

# Oats a 'gold mine'

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Oats are a crop that many farmers don't take too seriously, but they've been a gold mine to seed grower Bob Mastin.

Oats make up about 60 per cent of his seed sales, because it's the crop where he has a competitive advantage.

His land has always been virtually weed-free.

"Ninety-nine per cent of the land in the province is contaminated with wild oats," he says.

"If they ever invented a spray that would kill wild oats (and not tame), I would have a lot of competition."

With most other crops, if the price of seed goes a little high, farmers can always pull a little feed grain out of the bin for seed.

Not so with oats, he explains, since crops of feed oats will be contaminated with wild oats.

Because of that, oat seed prices don't tend to be influenced by feed prices the way other crops are. The improved margin makes all the fussiness put into growing a seed crop worthwhile.

Oats also do extremely well at

Mastin's location. Cool breezes off the hills at night relieve the day's heat stress, so he's usually able to pull off quality crops.

His land and location allow him to get pedigree certification easily enough, proving the genetic purity, quality and a complete lack of wild oats. Pedigreed seeds draw the business of farmers looking to export crops or byproducts, or wanting to harvest some of their own seed.

But the same conditions allow him to produce fine common seed. He believes that's why his common oats were the grand champion feed seed at the Calgary Seed Fair and Hay Show this year.

"Most of my common seed is grown to the same standard as pedigreed," he says.

Because he doesn't have to pay for government inspections on common seed, he can let it go for a lower price. Without the government certification, buyers only have the reputation of the grower to go on, but that's not a problem for Mastin.

"If people are just growing it to turn it into cow feed, they could care less whether it has a certificate."