

Mountain View GAZETTE

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**Reprint of Actual
Front Page Article**

Seed grower looks to change future of industry

BY JODI STYNER
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It's never easy going up against the big guy, but in true David and Goliath fashion, a Sundre seed grower did just that - and won.

Now this one farmer is getting the entire industry's attention in a move that could change the future of seed operation across the country.

When Bob Mastin first caught a glimpse of a new barley variety still in the testing stages during the Lacombe research station's open house last year, he knew he had to have it.

And at first, it seemed there wouldn't be a lot of competition for distribution rights given that seed companies weren't showing much interest in new varieties in the wake of BSE.

So Mastin mulled it over for awhile and decided a variety with that high a yield was just too good to pass up. He filled out the 12-page application and waited.

Then came the phone call. "Bob, we got your bid, but we've got a problem," said Dr. Jim Helm, with Lacombe's Field Crop Development Centre (FCDC).

One of the largest seed companies in the country had put in a bid of their own - a very professional and very competitive bid

- and if Mastin still wanted a shot at it, he was going to have to submit a more detailed proposal. And he had just 15 days to do it.

Two days before the deadline he started working on it full time, and the day before, he worked on it all day and all night.

In fleshing out his original plan, Mastin came up with an

"For farmers there's no money out there and everything comes down to economics, so I said I was going to make it so it's not to their economic advantage to break the law and get caught."

Until now, some farmers were willing to take that risk.

Distributors were assessing royalties against pedigreed sales and increasing the price gap between pedigreed and com-

After typing up the final draft as professionally as he could, Mastin hopped in his truck and made the trek up to Lacombe through a thick fog, finally setting down his plan, in triplicate, on Helm's doorstep at 3 a.m.

To his surprise and delight, seven hours later he got another phone call.

"Congratulations Bob, it's yours," said Helm.

"So I said 'look, we've been complaining about the plant breeders' rights as much as farmers complain about the gun registry, but nobody's willing to do anything about it'."

BOB MASTIN
Mastin Seeds Ltd.



idea he knew would be controversial, and may just lose him the bid, but he decided to go with it anyway.

Normally, about 85 per cent of the barley seed is sold and traded as common and only 15 per cent as pedigreed.

He wanted to flip those numbers. But to do that, he had to offer lower royalties, on top of offering less money up front.

It was risky, but Mastin saw this as the only solution to stopping a long-time trend that was forcing farmers to try to beat the system.

mon, and ultimately jacking up royalties.

"So I said 'look, we've been complaining about the plant breeders' rights as much as farmers complain about the gun registry, but nobody's willing to do anything about it,'" he said.

"But I'm a farmer, I can think like a farmer and I know how to end this. We'll put plant breeders' rights on it so it's illegal to do it."

His proposal offered that 85-15 reversal guarantee, a definite incentive - if it was, in fact, a guarantee.

"We're going to give you a chance to see if you can pull this off."

Mastin thinks he can.

"It basically comes down to price, and if the price is cheaper, the farmers won't try beating the system and they'll come and buy pedigreed," he said.

"It could be kind of a flagship for the entire industry."

"If this works, it could get people's attention and probably change the way the seed industry is operated."

Right now there are currently only 60 bushells of Sundre in

existence. But Mastin hopes to grow it into the number one six-row smooth awned barley in Alberta within a few years.

"It should be number one, without a doubt," he said.

"It's got the potential and I feel privileged that I got worldwide distribution rights on a top quality variety as opposed to starting out distributing a variety that nobody else wanted."

But farmers will have to wait a little longer to get their hands on Sundre.

So far he's seeded about 64 acres in five small fields, split up between Sundre and Peace River, to reduce potential hail damage.

He wants to build up to 3,000 acres, growing 300,000 bushells of seed to be made available.

"Assuming we get our seed off, it will be available in a big way in the spring of 2008," he said.

"We should be able to supply anybody who wants it at any location."

This first bid application and win seems to have started the ball rolling.

Mastin also just acquired the top silage oat in the province from Agrico, and this is the first time in history that anyone outside of Agrico has been able to grow the Mustang seed.

A pretty impressive feat for one little seed grower.

Carla Victor/Mountain View Gazette