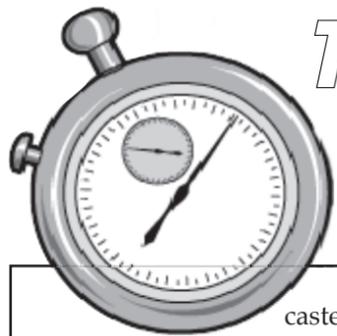


VIEWS & OPINIONS



Two Minute Insight ...

BY PAUL MARTIN



One of the country's leading private sector forecasters is toning down its outlook for the Saskatchewan economy this year.

The economists at RBC Royal Bank have just updated their provincial forecasts and are now saying the softness in potash markets earlier this year has prompted them to trim back their growth forecast – to 3.7 per cent from more than four per cent.

That still leaves Saskatchewan in second spot behind Alberta and the bank says next year we will be back on top, with Alberta and Saskatchewan both forecast to grow 3.9 per cent. In other words we will pick up a bit of steam in the next 18 months.

A key contributor to our growth rate, according to the bank, is investment. We are forecast to top \$20 billion in new investment this year – roughly three times the historical norm. And the key to the investment indicator is that it is permanent – its value doesn't change when prices or currencies go up or down – and it fundamentally changes the economic platform the economy is built upon.

Saskatchewan's fertilizer industry just got another big endorsement.

Most of the discussion regarding fertilizer production in this province centres on potash. And it should, given the volume of investment being directed to this sector with the existing players adding significantly to their asset base while a handful of new players has arrived on the scene, investing billions in new mine development.

But one segment that tends to get overlooked is nitrogen production.

Saskatchewan is home to a large nitrogen player, the Yara facility at Belle Plaine. Once owned jointly by the government and Cargill, it is now wholly-owned by a European company which announced a major expansion of its Saskatchewan facility over the weekend.

Yara plans to more than double the output of the Belle Plaine facility and will include development of a product line designed to meet the needs of canola growers in this part of the world.

The company will fast-track the expansion so it can be on stream in the second half of 2016, adding further to Saskatchewan's reputation as the world's biggest fertilizer supplier.

Weed it and weep

BY SHERI MONK

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Spring is almost over, and summer proper looms on the horizon. I always find the solstice bittersweet because every subsequent day is just a little shorter. I suppose it's just like the birth of a new baby – every single miraculous breath brings it one breath closer to death.

As the season progresses, I've found that having a first vegetable garden is much like a new mother with her first-born baby. My garden is demanding, all-consuming, fussy and I have no idea what I'm doing. I'm not sure I am feeding it enough, and while I'm not worried I'll drop it, I am still rather concerned I will kill it.

I suppose that by the standards of most farmers, my 19' x 19' garden is quite small. But I assume that most rural readers have more than one hoe and one spade at their dexterous disposal. I did not. Though the earth was black and healthy, it needed some deep and dedicated tilling. And there was a mound of dirt occupying the centre of the garden like a group of stubborn protestors that had to be dispersed and subdued.

Once my beautiful dirt was arranged into soft, inviting rows of fertile earth, I took a deep breath and surveyed the stunning scenery all around me and instead of seeing beauty, I saw danger. Everywhere, I could hear the birds singing of the seeds they would snatch from my newborn soil. Rabbits were no longer a cute mammalian accessory to the prairie, but a threat to be reckoned with. The gophers chirping in the distance made me want to replace my .22 with a garden-friendly Agent Orange.

I retreated to the safety of the house to plan my next move, only to find that a starling spy had invaded our sanctum by cleverly breaching our chimney. That evening, there were four mule deer gazing lustfully through the fence at my unplanted vegetable patch with murder in their lecherous eyes. It was clear – we were under attack.

Budget gardening is difficult, but defending a garden on a tiny budget is nearly impossible. I investigated small garden fences, edging, plastic owls and noise makers to keep the critters away, and it was all too costly. But if necessity breeds invention, then desperate paranoia can breed innovation.

I bought two dozen bamboo stakes, and two massive rolls of twine and then for nearly six hours, I engineered a fence that would not only stand up to the ridiculously excessive wind, but would also serve to keep out any deer, raccoons or dogs. I created little gates at the entry to each row, and that was good.

Of course, a fence alone does not a secure garden make. Automatic weapons activated by motion detectors disguised as garden gnomes are apparently illegal in Canada, but creativity is not. My stoic, utilitarian fence became a mecca for what can only be described as garden bling. Old CDs, styrofoam packaging, and var-

ious metal kitchen utensils were tied to twine and then hung from the fence with care. The CDs reflected light, and the utensils and styrofoam created intimidating noises. Love, they say is war and thus, I named my garden New Eden.

The next day I emerged for battle, armed with my penciled blueprints of where I would transplant the plants I had started in the house, and where I would plant my seeds. This is when I realized I had made a terrible, terrible miscalculation. This is also when I measured the garden for the first time.

You see, back in March, when I gazed outside at my future vegetable patch, it seemed expansive, endless. It seemed a grand undertaking, full of risk and romance – an epic matching of man against nature.

Fortunately, whatever I lack in sense, I've always made up for in ambition and I started nearly 250 plants in the house, 72 of which were tomato plants. I had dozens of cucumber plants, pumpkins and watermelon on the go and they grew like they could not wait for spring to arrive.

It was obvious. We were going to need a bigger garden. And if my tomato plants survive the summer, I'm going to need a lot of cans. In retrospect, I realize I was both enthusiastic and naive – I believed that each tomato plant would produce but one tomato. For anyone else out there planning a garden, you need to know this is not true. Tomato plants in fact can produce as many as 20 tomatoes per plant! They are like the plant version of rabbits – they revel in being sinfully prolific.

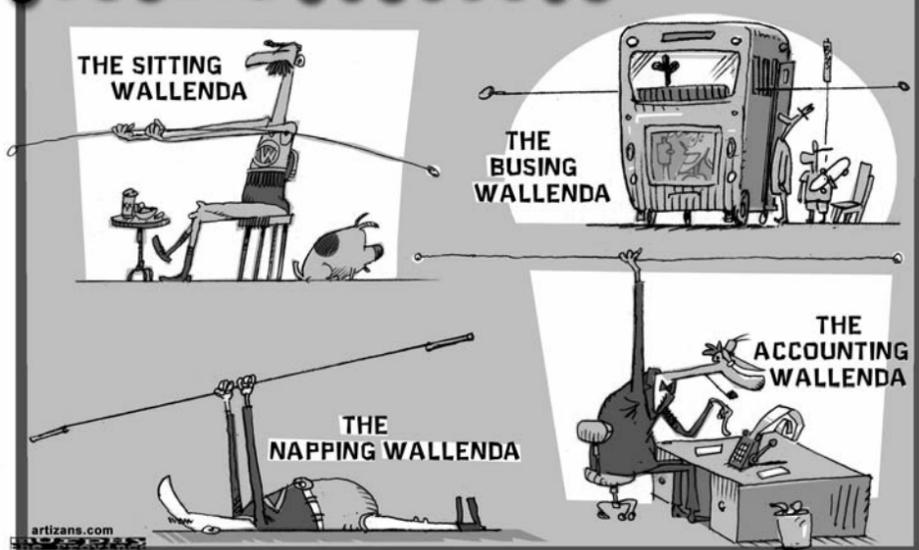
I could not bear the idea of sacrificing these plants I had lovingly nurtured from seeds, and so I began working over a second garden area. But then it began to rain, and it hasn't stopped for very long since. I'm half convinced there's a blizzard around the corner. And I may not need that second garden anyway – all of my transplanted pumpkins and melons have left this world and must be reincarnated into rabbits. And rabbits it seems, have a fondness for corn kernels and potato seedlings. At this rate, I'll run out of tomato plants long before I run out of garden, and there isn't enough bling in Los Angeles to save my peas.

My New Eden has become more like a death camp, and I provide the slave labour. My garden twine and bamboo sticks appear more like barbed wire and watch towers and my once-vibrant plants seem to wither more each time I look at them.

Yes, my only joy in this year's summer may be in its end, for after the harvest comes the hunt. The mule deer may chuckle now at my green thumb, but come autumn, my trigger finger will have the last laugh.

Sheri writes for an agricultural publication in Alberta, and also freelances as an investigative journalist and opinion editorialist

OTHER WALLENDAS



Roses & Raspberries

Got something nice to say or some constructive criticism?

Send us your Roses & Raspberries:

Email to glad12@sasktel.net
 Fax to 306-672-3373 or drop off at
 The Advance office 1462 Conrad Ave. during
 business hours. Deadline for submissions is
 Thursday at 4 p.m.
 All submissions must be signed and include
 a phone number for verification.
 Raspberries are intended to be an
 anonymous critique between private parties.
 Raspberries must not directly
 or indirectly identify
 an individual or business.

ROSE To the householders who cut the grass on their Blvd. and back alley. Thanks for helping control the dandelion problem.



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