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Why's of Agriculture: What keeps the grain farmers so busy in the winter?

By Aimee Delaney, PAL Coordinator

Sure, the fields are still covered in snow. And sure, harvest is months away. So what has been keeping all the grain farmers so busy over winter? Simply put, more work. Work is never truly done on a farm so when it's not seeding or harvest season, and their not being mechanics working on machinery, they're more than busy marketing and selling their crops, and becoming planners and strategists (not to mention other chores of course!).

With marketing, the goal is to supply the demand. When and how you meet that demand is where strategy and planning is pertinent. Economics are important of course, but perhaps even more so is the planning and strategizing around the environmental factors. Boiled down to the bare facts doing good environmentally has economic benefits.

Before the growing season can begin grain farmers consider the type of land they have and what it's best suited to grown. Several things may play a role in this: soil moisture, soil health (ie. available nutrients; crop rotations and crop residues that are incorporated back into the soil), biodiversity, weather projections, etc. Costs of inputs are also widely considered: seed costs and availability, water requirements, the need for pest control (ie. insects, diseases, animals) or fertilizers (ie. soil health), crop insurance, fuel and other equipment needs.

When land is taken care of it has the ability to remain sustainable and productive over time. Summer may be the time to 'get stuff done', but Winter is the time to plan and prepare – and as we all know, planning and preparation are keys to success. When demand is high, they'll be ready.

Each month we'll dig into a new 'Why?', or in this case 'What', of agriculture. If you have an agricultural question you'd like me to dig into let me know at adelaney@rdcounty.ca

