

Agronomic Practices Can Affect Trade

By: **Bill Greuel, Provincial Specialist – Oilseeds and Transgenic Crops, Saskatchewan Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization**

I have written a lot of mustard related articles over the years, and I think that I have touched on one common theme in most of them: *quality*. Those of you who know me, know that I have a canola background and didn't know much about mustard when I started with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food in 1999. I have learned a considerable amount since then, and I have come to appreciate the mustard industry's commitment to their product. I have had the pleasure of meeting countless mustard producers, seed suppliers, brokers, buyers, processors and end use customers over the years. Somewhere in the conversation, they usually will address that same common theme. I think it would be hard for most people to argue that the strength of Canada's mustard industry is rooted in the quality of our crop.

That said, numerous production areas around the world are picking away at our market share (Figure 1), and if recent trends continue including; escalating transportation costs, a rising Canadian dollar relative to US currency and these new production zones continuing to improve their quality, alternative sources will become more attractive to our export customers.

So where do we go? I am not suggesting that we should lower the cost of production, and I dare not suggest a price increase given that stocks / use ration is at 88 percent. I suspect the answer lies in alternative markets, be they industrial bio-oils or bio-pesticides, or new human food ingredient uses. But we need to be realistic, those advances are a few production cycles away at best. I would contend that in the meantime, we focus on the quality of our crop and engage our exporters to help build on Canada's reputation as the premier supplier of high quality mustard in the world. We have a reputation, we should use it.

Every grower in Saskatchewan has a responsibility if we want to exploit our position as a top quality mustard supplier. Every production decision you make can have implications for the entire industry. Specifically for mustard, I am talking about the use of non-registered pesticides and contamination from GMO canola.

We all know the challenges of weed control in mustard and we are all aware of the dockage penalties for weed seeds. The temptation may arise to use pesticides "off-label" in order to deal with hard to control weeds and often we do not consider the implications of this practice. In Canada, the Pesticide Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA), part of Health Canada, monitors off-label pesticide use. Growers found

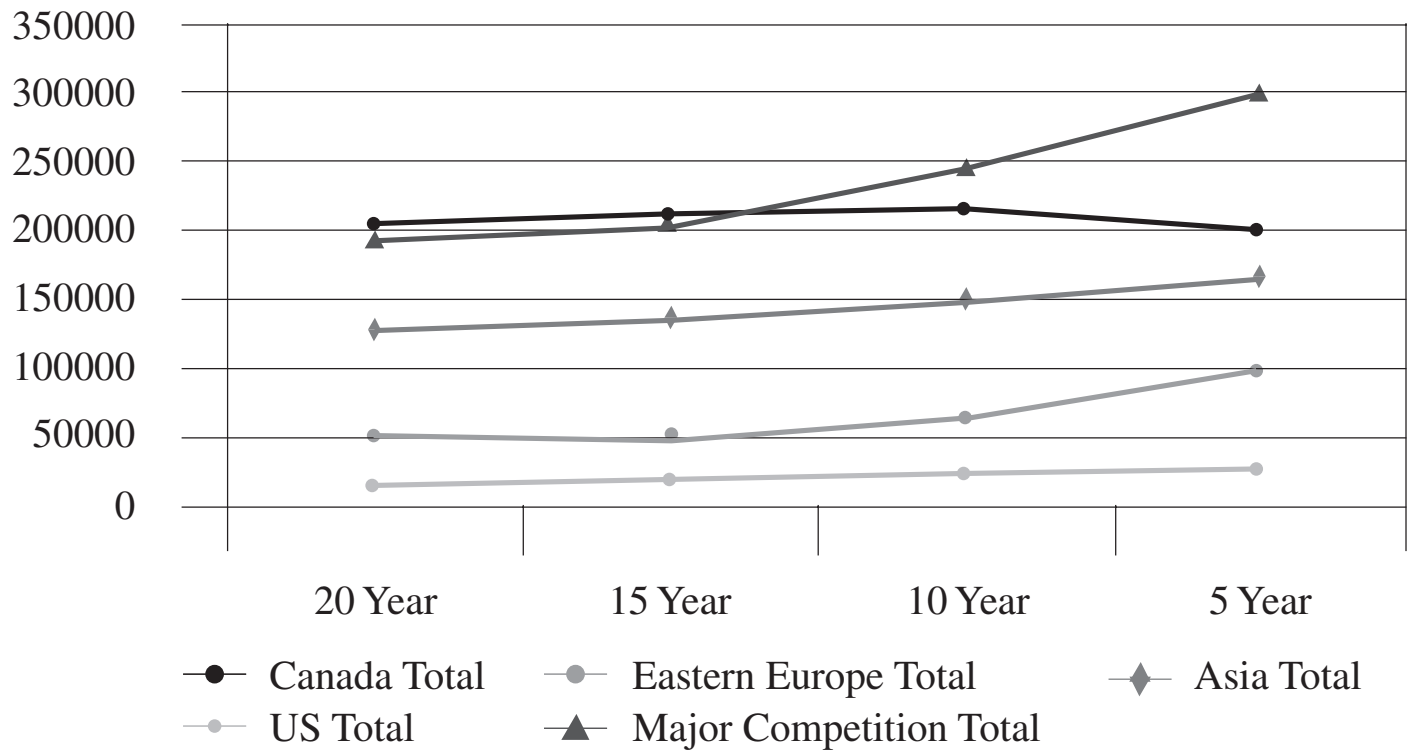
in violation of the regulations can have their crop confiscated and could have fines levied against them. These fines can be substantial, as can the value of the lost crop.

In addition to Canadian law, we need to consider new Japanese regulations. The Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) has quantified new pesticide maximum residue limits (MRLs) that will formally come into effect in April of 2006. With these regulations will come regular testing and the possibility that the MAFF may quarantine, refuse entry or destroy any raw or manufactured product that exceeds the new MRLs. Of interest to mustard growers are the MRLs for Edge, Muster and Glyphosate, all of which are very low and for good reason. Edge is only registered for use in yellow mustard, Muster is only registered in brown and oriental mustard and Glyphosate is not registered at all for preharvest perennial weed control in any mustard type.

Another production practice we need to consider very carefully is the effect of crop rotation on adventitious presence (AP) or the contamination of GMO canola. Although European regulations do allow for a certain percentage of AP and a recent ruling by the WTO may allow the importation of GMOs into the EU, buyers and end users may not be as accommodating. You must also pay particular attention to equipment sanitation including harvest, transportation and elevation as well as storage facilities.

I wanted to stress in this article the responsibility that every grower has, not only to their own operation, but to other farmers and the Canadian mustard industry as a whole. We have a reputation to protect and we all share in that. If that's not enough to get you thinking, consider this. Most mustard buyers retain samples of all product handled in their facilities. Most of these samples are tested for a host of different factors which may include off-label pesticides and AP. If the Japanese, or the Europeans or the Americans decide to deny entry of a container or shipment of mustard because of pesticide residues or AP, chances are the supplier knows where that shipment originated. He likely has samples of the individual deliveries that made up the composite shipment. The industry is still debating the issue of liability in these matters, but one thing is true, most farmers are at the end of the line. ❀

Figure 1: 20, 15, 10 and 5 year average mustard production (tonnes) for the major mustard producing areas of the world



Source: United Nation Food and Agriculture Organization
Asia (Nepal and Myanmar), Eastern Europe (Czech Republic, Ukraine, Romania)

At the SMDC Annual Meeting in Saskatoon on January 11, several speakers offered information on a wide variety of topics. The following presentations from that meeting can be found on the **Mustard website at www.saskmustard.com**:

- Producer Liability – Today's Biggest Risks – Presented by Craig Zawada, Lawyer, Wallace Meschishnick Clackson Zawada
- Marketing 05/06 Update – Steve Foster, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool
- Shattering Resistance – Van Ripley, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
- Mustard Traceability Pilot Program – Bill Riley, Canada Grains Council