheat and maintaining Canada's international reputation for being a safe and consistent source of grain.

New crop mission delegations comprise representatives of the entire value chain. Grain marketers and Prairie wheat growers join with Cereals Canada, Cigi and CGC to engage directly with international buyers.

Through this collaborative effort, a consistent Canadian message was delivered to customers in 18 countries during missions that took place in Asia, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, North America and South America



Alberta Wheat Commission business development manager Geoff Backman inspects the product of a flour mill in South America, where Canadian wheat is prized for its consistent high quality.

during November and December of 2017. Cigi and CGC representatives provided unbiased technical information on grading factors, grade breakdown, protein and milling traits, and baking and pasta and noodle-making qualities of this year's wheat crop. During the new crop missions to South America, the Middle East, Africa and Indonesia, Alberta Wheat Commission representatives promoted the high quality of Prairie wheat

and the best management practices of western Canadian farmers.

Because the entire value chain is represented, buyers also have the opportunity to ask questions of those directly involved in the production of wheat for international purchase. These annual missions ensure up-to-date information is passed on to customers and creates the extra value and trust necessary to maintain ever-changing markets.

MEET THE STAFF



Geoff Backman
**Business Development and
Markets Manager**

Geoff Backman joined the Alberta Wheat Commission (AWC) in September of 2017 as business development and markets manager. Growing up on Vancouver Island, his immediate family has pursued aquaculture since the 1980s and his extended family farms wheat in Saskatchewan.

While studying economics at the University of Victoria, Geoff connected with agricultural course material. After completing a bachelor of arts degree, he attended the University of Saskatchewan. There, he researched changes in marketing behaviour by western Canadian farmers due to the removal of the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly. His thesis on the subject earned him a master of science in agricultural economics.

Geoff then worked as a grain marketing adviser with Cargill where he valued helping farmers improve their economic success. At AWC, he is involved in initiatives that will provide opportunities to all Alberta farmers.

Outside of the office, Geoff is an avid skier and working to improve his golf game. For fun, he visits the family farm in Saskatchewan where he enjoys hands-on work.



New crop missions work to ensure importers continue to purchase Canadian products for use in their agri-food operations. Seen here, South American milling equipment produces flour.

During the South America new crop mission, AWC chair Kevin Auch highlighted his sustainable and progressive farming practices. “It was an honour to be able to tell the good news story of our quality and our sustainability practices,” he said.

The mission team in South America met with end users and buyers in Chile, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico. The use of Canadian wheat products, primarily flour, is prominent in much of South America due to Canada’s high quality and dependable supply. Even Chile, which imports much of its wheat from neighbouring Argentina, looks to Canada as its second-largest supplier. Cost and quality are the two biggest concerns for importers. Colombia, with its limited infrastructure, is more cognizant of wheat prices than Peru, a country highly interested in quality.

There was great interest in each South American country visited, with 60 to 90 per cent of importers, millers and end users attending the meetings.

In addition to building export markets, new crop missions directly impact the profitability of Canadian wheat growers. Ensuring importers are interested in continuing to purchase Canadian products creates growing demand and the potential for farmers to receive higher return for their crops.

“These trade missions are a great opportunity to demonstrate to the vast majority of the wheat buying market in these countries that we have a great desire to help improve the foods they’re producing with our quality Canadian wheat,” Auch said.

For many importers, Canadian agri-food exports represent stability, sustainability and consistent quality. The 2017 mission to South America proved Canadian wheat is in high demand throughout the region, thanks to our ongoing commitments to quality and dependable supply—good news for producers, marketers and buyers alike.



Annual General Meeting

Wednesday, January 31, 2018

10:15 am - 11:15 am

Edmonton Expo Centre at Northlands - Hall F

Hear about AWC's year in review and
celebrate our fifth anniversary

Open to the general public



albertawheat.com