

Seeds sow awards for Sundre grower

▼ *Kentucky Derby winners fed Alberta grown oats*

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The grain isn't any greener on the other side of the fence for one Central Alberta farmer.

Bob Mastin, who farms 800 acres of land on the banks of the Red Deer River east of Sundre, recently picked up a pair of prestigious awards for his oat seeds.

Mastin's 21-year-old Athabasca pedigreed oat seeds took second place at the Lethbridge Agriculture Expo, a North America-wide competition, in early March.

Mastin also entered the same sample in the Western Canadian Edmonton Farm and Ranch show later that month.

"I thought, 'I wonder how I'll do in Edmonton.' But the same guy beat me," Mastin said of his two second-place finishes. "It shows the judging was consistent."

The one-two finish with a Manitoba grower at both the Western Canadian and North American competitions also shows that there are two areas well-suited to growing oats — Manitoba and along Alberta's Foothills, he pointed out.

In fact, Alberta oats have been fed to half the Kentucky Derby winners in the last 15 years, Mastin said.

Most Alberta grown oats are sold as horse feed, with the lesser quality grain going to General Mills.

"The next best oats go to the humans," Mastin chuckled.

Mastin first sowed his award-winning seeds 21 years ago, while he was still a student at Olds College.

"It's amazing for a variety to stay around for 21 years," he said.

To win a seed competi-

tion with that same variety is even more remarkable.

"It was kind of a bit of nostalgia for me. 'Hey, old buddy. You've been good to me for 21 years'."

Three years ago, Mastin was the only farmer in Alberta still growing Athabasca.

Demand was dropping, leading him to believe it was no longer a viable variety until a hay exporter diversified and searched the province specifically for Athabasca. Mastin has planted it faithfully ever since.

Mastin thanks the weather during the last two growing seasons for producing the award-winning seeds. A moist summer, followed by a very hot summer spelled bad news for barley, but Mastin said growing conditions combined with a warm, dry autumn for harvesting were ideal for oats.

This is the first competition the grower has entered in 10 years.

"After two years of having really good oat samples, I thought, well, darn it, maybe I should enter."

Competitions also serve to promote business for the grower, who pays students to hand-pick the wild oats out of his 400 acres of oat fields.

Aside from nine varieties of oats, everything from green feed quality to silage to milling oats, Mastin also grows 200 acres of barley, a little canola and calves about 60 head of beef cattle.



SPRAWLING SOURCE

Set along the banks of the Red Deer River east of Sundre, a good portion of Bob Mastin's 800 acres of land has been sown with award winning Athabasca pedigreed oat seeds. Photo courtesy Bob Mastin