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# PRODUCER PROFILE #1



## The Producer...

**TERRY MACFARLANE** runs a 1600 acre operation on the eastern edge of the dark brown soil zone in the Carnduff, SK area (17 miles southwest and 4 miles from the US border). He says his clay loam soil "definitely has a few stones." His acres include 300 acres of Souris River Valley pastureland for some purebred livestock.

Average rainfall in his area is about 12" per season, although it has been quite higher in the past four years, including 18" in 1999 and 2000. This has intensified disease problems. Local producers were able to spring seed in 1999, although it was difficult due to the wet ground. Winter wheat was a good option later in the season for many zero tillers.

Macfarlane began growing winter wheat in the fall of 1996. He prefers to plant into canola stubble (usually two quarters, canola has best crown protection), but has also tried it in flax stubble, and following a pea crop. At the 2001 Manitoba-North Dakota Zero-Till Association conference, he heard how effective zero-till can be in residue management, which plays a major role in crown protection for winter wheat during the cold months.

Macfarlane's typical rotation is canola, winter wheat, peas, and spring wheat, with occasional use of barley or flax. He has also tried canamaize, which can work in his lower heat unit region.

## What Made Him Try Winter Wheat?

While he says "it was curiosity more than anything," Macfarlane also felt it would be a real advantage to be able to combine early the following year. "I was also growing peas that year, which also come off early. I thought I could harvest the winter wheat just before or just after the peas. It was all about spreading the workload, and harvesting in August is very nice with its longer, hotter days" he says.

Managing the workload, especially at seeding and harvest time, is important for Macfarlane, as he works on his own.

## Growing Winter Wheat: Advantage Macfarlane

"It's pretty nice to seed in September. Drier land makes it much easier to get through the low spots," says Macfarlane. During the wet spring and summer of 1999, Macfarlane was able to seed a newer variety, Clair, which worked very well (and much better than earlier varieties, such as Kestral (1997 and 1998), which was not as disease resistant, with yields not much better than spring wheat). Given that he wasn't able to plant any spring crops, he was certainly tempted to plant more winter wheat. Thinking of his long-term rotation, he of course did not.

Reduced weed control costs and better resistance to disease are other advantages.

"I am able to minimize herbicide costs when wild oats and wild millet are an expensive problem for spring wheat. Macfarlane generally just applies a low cost broadleaf weed control (2-4D) Winter wheat also matures early enough to avoid midge and fusarium problems," he says.

The availability of some local feed marketing options for his product has been another plus for Macfarlane. "I often get a better price from area cattle producers (including hog operators from southwest Manitoba), who also pay to have my winter wheat trucked out of my yard," he says.



## Advantage Macfarlane

- ☛ *spread out the workload*
- ☛ *dry seeding*
- ☛ *early harvest*
- ☛ *local marketing opportunities*

## Growing Challenges

As a smaller operator, Macfarlane feels the greatest challenge to growing winter wheat relates to coordinating the fall harvest of spring crops and the planting of his winter wheat in September. “Maybe it’s more of a mental thing, but it’s a big switch to unhook the combine from the tractor and get the air seeder going to plant winter wheat. It’s a lot easier if we get a rain in late August or early September. This is a prime seeding opportunity, and I have to stop harvesting anyway. If it doesn’t rain, you keep harvesting. As time moves on, you have to make up your mind if you want to plant winter wheat or not.” This can be a struggle, although it’s less of an issue for the larger operator with a bigger capital investment (e.g. a self propelled combine). “The trend for custom combining is coming soon for small operators,” he says.

Some weeds can be a problem for winter wheat. “Weeds that have started in May and June will still be there at swathing time. This is not a big problem during harvest, but they will take off on you after harvest, and they have to be managed” says Macfarlane.

The weed challenge varies from year to year, with annual weeds such as wild millet and pigweed being the biggest problems. Wild oats are not a problem.



## Keys to Successful Production: Macfarlane’s Learnings

Like most producers, Macfarlane is modest about his efforts. “I’m not sure if I’ve been in it long enough to provide much insight,” he says. The reality is that his production has been fairly stable since he introduced winter wheat into his rotation. **Average yields:** currently in the range of 60-70 bushels per acre. He had some disease problems during the first two years; variety improvements since then seems to have addressed this problem.

In the fall of 2001, he tried seeding without nitrogen fertilizer for the first time, a switch from his previous practice. Instead he will adopt the recommended approach of spreading dry product in the spring.

He has also found that it’s critical to maintain proper crop rotations; seeding his winter wheat into canola has been the most effective (crown protection during winter).



## Advice Offered to Other Growers

Macfarlane says getting a copy of the winter production manual from Winter Cereals Canada is of paramount importance. Macfarlane says “it contains information on all aspects of winter wheat production”, including:

- ☛ timing of seeding
- ☛ ideal stubble types
- ☛ seeding depth (“be careful not to go too deep,” says Macfarlane)
- ☛ a comprehensive fertilizer program (“it doesn’t seem too rigid,” he says)

Macfarlane also notes the importance of using the newest winter wheat seed varieties to avoid any of the initial problems he experienced.

He also suggests getting your broadleaf herbicide on in a timely manner. “You may want to explore the possibilities associated with custom application, to save time,” he says.

Finally, he says straight combining is ideal for winter wheat. “You don’t want your winter wheat in swath any longer than possible. If it gets wet, you can easily have sprouting problems, resulting in substantial losses in quality and value. If you have to swath, wait until it’s ripe, then get it done!” says Macfarlane.