

Agrology Professionals: Listen to the Experts

BY JILL WINZOSKI

To ensure farming operations are keeping up with increasingly complex standards in a rapidly changing industry, The Manitoba Institute of Agrologists (Agrologists Manitoba) urges producers to call on licensed agrology professionals for expert advice and support.

“In today’s rapidly-evolving agricultural landscape, the role of producers extends far beyond planting seeds and harvesting crops,” said Keresna Mamchuk, executive director and registrar of Agrologists Manitoba. “From navigating complex regulations to adopting innovative technologies, the demands on producers are immense. That’s why consulting with licensed professionals – agronomists, animal production experts, financial advisors and environmental specialists – is a necessity for long-term success.”

Mamchuk says licensed professionals are technical experts who assist

producers with a broad and diverse range of tasks.

“Licensed professionals bring specialized expertise that can help farmers improve yields, manage risks and ensure compliance with changing industry standards. Whether it’s optimizing soil health, enhancing animal welfare or developing a sound financial strategy, expert guidance can mean all the difference for agricultural operations,” she said.

These consultants can take some of the pressure off farmers to acquire exhaustive education in all facets of their operations while increasing producer profits.

Agrologists Manitoba is the licensing body that ensures professionals who are advising or contributing to the agrology profession are qualified and competent.

“Whether they’re assisting producers with their agronomy, marketing, animal production or environmental management, agrologists contribute to safe food production, »

sustainable practices and economic benefits,” said Mamchuk.

The regulated profession of agrology umbrellas all knowledge transfer or advice including agricultural production environmental management, agricultural extension/innovation and agricultural economic/policy development.

“I like to think of it as assisting producers with the next stage,” Mamchuk said. “That’s why producers consult with them, instead of just Googling answers. Producers who need agronomy advice find an agronomy professional, the same as someone who needs medical advice would seek out a doctor.”

Another example of where producers may seek the expertise of an agrologist is to secure On-Farm Climate Action Funds from the federal government, to which producers must submit environmental assessments.

“Those [assessments] must be signed off on by a qualified Professional Agrologist [P. Ag.] or Technical Agrologist [Tech. Ag.],” said Mamchuk.

Licensed agrologists are required to meet specific competency standards established by Agrologists Manitoba, which ensure they are qualified to provide expertise and advice to their customers and clients.

“That’s where their impact lies, in that they have to take the scientific principles that they learned through their formal education and apply it to agriculture or the environment – wherever they are practising – to ensure food production is following environmental and

sustainable practices. It’s about meeting those standards,” said Mamchuk.

She compares the regulatory body of agrology to other regulated professions, like The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba.

“Doctors are licensed to ensure that their patients are protected from incompetent or unethical practitioners – the same in agrology, farmers and other organizations need assurance that food production and environmental practice is done in a safe, competent and ethical manner,” she said.

Under the *Agrologists Act of Manitoba*, which was passed into legislation in 1983, Agrologists Manitoba was mandated to create and enforce competency standards, and then operate as a self-governing profession.

“Licensing offers assurance there’s a system in place to protect those who are receiving expert advice from agrology professionals. We are delegated authority to decide what standards need to be in place to ensure the public is protected,” Mamchuk said.

Under the licensing system, agrology professionals are required to meet two sets of standards.

“The first is that they are technically competent,” said Mamchuk. “Do they have enough knowledge to call themselves a P. Ag. or a Tech. Ag.?”

According to Mamchuk, the difference between a Tech. Ag. and a P. Ag. is their educational pathways to obtain certification.

“Producers can call either for advice. Both are licensed professionals,” she said.

The second requirement agrologists must meet is a behavioural competency standard.

“Are they behaving in such a way that they meet public expectations for ethical behaviour and trust? We have in place a Code of Ethics and Practice, which lays out the exact behavioural expectations for these agrology professionals. In doing so, it ensures things like environmental stewardship outweigh personal benefits and customers can be assured that their advisor is offering objective information,” said Mamchuk.

The regulating body’s Code of Ethics and Practice states that agrologists must behave with integrity, competence and objectivity while fulfilling their professional responsibilities.

According to Mamchuk, all regulated professions are built on four ethical pillars. The first is public protection, while the second is legislative authority that grants Agrologists Manitoba the authority to set and enforce policy standards. The third pillar requires specialized knowledge intrinsic to all regulated professions, and the fourth requires the profession to operate within an ethical and accountable framework.

Agrologists, Mamchuk says, have always relied on scientific expertise.

“Producers need to ensure they are receiving advice from competent people. You’re going to [agrologists] because even if they don’t have the answer, they

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know how to find the answers. The problems that could come to one's farm as a result of taking advice from unqualified non-experts are massive. You could be injuring your farm or operation for years to come," said Mamchuk.

Producers stand to benefit economically from obtaining agrologist services.

"It will either have an immediate economic impact, as in increased yields, or the contributions will be rooted in

sustainability, which will have a long-term environmental impact," she said.

Expert advisors contribute to the betterment of producer operations, Mamchuk says.

"That's why these jobs exist. They're the advisors, they're the experts. Agrology professionals help producers by providing quality information to help make decisions. I speak with future agrology professionals regularly, and one of the

things that gets emphasized is farmers cannot be experts in everything, and you have to consult with professionals in the areas you need support in," she said.

Stewart Boyd is a third-generation farmer operating a grain farm on 4,000 acres just north of Minnedosa. He's been farming exclusively for the last two years, but for 15 years before that, he worked as a licensed P.Ag. »

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– Keresna Mamchuk, The Manitoba Institute of Agrologists

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“I’ve got a pretty good idea of what happens on both sides of that story,” said Boyd. “At the end of the day, we use agrology professionals either on the agronomy side or in marketing. Maybe not every day, but throughout each season. Just to call upon the experts, to get a better feel. It complements your regular business.”

While Boyd was busy wearing both his farmer and agrolologist hats, he says he “really enjoyed the agrology side.”

“I got to deal with a whole bunch of different farmers. My last job was on the senior level of things, so I used to help teach and mentor some of the younger agrologists coming in. I’m still involved with Kerensa, and I’m still involved with other [Agrolologist Manitoba] committees. I like that part of it, working with them to mentor and see the next generation coming in,” said Boyd.

With his experience as both a P.Ag. and producer, Boyd gained an in-depth understanding of how the two roles interrelate and mutually benefit the other.

“When I was working on the agronomy side, I got to see what farmers were going through because I was going through that when I got home from work,” he said.

Boyd found that the variety intrinsic to agrology made for a very interesting career.

“It’s hard to prepare for it until you’re in it. Some of the programs out there in university and college are fantastic, but they can’t cover everything because every farm is so different. So, you cover broad topics, but the first few years on the job, you’re drinking from a

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fire hose. Then you kind of figure it out and go from there,” he said.

His experience as both agrologist and farmer convinced Boyd that farmers need agrologists for their expert advice.

“A farmer’s got to wear 25 different hats. Throughout the year, you’ve got to be a mechanic and an agrologist to some extent. You’ve got to do your own marketing and you’ve got to do your own books – all these different things. There’s only so much time in a day and in a year, so you’re going to have to pick your battles. If you’re going to become an expert on one, it’s going to cost you time in another area. You can’t focus on everything, so you’ve got to tap in and make your network,” Boyd said.

For example, Boyd knows other farmers whose speciality is marketing, but they aren’t as versed in growing crops.

“So, they would tap into an actual agronomy specialist, where they ask how to grow this and how to do it better, and [the farmer would] worry about the marketing side,” he said.

According to Boyd, every farmer is stronger in some areas over others, which is why he believes agrology is an essential resource producers should be taking advantage of.

“Even on the animal side, if you’re tapping into animal science – even if it’s with the province or from these nutrition companies – that’s pretty huge to be able to tap into those networks and get the professional advice,” he said.

Boyd also stresses that a P.Ag. is not necessarily better than a Tech.Ag..

“It comes down to the person and their individual experience,” he said. “Just the fact that it’s a regulated profession in Canada is something most people don’t know.”

Producers only have so much time in a day, Boyd says, which is why a licensed professional can assist with making sure a producer is “staying on top of everything.”

“A producer just wouldn’t have that much time because they’re running their equipment or taking constant care of their animal children,” said Boyd.

Boyd encourages producers to lean on the experts because it’s in the public’s best interest to do so.

The regulatory role interfaces between the producer and the public,

Boyd says, encouraging producers to keep the public interest in mind when making any decisions related to their farming operations.

“As a producer, you should be worried about the public and their perception about what you are doing, and that’s where the regulatory side comes in. The agrologists are probably more worried about that more than the average producer would be,” said Boyd.

Producing safe and nutritious food while following all the laws and regulations associated with chemicals and antibiotics is of paramount importance.

“It’s bad for business to not produce a safe and healthy product,” said Boyd. ^{FV}

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