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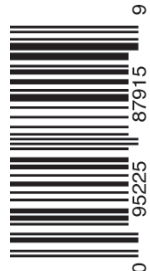


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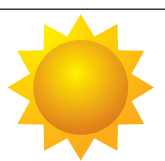
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TIMES PHOTO BY MEG NOGUCHI

GET IT WHILE IT'S HOT: With August rolling around, corn stands have started popping up in southern Alberta as Taber corn hits the market once again for the next several months. Lolly Turner hands out a bag full of corn earlier this week.

Hunter hearing plenty of concerns about inflation and cost of living

By Cole Parkinson
Taber Times
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Inflation and cost of living have continued toward dangerous trends throughout 2022 and the provincial government is well aware of the struggles Albertans continue to face on a day-to-day basis.

As Canadians across the country continue to budget as best as they can, Taber-Warner MLA Hunter says the province is doing everything in its power to help Albertans during this time.

With cuts to a number of programs that will help save some money for Albertans, Hunter explains how the province is reviewing things in order to help.

"That is a big issue — the cost of goods going up, food, gas, utilities. We were able to roll out the \$150 reduction in utility costs, which was helpful. We are going to extend that program as well and that's going to be nice. We are also able to get rid of the 13 cents per litre for the provincial gas tax, so that's nice to have that off as well. All of those things help with getting rid of cost pressures Albertans are dealing with."

■ Continued on GAS, A3

Scientists from U of L working to bring rice to Alberta

By Ian Croft
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter
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With Alberta, and in particular southern Alberta, being home to a large amount of dedicated and hard-working farmers many crops have already been grown in this province.

However, this is not stopping Michele Korschuh, Irrigated Crop scientist at the University of Lethbridge, as she has partnered with several other businesses of interest to try and bring a new crop to the field. Those very same farmers may find it quite surprising that the new crop being considered is rice. Korschuh was able to provide more detail about this endeavour and what may soon come to southern Alberta.

"I can't lay claim to the idea," said Korschuh. "The university was approached by a company called Galaxy Ag Ventures and they were looking for someone to help them with some neat ideas they had. Se Hong Park, who is the principal of the company, came to us and said 'You know we would really like to grow rice in Alberta.' They approached me and I said 'You've got to be crazy.' The thing is that they also brought with them some technologies. I had to learn a little bit more about rice it's certainly not something I grew up with, or something that has grown here. Now the rice that I picture being grown is what they call lowland rice where you flood fields and people transplant into those flooded fields and you grow rice that way. That's not entirely necessary for rice. Rice is not actually an aquatic plant, but the water in that setting is used to suppress weed to prevent pests from getting the rice."

Korschuh spoke about her scepticism of this project before doing more research into rice.

"I didn't think that was going to be feasible here, but I found out there was also upland rice. Upland rice production is where they don't flood the fields and where that rice is grown more like a regular crop. Rice is grown in the U.S., and the U.S. is number five in rice production in the world, which really surprised me and in the U.S. it is mechanized. I could see a fit here if we could grow it in upland conditions and if we could mechanize it."

After this, Korschuh talked about some of the technology that could help facilitate the growth of rice in Alberta.

"One of the technologies they brought forward is called FSC film for seed film cultivation and that's a Korean product," said Korschuh. "It's basically a biodegradable plastic layer that you can attach the rice to and the rice will grow up through flutes in the opening. The plastic is well served for several purposes. One, it will warm up our cold soil in the spring — another is it will trap moisture in the field, and the third it will prevent weed growth between the plants. With the technology, I thought, 'well, you might be onto something maybe we can try it here.' To explore the topic, we have approached Farming Smarter, they have wonderful skilled technical people, the wherewithal to make this happen, and they have irrigation. We need to work with someone to make that happen, so we partnered with Galaxy Ag, and Farming Smarter to try this project out. We started with a few approaches of seeding it, and two different styles of irrigation, and this year were really on the learning

curve to see what can be done here."

Korschuh then began to discuss the first steps of the project.

"It's a great first. We have grown transplants in the greenhouse at the university and we transplanted some of them in the field. They seemed shocked to experience our environment after being in the comfort of the greenhouse. They seemed really horrified. Those plants haven't really thrived or taken off yet. We also tried direct seeding some of those and they actually caught and we have small rice plants. Then we have some attached to the seed film and that probably has so far worked the best because the weed control is quite good and the rice took off a little sooner. I'd say we actually have plants growing in Alberta. I don't know if they're going to reach seed production and maturity this year — small steps first. One of the things I learned about rice is that it prefers a short day length, and of course, as you know in Alberta, at this time of year we have a long day length. We might have to find a variety that is photoperiod insensitive to grow here and also something that's a little bit shorter season or more adapted to a cold start in the spring, but at least we have plants growing in so it's been a modest success."

Korschuh also spoke about selecting the right type of rice plant for this area as well as their next steps for the project.

"We also did some work with some germplasm (a term to describe certain parts of the plant that are used within crop breeding and research such as the seeds) evaluation in the greenhouse at the university and just getting our feet wet with how rice grows, what does it need to be successful," said Korschuh. "I think

there's an opportunity to select varieties that can thrive in this area, but we need to work with a breeding program. Probably the next step and at this time it is just a one-year project with the company. I think our next steps will involve germplasm selection where we are looking for germplasm from different sources around the world to see what has a better fit in our environment, and this year we hope to figure out our best planting strategy, and best irrigation strategy. Then we can go forward with the best practices that we learn from this year and try some germplasm selection of those."

Following the discussion of the initial progress with growing rice in Alberta, Korschuh spoke on how they are planning to go forward with this project, and if southern Alberta in particular will be a good location for growing rice.

"A couple of things, certainly irrigation is going to be key. In that sense, southern Alberta will be a great place. We have a little bit — I call it kind of a banana belt — but we have a little longer growing season here, we have access to irrigation, and we have some of the most skilled and progressive farmers in this area. In that sense, I think southern Alberta might be a good fit. There are other parts of the province that may have the moisture needed for rice maybe they're lacking something else there. I think we'll try to hear first. We do know that it's been grown successfully in B.C. and in Ontario. I don't think it's going to be something that happens very quickly — I think we will need a few years to try and find good varieties and get a few people interested in growing very small plots."

■ Continued on LOTS, A3

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