

# Between the Rows

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## Scouting Takeaways from 2025

2025 marked my 30th year up here in the North Peace. Granted positional and territory changes while I was with UFA reduced my time up here for a few years, but I have returned to scouting up here full-time again in 2022. Over the years one thing has always been constant: no two years are alike.

This past season had it's many highs and lows and like a hockey team looking for consistent goaltending (I'm talking to you, Oilers), farmers need consistency as well. As mentioned in my last "Between the Rows", moisture-wise 2025 was considered an average year. Average it may have been but consistent it certainly was not. So officially we didn't have a drought-year, but yields still suffered. So what happened? Actually what didn't happen is rainfall from early June until almost mid-July. Zilch. Nada. Just as our crops were establishing the moisture evaporated (pun intended). As a result crops that determined their yield early had no chance.

Another major trend from 2025 was a continuing increase and spread of clover cutworms. (BTR 3.8). The climbing-type cutworm damaged fields from Blue Hills to Beaver Ranch. Some fields were able to overcome the damage, some were not.

I also detected Verticillium stripe (*Verticillium longisporum*) in a field near Fort Vermilion. Now it was only one plant in the field, but its definitely something to watch for. As of yet there are no registered fungicides or resistant varieties. I will do a deep dive

into Verticillium stripe and the current state of research on it in my next issue.

As for weeds, we are seeing an increase in kochia in the area. Contrary to popular belief Kochia has been here for quite sometime. I remember finding it in 1996 on the Experimental Farm when I was with NPARA (MARA). Since we have to assume all kochia is herbicide resistant to glyphosate and Group 4 herbicides, it might be time to look at some new methods to control it better. I also dive into this in my next issue.

In 2025 more new products hit the market, often with exaggerated claims of yield increases and how 200ml/ac of this product will replace lbs./ac of another product. I'm not here to tell you they don't work, but I do urge you to tread carefully. If you are interested in a new product, do some research. Read up on the product, understand what it is and how its supposed to work. If you're still interested then try it on a few acres on your own farm, but not your whole farm. Not every new product will work in all fields or farms.

Finally when looking at soil test results (from the over 27,000 acres we sampled this fall) there was actually some consistency (so maybe there's hope for the Oilers after all). Boron levels in our soil are deficient. I discussed Boron in an earlier edition (BTR 2.2), but I'll revisit Boron in my next edition as well.

## What to watch for in 2026

1. Clover cutworms
2. Seeding soil temperature
3. Seeding depth and rate
4. Early season weed control
5. Micronutrients: especially Boron
6. Early leaf disease in cereals
7. Bertha Armyworms
8. Grasshoppers
9. Canola diseases
10. Team Canada in the Olympics

## Fort Vermilion Experimental Farm: A History



Harvest on Farm 1914



Pumpkins and squash 1914



Vegetable plots on Farm 1919



Fort Vermilion Flood 1934



1934 flooding on the north side of the Peace River at the Lawrence Ranch

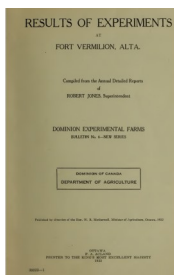
# Fort Vermilion Experimental Farm: A History

Robert Jones



My main topic this week is the history of the Fort Vermilion Experimental Farm. In 1907, Frederick S. Lawrence established the Dominion Experimental Farm at Fort Vermilion. Robert Jones became its first Superintendent and researcher in 1908. At this time the Dominion Experimental Farm was located near Stoney Point, just southwest of the bridge. I was able to download a copies of Mr. Jones Annual Reports from 1922 (covering years 1909-1920) and from 1928 (covering 1927-1928). These reports are highly

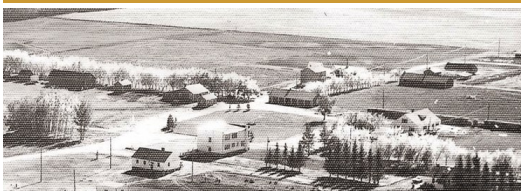
1922 Annual Report



ly detailed with weather and climate data as well as agronomic testing. What's really interesting is the amount of research that was done on horticultural plants. Over half the pages deal with all kinds of vegetables, fruits and even ornamental shrubs and trees. I have copies of these on my computer and if you interested I can get you copies.

In the spring of 1934 the Peace River flooded and the Experimental Farms was wiped out. The decision was then made to move the farm up out the Riverflat to it's current location. From that point the Experimental Farm flourished. At one point there were half of dozen houses, a very large cistern (with water-treating), a dormitory, labs and a two-story office building. As well there were orchards, flower beds and vegetable gardens.

Experimental Farm circa 1930-1940's



Plots circa 1970's



Figure 3—View of Fort Vermilion Experimental Station and plots looking east.

In the early 1990's, the Fort Vermilion Experimental Farm became a satellite site of the Beaverlodge Research Farm and the last scientist, Dr. George Clayton was reassigned to Lacombe. At this point I became the first Research Coordinator for the North Peace Applied Research Association and my wife and I moved into the duplex on the Farm. On the other side of the duplex was Mike Hall, Crop Specialist with Alberta Agriculture. Although the Experimental Farm was now a satellite of a satellite site, Ag Canada still had a research presence on the Farm. NPARA and Alberta Ag were also able to carry out many small plot trials and demonstrations on the Farm. Our 1997 Field Day had over 200 people attending. However the Farm itself had lost all the houses and dorm, the water pump for the massive cistern, many of the trees, flower beds and shrubs, and eventually the old office building. Only a few labs and the red barn were left.

After I left NPARA, it eventually split off and became Mackenzie Applied Research Association (MARA), and Alberta Ag eliminated the Crop Specialist position. MARA and Ag Canada continued to have research plots on the Farm up until Ag Canada finally pulled out all together in 2012. At this point Mackenzie County stepped in eventually being able to purchase the Farm from the Federal government. Mackenzie county in turn leased to land and assets to MARA.

Some of MARA's plots 2024



All of us involved in agriculture in the area owe a big thank you to Mackenzie county, the MARA board and staff, local farmers and business that donate to MARA for keeping this grand ole Farm still serving the quest for agricultural knowledge for over 117 years.



## Bees: A Possible Ally in Reducing Heat and Drought Stress in Canola

### Bees: A Possible Ally in Reducing Heat and Drought Stress in Canola

Researchers are currently looking into the effect of pollinators in relationship to stress reduction in heat and drought. Now everyone knows the benefit of bees to all plants. It's a mutual benefit, bees get nectar and pollen, crops get pollen transfer in their flowers. Hybrid canola seed production in southern Alberta has relied on bees for this cross pollination for some time. Now researchers are looking at possible benefits for canola production all across the province.

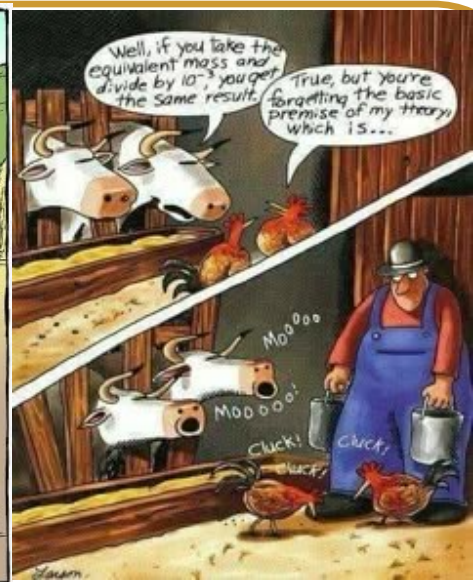
Heat and drought stress can severely limit yields, just look back to July 2024, when we had 35°C. In that heat flowers were aborted, pollination was reduced and we had sprouted seeds at harvest all due to that heat wave. Drought of course has its own effects of poor plant growth and small pods.

Now bees can't make it rain or lower the temperature, so what good are they? Well some past research has shown that the presence of pollinators has enhanced the ability of canola to withstand these stresses. How does it work isn't fully understood, so this study was created to further our understanding of the interaction of pollinators and heat and drought stress in canola.

The study started in 2022 and was conducted in greenhouse conditions to be able to control the water and stress levels. First researchers wanted to examine the effect of these stresses to the overall flowering process of canola. Then introducing pollinators to see what effects they brought to the table.

Initial findings showed that early introduction of pollinators prior to or during these stress events did improve canola yield. More research will be done on this subject, so stay tuned for further findings. But for now it might not be a bad idea to cozy up your local beekeeper.

## Farming is Fun



## Need paperwork?

If you would like your farm to receive invoices, statements, load tickets sent to your direct farm email. Please send a quick Hello to Keven at [FVmanager@bigriveragro.ca](mailto:FVmanager@bigriveragro.ca)

Thanks  
Keven