

## SPRING'S SPRUNG



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***In the spring, at the end of the day, you should smell like dirt.***

(Margaret Atwood - Canadian Author; 1939 - )

Halfway into a supply and demand view for this article, I stopped

and thought, "well this is boring and no one will read it". The fact that there will be large carry-over of peas and lentils (1.1 million tonnes each) is well known. At this point in the year, farmers have only wanted to talk about weather and seeding plans. For pea and lentil growers, the end of winter could not come soon enough. Not only did they have to look at snow-free fields all fall and winter, the trade issues that have been well documented in previous Pulse Market Reports, exacerbated an already tense mood on the farm. No moisture tends to do that. Looking out vehicle and airplane windows only seemed to make the matter that much more dire. In reality, with the last blizzard moving through the Prairies during the first week of March, the percentage of normal changed for the better. My biggest concern was the pattern that had been entrenched across Saskatchewan, with rains splitting over the mountain ridge, would continue through this summer. With the exception of a pocket near Regina, that pattern seems to have been broken.

Never in the past 37 years have I seen such uncertainty around seeding plans as this year. It is not uncommon for farms to have a Plan A and a Plan B for seeding depending on spring forecasts and grain movement. This year, some farms had three different plans for seeding and the most common answer to my question, "What are you going to seed this year?" has become, "Ask me in April, but could you send me some yield data on dry versus wet years?" Included in this month's submission are 25 years of yield data for peas and lentils. The average for peas from 1992 to 2017 in Saskatchewan is 32.26 bushels per acre

(bu/ac) for peas, and 1,256.96 pounds per acre (lb/ac) for lentils. To put that in perspective, the 25-year average for wheat, durum, and canola is 35.33, 34.74, and 28.76 bu/ac respectively.

Seeding intentions have changed so much since the fall - no one really has a good handle on it. If someone thinks that they can second guess a farmer, more power to you. I have learned that listening is the best tool, rather than asking. In January, after a survey of 100 farmers (64 in Saskatchewan), I estimated pea acres would be down 165,000 (-9.2%) from 2017, to 2 million (M) acres. I had lentil acres down 1.02 M (-26%), to 2.9 M acres. If there has been a shift in the past three months it has been to more lentil acres. I believe Saskatchewan will be closer to 3.3 M lentil acres. I am comfortable leaving peas where they were in January. My biggest fear is that farmers will seed wall-to-wall green lentils, as the majority of the carry-over will be red lentils from last year. With no disrespect to anyone, the majority of lentil growers also plant durum and they have hurt that market for years by over subscribing acres.

Lastly, the weather is going to make or break the crop once farmers get it in the ground. That is the one constant that has never changed. The difference this year is that any subsoil moisture for two-thirds of the province was utilized to make the last crop - there is no more reserve for the 2018/19 crop. Most of you know I began following Drew Lerner in 2002. While he is not right all the time, he is the most consistent farm forecaster of all the wire services that I subscribe to. Lerner's forecast for the March through August period issued during the second week of March indicates an increased precipitation pattern for most of the Prairies until the end of May. While it won't be enough to regenerate subsoil moisture levels south of the No. 1 Highway, it will provide ample moisture for seed germination and development until the end of May. For the June through August period, most of Saskatchewan will see near normal rainfall, with pockets in northwest and southeast Saskatchewan at near-to-below

normal rainfall. At this time, weather should not be a deciding factor as to what you seed or not. Economics should.

Economics, crop rotations, and land stewardship were the top three answers to my seeded acreage survey of 100 farmers in December. That should never change. While new crop green lentil bids range from 24 to 27 cents per pound (¢/lb), red lentils are in the 18 to 19¢ range. Even at 18¢ or \$10.80/bu, red lentils still can pencil into the profit picture with normal yields. The days are getting longer and it won't be long now until everyone has a solid seeding plan. In 30 days, like Margaret Atwood, at the end of a long day, I hope all farmers smell like dirt.

*Larry Weber operates Weber Commodities Ltd. More information can be found at [www.webercommodities.com](http://www.webercommodities.com)*



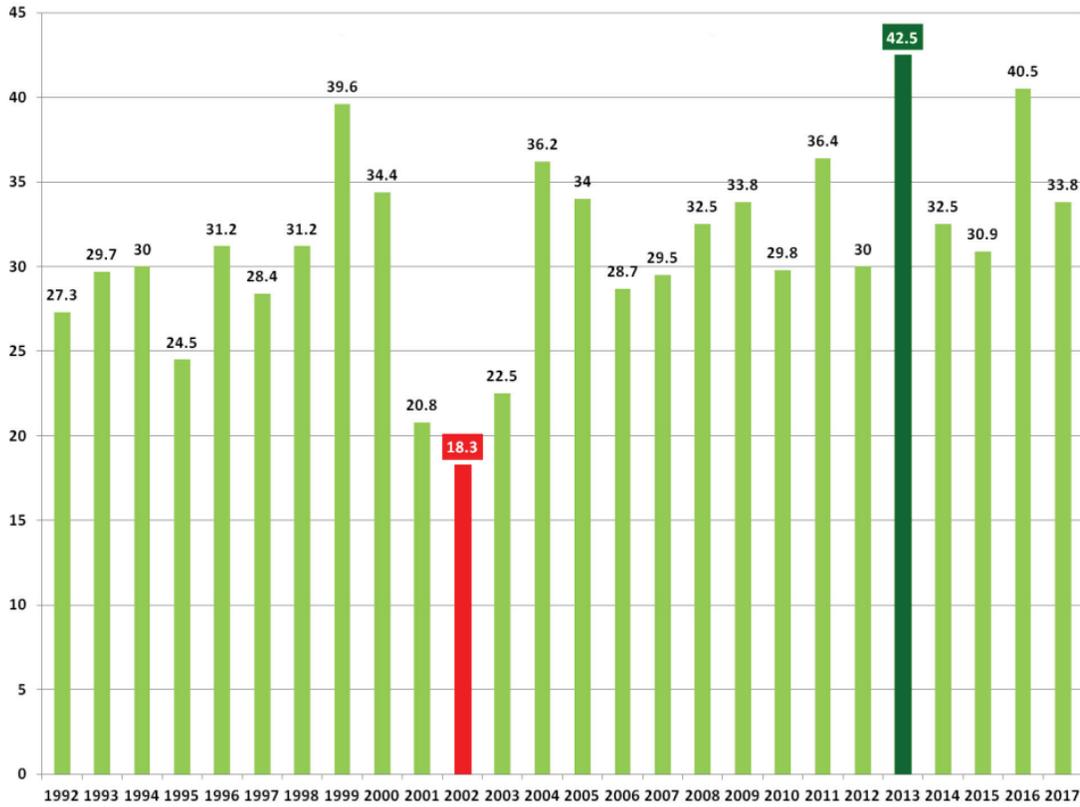
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### Saskatchewan Field Pea Yield - 1992 to 2017

Source: Statistics Canada - Bushels per acre



### Saskatchewan Field Lentil Yield - 1992 to 2017

Source: Statistics Canada - Pounds per acre

