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An Ontario Cattle Feeders' Publication



Fall 2023 Edition



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From The Desk Of Jim Clark



Jim Clark, Executive Director

The other day I was going through some of my presentations from previous years, and one of my old slides drew my attention. The quote on the slide was, "People will not have the luxury of eating a good centre cut of steak at the cheap price often featured at retail." I felt that in the next 10 years eating beef would become more expensive due to demand and the changes we have seen around the world as economies continue to rise. Here at home, we had become accustomed to eating some relatively cheaply priced beef when you took into consideration the costs that went into producing it through to the consumer's plate. I always take a look at the weekly retail features just to see what is happening. Beef has not been a front-page item as much lately, but I did notice rib steaks priced at \$6.99 a pound for AAA or Choice Grades. That was pretty reasonable when you consider an average fed steer returns roughly \$4000 in this market. So, yes, I believe eating beef will be more of a luxury when it comes to the best cuts. Yet when compared to everything

in general and the inflation we have seen, beef is still reasonable when compared to every other thing we buy.

It seems we're getting a curve ball thrown at us every year. We've had the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and all sorts of adverse weather patterns. In North America, the conditions have the potential to change many things, including crop yields and the availability of good quality feed. You know that if you're looking for hay right now, the crops are very short and good-quality hay is extremely hard to find in some areas.

A recent conversation with an older farmer provided an interesting perspective on the current situation. He told me just to settle down because, in his life of 90 years, he had seen something different every year. He's seen it all, whether it was drought, too much rain, or armyworms. He said it's part of a cycle.

And while his sentiment may be true, this cycle we're experiencing right now – with the growing conditions and a potential economic slowdown – could have very serious consequences for the beef sector. With inflation and the possible impact of a mild recession on people's minds, we need to ensure that we don't end up with consumer resistance to our products. We have maintained strong consumer demand for beef as the supplies tighten. But since the spring, we've seen it back off slightly.

We're getting the opportunity again this summer to connect directly with consumers. Our big Pride of Ontario truck is on the road, going to Loblaw store banners. It was the first time we've been able to do this since the COVID-19 lockdowns three years ago.

We've been handing out samples of El Paso mini tortilla boats filled with pulled beef blades that we're cooking and topping with barbecue sauce



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The Pride of Ontario mobile kitchen unit is back on the road. Pictured here is the stop in London on a sunny day at the Loblaws store at Masonville Place.

sure that we keep our beef quality high and deliver on the taste factor that our customers have grown used to. We know that corn makes good beef so don't cheat on the rations. We know from our work in Asia that people love the hearty taste of Ontario beef, which is why we need to make sure that we're doing everything we can to build on that consistent beef product that the consumers are looking for - not only at home but around the world. If you have a steak with family or friends, and it's a great eating experience, you leave the table very satisfied. And you don't often focus as much on the price of the steak, but rather on the quality and how it delivered on your expectations. So, when consumers make that purchase, we need to ensure that the meat they're buying is a top-quality piece of Ontario beef. We know that there's a majority of consumers out there who enjoy that great-tasting steak, and it comes down to us as the producers and the branders of the beef to make sure we follow through on delivering our promise.

and coleslaw. The samples have been going over well, and the response has been tremendous.

Yes, people mention the high price of beef. The price appears to be even dearer when compared to other proteins. For example, the price of pork tenderloins and chops is running at approximately \$3.00 a pound. If consumers think that beef is expensive, then this is where we need to double down on our messaging. With cattle prices likely to remain strong in the short term, we need to focus on the consumer and play up the good things that we do. Much of it is related to promoting Ontario Beef and the On-

tario Corn Fed Beef program. That's why we're doing the summer tour and delivering our message to consumers.

Beef producers also play a significant part in this and need to recognize that we have one shot at this. I have always promoted attributes such as great-tasting, top-quality beef. We must ensure that our steak meets the expectations when a consumer buys a steak or orders one in a restaurant. This requires producers to continue looking at their ration compositions. Good feed makes good cattle. If we want to keep selling the beef at today's prices, we need to make

When we talk about the production side, we know the cow/calf numbers have dropped in North America and continue to do so as we speak. But when you really look at all the changes in technology, the genetics and how we feed cattle, we're actually producing more pounds of beef in the feedlot than we ever did. In 1973, the average steer carcass weighed a maximum of 700 pounds. In 2023, most of the carcasses are over 1,000 pounds. While there are a few negative things on the beef side, we're countering with our branding and consumer engagement efforts. The producers are doing their part to produce that top-quality piece of beef. We need to stay focused on that and continue to produce that excellent eating experience and hold onto that great consumer response to our beef.



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Ontario Corn Fed Beef Receives Internationally Recognized 'Superior Taste Award'

Local beef awarded with three golden stars for exceptional taste

Ontario Corn Fed Beef has received a 3-Star Superior Taste Award from the International Taste Institute for their quality beef. This is the fifth time Ontario Corn Fed Beef has been awarded this recognition. The Superior Taste Award is the only stamp of quality in taste granted by 135 food and drink opinion leaders that are Michelin starred chefs and sommeliers. Today's consumers are demanding exceptional quality and taste, and receiving this award demonstrates that Ontario Corn Fed Beef has what it takes to meet this high demand at home and around the world.

Similar to the Michelin guide of gastronomy, the International Taste Institute does not organize a competition, but assesses and rewards products on their own merits. Only products having received a mark superior to 70 per cent will be granted a Superior Taste Award of one, two or three golden stars. Ontario Corn Fed Beef received a grade of over 90 per cent, with three golden stars, marking the exceptional taste of the product.

The jury, representing 17 different nationalities, is composed of members of prestigious culinary institutions in Europe. "We are very honoured to receive this recognition for our exceptional quality beef," says Jim Clark, Executive Director of the Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association. "This high grade and praise for our quality beef with superior taste is a direct result of our nutritionally balanced feeding program, our on-farm management, and animal health practices, all of which contribute to our consistent quality."

Ontario Corn Fed Beef, a brand owned and run by Ontario beef farmers and cattle feeders, operates with the belief that by feeding top quality forages, grains and minerals as part of a nutritionally balanced diet, combined with top quality cattle results in a naturally great tasting beef. "Generations of knowledge from our members and partners make them experts at what they do. This, combined with their love for what they do, shows through in the beef products we produce," says Clark. "Producing great tasting beef and addressing societal needs is all part of the brand we are so proud to showcase to the

world. Receiving this international recognition is a true testament to the philosophy we have."

The Ontario Corn Fed Beef program works closely with industry partners such as the Beef Farmers of Ontario, Grain Farmers of Ontario, Ontario Soil & Crop Improvement Association and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs to ensure the sustainability of the beef and crop sectors in the province.

In demand at retail and at foodservice at home and around the globe, Ontario Corn Fed Beef has gained a reputation for its great beef flavour, tenderness, and consistent quality. "Each of our 500 plus beef farming and cattle feeding families, our quality assurance team, as well as our partners in processing and packing share in this great award," says Clark. "We care about great beef at every step of the process and thank our producers and partners for their commitment. The proof is in the beef, and this award reinforces that."

Governments Driving Growth In Ontario Meat Processing Sector

The Meat Processors Capacity Improvement Initiative will provide funding to eligible free-standing meat plants and abattoirs to make short-term investments in meat handling and processing equipment, technologies, and practices that improve efficiency, productivity, and food safety. The initiative is being funded through the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership and will provide up to \$150,000 per eligible applicant.

The Meat Processors Capacity Improvement Initiative will also cover consulting and engineering costs associated with planning future projects. Applications open on August 31, 2023, and will remain open until January 31, 2024, or until the initiative is fully subscribed, whichever comes first. Eligible project costs can be incurred as of July 26, 2023. Eligible projects must be completed with equipment delivered by March 1, 2024. Recipients will have until June 28, 2024, to have their equipment installed.



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Ontario Corn Fed Beef Back In Saudi Arabia



Ontario Corn Fed Beef was on display in partnership with St. Helen's Meat Packers at the Saudi Food Show in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The show was held in June and attracted delegates from across the Kingdom and the Middle East.

The event was the first time Ontario Beef was being promoted in the market since 2017. "This event was a great opportunity to work closely with St. Helen's and our distributor brand partners in the market," says John Baker Director, Ontario Beef Market Development program.

"The Saudi Arabia market showed tremendous growth last year and has grown into one of the highest valued export markets anywhere for Canadian beef," says Baker. "It is important for us to be here and to maintain a market presence. Our partners are very happy to have us here and help to increase the awareness around the high quality of Ontario beef."

The booth featured a display of high-quality beef cuts along with samples which were very well received by the delegates. "Having the opportunity to speak to key industry delegates about what makes Ontario Corn Fed Beef unique, and then have them sample the prod-



uct is an important process," says Baker.

Many of the delegates are highly respected chefs and local distributors who understand high-quality beef. The market is seeing tremendous growth and is expected to continue.

The entire Middle East represents a huge opportunity to increase the value and volumes of Ontario beef exports.

Participation at major trade shows is an important tool in creating a strong awareness of the high quality of Ontario Corn Fed Beef.

\$12 Million Boost For Beef Industry Research

The federal government has announced an investment of more than \$12 million to the Canadian Cattle Association to drive the growth of Canada's beef industry through research, innovation technology transfer while improving its environmental footprint.

The Beef Cattle Research Council, a division of the CCA, will administer the Beef and Forage Cluster.

The 23 projects to be funded focus on three AgriScience program priorities: Climate Change and Environment, Economic Growth and Development, and Sector Resilience and Societal Changes. Research activities include reducing methane emissions through feeding strategies, breeding forages that are more productive and profitable, and developing technologies for faster response to emerging diseases.

According to the Beef Cattle Research Council (BCRC), the GHG emissions of Canadian beef production have a total footprint of 11.04 kg CO₂ equivalent, representing 2.4% of Canada's overall emissions, less than half the world's average.

Also, according to the BCRC, the land used for beef production and managed by Canadian farmers and ranchers helps to sequester over 1.5 billion tonnes of carbon in Canada.



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Going Back To Feedlot School



Pictured: Attendees of the Feedlot Management School get a closer look at Marvin Burkhart's barn, including the catwalk and the belt feeder that's located underneath it.

By Brent Cavell, Quality Assurance Manager, Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association & Ontario Corn Fed Beef Program & Jaclyn Horenberg, Beef Farmers of Ontario Senior Producer Relations Specialist & Director of the Ontario Beef Youth Alliance

The Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association (OCFA) and Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO) once again collaborated to host another Feedlot Management School on June 21 and 22 in Waterloo and Wellington Counties.

The tour began at the University of Guelph Meat Lab. Dr. Katie Wood, Animal Biosciences, and Master's student, Katie Kroeze, led a session on fecal starch analysis findings and various feed processing methods. In their take home messages, they encouraged participants to work with a nutritionist to evaluate fecal starch levels. Also, to consider determining the particle size and fibre length of the ration using a Penn State Particle Separator shaker box as was demonstrated. The impact on gut health and animal welfare is determined by evaluating levels of physically effective Neutral Detergent Fibre (peNDF).

Dr. Cynthia Miltenburg, OMAFRA Lead Veterinarian, Animal Health and Welfare, spoke on digital dermatitis in feedlot cattle. She covered causes, symptoms and prevention which included tips like regular scraping of pens, allowing time for pens to dry before filling again, ensuring pens are well-bedded, and considering the use of a footbath upon entry and throughout the finishing days on feed. Dr. Miltenburg is in the process of developing a survey/questionnaire for producers to complete. This will provide the ability for her group to evaluate the severity and occurrences of this issue in Ontario feedlots and develop a strategy/recommendation to reduce/control the problem. See next page for more about the survey.

Dr. Marcio Duarte, Meat Science and Muscle Biology Professor, and Master's student, Sarah Dean, welcomed the group into the federally inspected University meat lab where there were three carcasses that participants had to match up with the pictures of the live animals. The cattle, sourced from Marvin Burkhart and HM & Sons, were a traditional Angus beef steer, a beef on dairy X steer, and a beef on dairy X heifer. We compared the carcasses, and discussed

factors that impact meat quality and yield, and viewed a demonstration on new technology for grading cattle. A great exercise considering producers don't have the opportunity to observe carcasses very often and compare the differences between carcasses.

The bus then brought everyone back to St. Jacobs for the evening portion at the Hampton Inn and Suites. Beef Farmers of Ontario, Executive Director, Richard Horne, welcomed and thanked everyone for attending and supporting the Feedlot Management School. Al Noorloos, OCFA Chair, thanked those involved in planning the event and the sponsors that helped to make it possible.

Our evening program began with Brent Cavell (OCFA) introducing Dr. Michael Lohuis, Vice President, Research and Innovation for Semex Alliance, speaking to the group about the evolving path of the beef on dairy X production model. He stated that with the declining beef cow herd numbers and increasing input costs, there is an opportunity to meet the growing global demand for high quality protein using beef on dairy X genetics. Dairy producers have adopted

a management strategy to select the superior high production cows in their dairy herd and breed that group to produce select replacement heifers. The balance of the herd can produce high quality beef on dairy X calves that are more valuable in the replacement cattle trade rather than the traditional dairy breed calf.

Brent also introduced our keynote speaker, Philip Shaw. Philip is a contributing editor to DTN of Omaha, Nebraska, which publishes his weekly agriculture economic commentary "Under the Agridome" column across Canada and the United States. Shaw gave a candid presentation on grain markets and a market outlook highlighting the challenges and opportunities of the 2023 year. Philip is particularly in tune with the Ontario and Quebec markets and offered his thoughts on the upcoming 2023 crop price influencers, including weather conditions, final acreage reports, WASDE reports, and European issues. There was lots of good information for your risk management toolbox!

The next morning, the participants travelled to our first host farm at Marvin Burkhardt's, near Wallenstein. From the catwalk, participants had a great view of the cattle as Marvin explained where he sources his cattle and how he has expanded into feeding beef on dairy X cattle. Marvin's feeding system is rather unique for newer feedlot designs, using a belt feeder to deliver feed to the feed bunk rather than a more common TMR system of centre or outside wall feed bunks. I would think Marvin's feeding system is a welcome addition during a cold, stormy winter's day or rainy weather during other times. The catwalk, belt feeder and feed bunk are incorporated as one stacked unit, a very efficient use of space.

Next, we were joined by Jason Koudys, who works with AgSights to offer ultra-sounding of cattle to project the ideal time to harvest to meet desired carcass quality attributes using the ribeye area and backfat, percent of intramuscular fat, and rump fat. Jason did a demonstration of ultra-sounding Marvin's traditional beef and beef on dairy X steers to show how ultra-sounding can project how many more days of feed is ideal to meet carcass goals. Jason also showed the ultrasound images from the cattle that the participants viewed hanging in the cooler the day before at the University of Guelph.

Dr. Van Mitchell of Metzger Veterinary Services gave a presentation on common feedlot illnesses, data on expected pull and treatment rates, post-mortems, implant strategies, and the importance of a team effort when it comes to feeding cattle. It's important that all players involved with sourcing the cattle be on the same page. Conducting a risk assessment of incoming cattle matched with the proper arrival protocols for health and ration introductions need to be a priority. Previous history information on the cattle, including transportation, previous vaccine program, and latest feed rations, is also very helpful in making decisions for getting cattle started on feed quickly.

Cardiff BBQ Catering Ltd. of Brussels served a delicious lunch in the Burkhardt's shop which was enjoyed by everyone. We then travelled to the next stop at HM & Sons Inc. near Moorefield. Javan Martin explained how their feedlot has moved from custom finishing about 1,200 head to now bringing in their own sourced beef on dairy X heifers to finish, and beef on dairy X steer calves for backgrounding. Javan also has a composting business as well and utilizes the feedlot manure source to produce a value-added product for the retail landscape and agricultural markets.

For a chute-side, hands-on demonstration, we were joined by Dr. Jacques van Zyl and Wally Martin of the Metzger Veterinary Services team. Dr. van Zyl discussed proper vaccine handling and administration, proper implant techniques and demonstrated how to lift a foot.

On behalf of our organizations, BFO and OCFA, we would like to thank all the generous sponsors, speakers, demonstration providers on farm and the University of Guelph meat lab including the breakout room participants. Thank you to the participants for supporting the Feedlot Management School with keen participation and interest in attending!

A special thanks to the host producers and families for allowing us to view their operations and share management styles with our group. As we can appreciate, it requires a lot of work to prepare for a group visit and we appreciate your support of the Ontario beef industry.

Ontario Animal Health Network Survey On Digital Dermatitis

The OAHN Bovine network has launched a survey to better understand the presence of digital dermatitis on Ontario feedlots and actions producers are taking for its control. Digital dermatitis is a painful foot condition causing lameness in cattle.

The disease is characterized by painful lesions on the feet. Initially, lesions are raw, red, circular ulcers with a strawberry appearance. Chronic lesions may extend up in between the claws and develop hair-like projections with a warty appearance. Other common names for digital dermatitis are strawberry foot-rot and hairy heel wart.

The questionnaire will ask about the presence of digital dermatitis on your farm and its impacts. This information is being collected and analyzed by the bovine Ontario Animal Health Network (OAHN), which is dedicated to early detection and response to emerging diseases.

All responses will be kept confidential and results from the project will only be released as a summary of all responses. The survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

The survey can be accessed via the QR Code below:



Waterloo-Wellington Beef Tour 2023



By Brent Cavell, *Quality Assurance Manager, Ontario Cattle Feeders' Association & Ontario Corn Fed Beef Program*

The Waterloo-Wellington Beef Tour 2023 was held at the Howick Community Centre in Gorrie, Ont. on June 13. Over 400 people attended, and everyone enjoyed a delicious steak supper. The event included barn tours of the Jared Frey and family feedlot operation and a recently built new barn with a cattle processing area. The Bennett family of Bennett Farms was the other feedlot facility included on the tour, also with a new barn recently built. The barn designs, cattle comfort, air quality, ventilation style, cattle movement and handling were the most interesting attributes of the tours, indicated by the many responses from the participants. It was great to have the opportunity to see new working ideas and thoughts to implement at home.

Following the meal, there were two presentations, including Steve Duff, OMAFRA Chief Economist, giving a market outlook that was very informative, considering the liveliness of

the current markets at the time and continuing the juggling act through the summer. At the time, the United States Department of Agriculture projected the U.S. corn yield at 181.5 bu./acre; the final acreage wasn't reported yet. As we were heading into the influencers of the summer growing season, the weather markets, drought, moisture and the final acreage report all play a role in determining corn values for the year. Steve suggested any deviation from that yield number will cause an up or downshift in values and, thus, reflect on the cattle market as well.

John Baker, OCFB Director of Market Development, spoke on the current beef markets, both domestic and export. He also provided an update on the Ontario Corn Fed Beef program and its benefits to the Ontario beef industry. As reported on Page 4 of this edition of The News Feed, OCFB has again captured the prestigious International Taste Institute 2023 3-Star Superior Taste Award. It's the fifth time Ontario's OCFB producers are being recognized as producing the best beef in the world!

He also expanded on the "Sustainably Raised OCFB" topic as well. John outlined what the importance of this phrase means in the OCFB production model, as well as the consumers' take on the significance of "Sustainably Raised" and what it means to them as related to the food supply chain.

Christoph Wand, OMAFRA Livestock Sustainability Specialist, outlined the various webinars and videos produced in collaboration with OCFB & OCFA and the benefits these exercises play in improving the industry as a whole. This continued collaboration between OMAFRA and OCFB/OCFA continues to help bring meaningful educational value to our Ontario producers with our various platforms available.

OMAFRA and OCFB were pleased to take part in this event put on by the organizing committee of Javan Martin, Glen Martin, Jared Frey and their families. We want to thank all our generous sponsors and event participants involved in preparing and serving the meal, including the Jones Feed Mill Beef Team and Gerry Wideman, for working the BBQs. Thanks go to Gerry for smoking/cooking the strip loins, along with John Baker's expertise at carving the steaks.

This event promoted fellowship, the sharing of ideas, and a great meal and presented some good information about what affects our producers and Ontario's beef industry. It was certainly my pleasure to be involved and participate in this event again in 2023!

We're looking forward to next year, in early June. Please go to our website, www.ontariocornfedbeef.com, to view all sponsors and photos of the event.



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High Prices, Strong Demand Driving Cattle Markets



Although fed cattle prices have softened in recent weeks, record values and strong beef demand continue to be the significant stories in the cattle markets.

Dallas Rodger, Canfax market analyst, says fed cattle prices hit their seasonal highs a little later than usual and peaked in June. Prices in Eastern and Western Canada rose to approximately \$245 to \$247 on a live basis. While the “dog days” of summer have weighed on the prices, producers have seen their margins improve. “It’s been a long time coming, and positive from a feeding perspective that these guys are making some money,” adds Rodger.

While higher prices and tighter beef supplies can tend to ration supplies, Canadian beef exports have remained strong through the year’s first quarter. Market analysts are closely watching to see if that trend will continue. “We were down 12 per cent in April and May, I believe, on Canadian exports,” notes Rodger. “But we had a strong first three months of the year where we were just a tick above last year.”

The impact of drought in Western Canada and parts of the United States is another story capturing the markets’ attention. Rodger says the number of heifers and cows being slaughtered is running higher than last year. “It’s disappointing when some producers are challenged with tighter feedstocks and more poor pasture conditions,” he says. “There’s just the inability to expand, and (they’re) looking at the scenarios of having to buy feed.”

In addition, yearlings are coming off the grass earlier than normal, with some not making it to the summer turnout as producers were forced to sell. “We saw a big jump in June placements,” says Rodger. “I suspect when we do our next cattle-on-feed (report), we’re going to see another big jump on July placements as well.”

As a result, the assumption of higher placements over the next couple of months could take the shine off the rally into the fourth quarter market.

When looking ahead at the fed cattle market, Rodger notes that the packers in Western Canada have started to dial up their slaughter rates after running “limited” numbers throughout the spring and early summer. Seasonally, the market usually drops by 15 to 20 per cent. “That would put us back into that \$2.00 (per pound) as a potential summer low,” he says. “I don’t think the market is going to hit that \$2.00 mark. That’s by no means suggesting it, just highlighting the risk that there is on today’s market from what we’ve seen from our price peak in June.”

U.S. Cattle On Feed Down Two Per Cent

Cattle and calves on feed for the slaughter market in the United States for feedlots with capacity of 1,000 or more head totaled 11.2 million head on July 1, 2023.

The inventory was 2 per cent below July 1, 2022. The inventory included 6.73 million steers and steer calves, down 3 per cent from the previous year.

This group accounted for 60 percent of the total inventory.

Heifers and heifer calves accounted for 4.47 million head, unchanged from 2022.

Placements in feedlots during June totaled 1.68 million head, 3 per cent above 2022. Net placements were 1.61 million head.

During June, placements of cattle and calves weighing less than 600 pounds were 390,000 head, 600-699 pounds were 275,000 head, 700-799 pounds were 380,000 head, 800-899 pounds were 368,000 head, 900-999 pounds were 185,000 head, and 1,000 pounds and greater were 80,000 head.

Marketings of fed cattle during June totaled 1.96 million head, 5 per cent below 2022.

Other disappearance totalled 69,000 head during June, unchanged from 2022.

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On The Lookout For Tar Spot



Tar spot can appear as small, raised, black spots scattered across the upper and lower corn leaf surfaces.



Tan to brown lesions with dark borders surrounding dark fungal fruiting structures can also develop. These are commonly referred to as "fisheye" lesions.

The watch for a relatively new disease ramped up across the province as the corn crop reached its critical development in late July. Tar spot is a corn leaf disease that can cause significant yield losses. On the Field Crop News website, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs notes that the disease went from being in a few fields in five counties in 2020 to being found throughout 17 counties in 2021.

"We're fairly certain that it's overwintering here in Ontario," says Ben Rosser, OMAFRA corn specialist. "Unlike some other diseases we've dealt with, under good conditions, it can spread and develop very quickly."

The infection's primary source is the inoculating tar spot spores that can travel long distances through the air. OMAFRA notes that the spores overwinter on corn residue and can cause early tar spot infection in Ontario. Plowing under corn residue and crop rotation may reduce

spore levels in the field and delay infection due to airborne spores but does not stop tar spot from developing.

"It favours wet canopies and wet leaves for it to develop and grow," says Rosser. "So, the weather we're having now would be conducive for tar spot."

While he doesn't expect tar spot to be in every field and show up yearly, Rosser encourages farmers to scout their crops and watch their local areas for signs of the disease.

On the positive side, growers have some management options. For future years, OMAFRA notes that hybrid resistance to tar spot is a critical management tool. Collaboration with various corn seed companies began in 2021 to assist in evaluating the tolerance of commercial and experimental corn hybrids to tar spot. During the 2021 season, some hybrids showed

good tolerance to tar spot in field sites at Dresden, Ridgetown, Rodney and Tilbury. But few hybrids examined in Ontario would be considered highly tolerant to the disease. This finding is consistent with similar trials conducted in the U.S. Midwest, notes the OMAFRA website.

A second tool is finding the right fungicide to help control tar spot. According to OMAFRA, many registered products are available to farmers that have demonstrated good tar spot control. In a field trial in 2021, all fungicides reduced the disease's severity and increased yield compared to the untreated control treatment. However, a group of fungicides consistently reduced tar spot severity, leading to higher yields in Ontario and U.S. trials. The Ministry notes that it's important to scout and understand your risk to other diseases and select a fungicide that is effective on the specific leaf diseases found in a field.

Ontario Corn Acres Down Slightly

In its prospective plantings report, Statistics Canada reported that Ontario farmers planted 2.3 million acres of corn this year, down 0.7 per cent from last year. At the national level, farmers reported seeding more corn for grain in 2023 compared with the previous year, rising 5.5% to 3.8 million acres, led by a higher-seeded area in Manitoba (up by 46.3% to 553,900 acres).

In Quebec, corn for grain area edged up 0.7% to 898,300 acres compared with 2022.

As for the Ontario crop, Rosser says the corn was in good shape in late July. While planting may have started late compared to other years, the pace quickened once the conditions improved. Regular rainfall then helped the crop develop in most areas. "I know, there's been some areas, particularly south and west of London, that have been getting lots of rain to the point where, in some cases, there's water sitting in some fields," he says. "I was just in Eastern Ontario, and they mentioned that they were relatively dry, but they've been getting enough rain to keep things going. Most people are pretty happy with how things look. Of course, there's always going to be pockets where there are exceptions to that."

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