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PRODUCER PROFILE #5



What Made Him Try Winter Wheat Again?

Being concerned with wild oat herbicide resistance, Butcher has always viewed winter wheat as an opportunity. "The crop doesn't normally require a herbicide," he says.

"I was also interested in the profitability....as well as extending my harvest and planting periods. Growing winter wheat is profitable; that's the cut and dry of it," says Butcher. He notes the reduced use of wild oat herbicides.

The Producer...

GARTH BUTCHER runs a 2700 acre operation on the homestead where he grew up east of Birtle, MB. He has four children.

His soils are medium to heavy textured clay, and by Manitoba standards, average temperatures are cool, due to a 1700' elevation. Butcher grows canola, flax, barley, wheat, field peas, and grass seed. He generally includes 300 acres of winter wheat, and he's thinking about increasing it.

Butcher began growing winter wheat during the dry 1980s, but quit after six years due to problems with rust and a lack of varieties suited to his field and growing conditions. "I was initially attracted because of the yield advantage and better use of early spring moisture, Northstar didn't work too well here, and it produced a lot of straw."

Butcher is growing winter wheat again, mainly due to some dramatic changes in crop varieties which are now available.



Growing Challenges

"Planning the planting time is the first thing to overcome," says Butcher. The fact that winter wheat is seeded near the harvest time of other crops is a challenge faced by many new winter wheat growers. For many producers, there is a psychological barrier to overcome. Butcher says "planting winter wheat at harvest time takes some getting used to, but any acres planted in the fall reduces seeding pressure in the spring."

Butcher closely watches the cost of applying nitrogen fertilizer to the crop, although winter wheat typically has a good response to nitrogen. He pegs his current nitrogen costs at about \$30/acre.



Keys To Successful Production: Butcher's Learnings

Butcher has to carefully watch his winter wheat seeding dates. "It's always difficult to get the crop in early up here," he says. "I should have it done by late August, but I don't think I've ever made it. With a cooler growing season, my fields are rarely ready at the ideal time, although I try to time some of my canola crop to come off at the optimum harvest date. It takes precision planning, and maybe some shorter season varieties" says Butcher, who has also been working on a system for planting winter wheat into barley stubble.

"In order to be profitable, you must time your season with the proper winter wheat seeding date, and use optimum fertility rates to your benefit. Fungicide is another important treatment in producing a good crop," says Butcher.

Butcher says straight combining is another good management decision - as a swathed winter wheat crop is very susceptible to sprouting if rained on.



Butcher's Return to Winter Wheat

- ☛ *seeding flexibility*
- ☛ *weed control*
- ☛ *disease resistance*
- ☛ *new improved varieties*



Advice Offered To Other Growers

While he admits he doesn't have all the answers, Butcher says managing crop rotation is critical. "You have to make sure you plant early enough in order to get good fall development." He also notes the need to leave a good amount of standing stubble after seeding, to effectively trap snow for winter cover.

He also suggests seeding shallow (1/2 to 3/4 of an inch) with adequate fertility.

In terms of weeds, he says, "start with a clean field and use good weed control planning in the fall. You've got to keep the crop healthy, sometimes spraying late if you have to, even in a dry year." The use of fungicide is a must in most areas of Manitoba.

An adequate amount of fertilizer is also important. "Winter wheat's yield response will pay off," he says. Butcher has also seen a definite yield advantage over time. "My winter wheat yields are 20-40% higher than spring wheat," he says. **Average Yields:** 65 bushels per acre.

Butcher has wondered if the use of fungicide somehow extends his winter wheat growing season. "Perhaps it's just a little different at my elevation. Sometimes I'm harvesting winter wheat at the same time as my spring. There is a long period of seed development," he says.