

At Your Service

Three Alberta seed growers are taking action and turning ideas into certified success.



Mastin Seeds

Low levels of pedigreed seed usage prompted Bob Mastin to create the Mastin Method of seed distribution, which can be summed up in four words: lower royalty, higher volume. The premise behind the innovative distribution method is simple—Mastin pays a lower royalty to breeders for the rights to good varieties, and then sells higher volumes of reasonably priced certified seed to farmers.

This new distribution method was conceived when Mastin, who has been in the pedigreed seed business for more than 30 years, was asked to submit a bid to the Alberta Agriculture's Research Station in Lacombe, Alta., for the BT566 barley variety now known as Sundre.

The Mastin Method is built on three cornerstones—supplying a consistently high-quality product, fair pricing and readily available product. The method concentrates on cutting costs, increasing

efficiencies, improving quality and making the product available.

Mastin's strategy is based on the fact that only about 15 per cent of cereal seed sold in Western Canada is pedigreed. "Seed growers are trying to determine how to divvy up that 15 per cent of the business when we should be going after the 85 per cent, which would reduce the cost of the seed," says the owner of Mastin Seeds, based near Sundre, Alta.

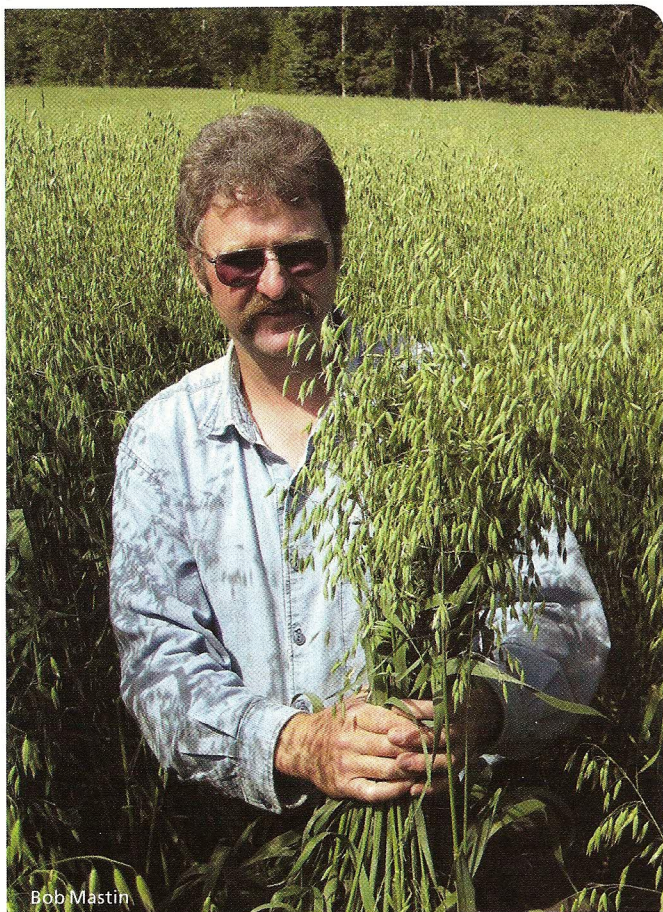
Plant breeders often have a million dollars invested in a variety, he explains, and they try to recover these breeding costs through royalties and fees. But if royalties are only collected on 15 per cent of the seed, the royalties become fairly high and onerous, according to Mastin. "It's a vicious cycle. If you have high royalties on pedigree seed the price of pedigree seed becomes significantly higher than common seed. And this encourages more people to use common seed," he says.

Mastin is hoping that a lower royalty and thus a lower certified seed price will lead to more growers buying certified seed on a regular basis. And he's already seeing promising results. Two varieties he distributes, Sundre barley and AC Mustang oats, have sold out every year with very little promotion, he says.

With his new approach to seed distribution, Mastin is trying to change the entire seed industry in Western Canada. And he realizes that this will take time as old habits die hard. "The trend is on my side, but it's still going to take a long time. All I can do is speed this natural trend up," he says. "In a long drawn-out process things change along the way, so you have to be vigilant, recognize the changes and change your strategy to stay relevant."

Mastin's advice for other farmers considering new business ventures is to do your research, stick with what you know and make sure your idea has a strong profit potential so when things get scaled back as they often do in agriculture, it will still be viable.

"And make sure it [offers you] satisfaction other than just money. Money alone is not enough to keep you going for years or to keep you motivated to do the right things," he adds.



WHERE ON THE WEB

For more information on the Mastin Method visit
WWW.MASTINSEEDS.COM.