

## CHAIR'S MESSAGE

### *Jason Lenz honoured to lead commission*



**T**his is my first message as chair of Alberta Barley, and I am certainly excited and honoured to take on this new responsibility on behalf of Alberta's barley farmers.

My name is Jason Lenz and I farm near Bentley, in west-central Alberta. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time working with Alberta Barley since 2009, including my time as vice-chair for the past two years. I also serve on the *GrainsWest* magazine editorial advisory board and am a former Alberta Barley representative for the Barley Council of Canada. In addition to barley, I grow wheat, canola and faba beans, and have a small cow/calf herd.

Alberta Barley has worked hard for producers for 25 years, and I am thrilled to continue that legacy. Improving profitability, increasing competitiveness, and connecting consumers and producers are important factors in growing our industry.

I've got some big shoes to fill following Mike Ammeter's run as chair, but over the years I've seen how important our organization is in ensuring a bright future for the barley industry.

During my time with Alberta Barley, I have seen my fellow farmers deal with harsh weather, transportation issues and the introduction of new legislation affecting our day-to-day lives. Alberta Barley has been there every step of the way, amplifying our voices on policy matters.

From the steady feed industry to the booming malt sector, barley is a big part of agriculture here in Alberta. Barley is an important crop—not only for our province, but also for Canada as a whole. As a supplier of more than 50 per cent of the country's barley, Alberta's barley industry is integral and representation for farmers is critical.

Research has always been a priority for me. Investments in research are

direct investments in our industry and our farms. I am especially looking forward to expanding our research investments further to benefit farmers.

As chair, I am committed to working for you. I plan to continue my work within the research and policy committees, while becoming even more involved with the day-to-day work Alberta Barley does on our behalf.

Farmers drive change. With an organization like Alberta Barley representing Alberta's barley farmers, I am confident the next year—and beyond—holds great things for you and our industry. We—myself, along with our dedicated board and talented staff—are here for you.

Sincerely,





# OLD GRAIN, NEW TRICKS

## Poster session winner looks to future uses of barley

By Ellen Cottee

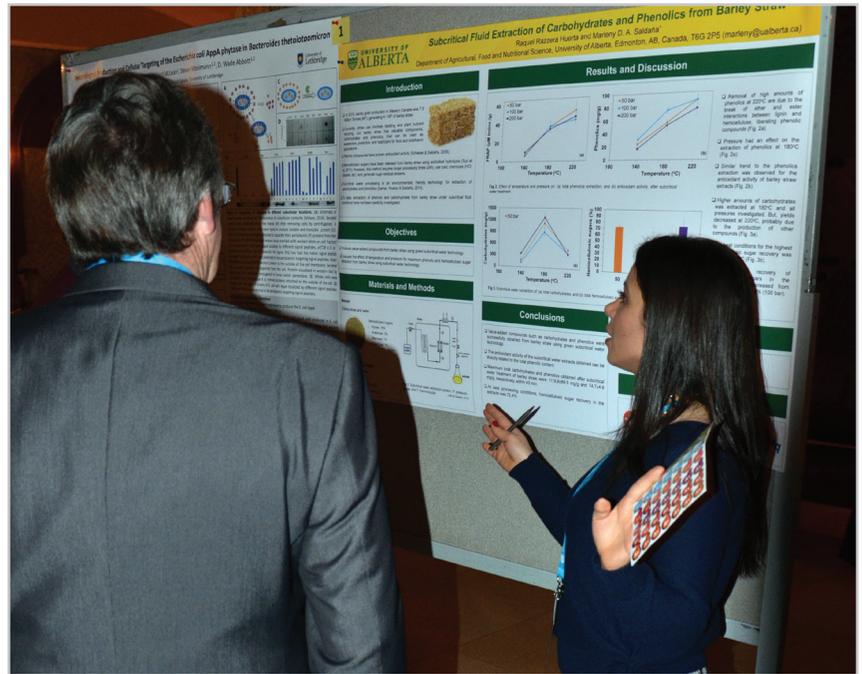
**A**lberta Barley’s AGM is always a great networking opportunity. But the event also gives attendees the chance to learn about current research affecting their livelihoods, through a poster session featuring student researchers—judged by barley farmers—before the evening banquet.

In the past, student researchers have won for their projects on enhancing barley’s value as feed for livestock. This year, however, the first-place winner focused on using barley in an entirely different application.

Raquel Huerta, a student at the University of Alberta, is completing her PhD in bioengineering processing. Her project, titled *Subcritical fluid extraction of carbohydrates and phenolics from barley straw*, looked at practical uses for extractions from barley straw, including biofuels and food sweeteners.

“When I was searching for my project I said, ‘well, okay, in Alberta, what is happening here?’ because I would like to use the resources I have where I am,” Huerta said. “I thought it was nice to try and help the Alberta local industry with some new science and new technology.”

She settled on barley and canola straw, products that have very little value for farmers. Shipping these products often costs more money than a producer could possibly make



Raquel Huerta discusses her research project, *Subcritical fluid extraction of carbohydrates and phenolics from barley straw*, with an AGM attendee.

back. However, some producers put straw back in the soil for nutrient benefits.

“I recognized this,” Huerta said. “I knew what is in this straw is basically sugar compounds.”

The first round of the project had Huerta using green technology—no chemicals, only water and pressure—in the university lab to extract and separate the sugars contained within the straw. “My results were really nice, I extracted carbohydrates,” Huerta explained. “These carbohydrates, which are sugars, are being applied for biofuel.”

“The first step was to get the sugars and the phenolics, and now we are working more with the cellulose. So we have more coming for farmers.”

Biofuel has become a hot topic in recent years. As concerns mount over the large number of gas-guzzling vehicles on the roads, scientists in North America and Europe are looking for alternatives to traditional fossil fuels.

Huerta was quick to add that this research has real-life, practical applications. “We are not just scientists thinking up something. It’s a concern for industries—change from the chemicals to the green technology, add more value, try to reduce the waste.”

Communicating these applications to producers is important to Huerta. Through investments in research, scholarships and donation of resources, the barley industry supports her research and that of her fellow students.

This was only the first part of Huerta’s PhD research involving barley straw. For her second year, Huerta will be working with residues from the sugars, which she said could be used for biomedical applications by her fourth year.

“This is our target, trying to combine a lot of different knowledge,” she said. “We believe this is the future, it’s not just about agriculture. We are sure that we will be mixing science, agriculture and engineering ... trying to see new solutions.”



Maltsters and growers discuss the benefits of malting barley contracts at FarmTech 2017. From left to right: Kevin Sich with Rahr Malting, Wade McAllister of Antler Valley Farm, Robert Chappell with Canada Malting, and Chinook Arch barley grower Scott Keller.

## CASHING IN ON CONTRACTS

*Malt contracts are changing how farmers market their barley*

By *Ellen Cottee*

**G**rowing any crop carries risk. From the time seeds are planted until harvest season, any number of things can happen that could reduce the value farmers will get for their production. Add to that the uncertainty of markets following harvest, and producers have a lot to worry about.

For malt barley, however, the times are changing. The introduction and growth of malt barley contracts in Alberta has changed how farmers market their malt.

For Wade McAllister of Antler Valley Farm north of Innisfail, contracting malt acres has taken much of the worry off his mind. “Our biggest thing is having that barley locked in for a set price for the next three years,” he said. “That just takes care of our marketing for our malt.”

Robert Chappell, director of grain with Canada Malting in Calgary, agreed. “If you’re going to be growing malting barley, you better have a marketing plan,” he said. “That’s what a production contract does.”

For farmers without a contract, marketing often happens near the end of harvest. Once the malt quality has been assessed, they work to find a maltster in need of product.

On contract, however, that marketing happens before seeds are even planted.

Generally, maltsters approach farmers to discuss the possibility of growing on contract. If a farmer can show consistent yields and quality in their malt acres, they have a better chance of being picked up for a contract.

It’s not just farmers who benefit from contracts. They are a win-win for farmers and maltsters alike.

“It gives us acreage and barley security,” said Kevin Sich, grain department manager with Rahr Malting in Alix. “We cannot run these plants without knowing there’s barley being seeded.”

On the other side of the malt barley chain are customers, such as breweries, looking for quality malt with sets of specifications unique to their product.



“Contracts allow us to contract the right varieties that our customers need, and I think that’s a benefit for us,” said Chappell.

Of course, it’s not all easy. While contract growing, compared to traditional marketing techniques, is virtually risk-free, there are some precautions both farmers and maltsters have to take.

“We have to watch where we position our acres,” Sich said. “We have to risk-manage our acres and where we put them.”

Maltsters, including Rahr and Canada Malting, also make an effort to mitigate risks on the side of the farmer. One of the biggest risk management tools available to farmers is an “act of God” clause, which offers protection in situations where crops suffer weather damage.

The benefits of contracts are not restricted to marketing either. Contract growing through a maltster helps farmers develop relationships with end users they normally do not have the opportunity to connect with.

Scott Keller, who farms in New Norway, is an original member of the Chinook Arch Growers, a group of farmers contracted by Lagunitas Brewing Company in Petaluma, California. The brewery worked with Rahr

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*–Robert Chappell*

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to select the original group of six producers, which has expanded to include 15 farmers today, in order to meet Lagunitas’ demands for quality malt barley.

“It’s fascinating ... it’s fun to get some face time with brewers,” Keller said. “These guys are passionate about what they’re doing and it’s just fun to interact with these guys.

“They’re basically making some of the best beers in the world, and the fact that we grow one of their main ingredients, there’s a sense of pride there.”

Breweries require large amounts of malt to make beer, and for those adhering to craft brewing standards, the amount of malt needed is approximately four times higher than it is for popular macrobreweries.

McAllister also grows malt barley for a major brewery in the United States, a relationship co-ordinated through Rahr. Alberta and parts of the U.S. have experienced a “craft beer boom” over the past several years, leading to increased demand for quality malt.

“Ever since the boom happened, all these contracts have started happening,” McAllister said. “They can get that supply. No matter what, the brewery we grow for gets 1,000 tonnes of malt from us a year.”

Sich said he believes the growing “drink local” mentality has also driven this desire for traceable malt. “The smaller craft guys are more regionalized, so they have a lot more interest in getting to know where their supply comes from, with the farmer,” he said. “I think that comes from the local consumer.”

When it comes to the future of malt contracts, Sich said he thinks the future is now. “Growers take on so much risk when growing malt,” he said. “Why would you want to take on more by not even trying to figure out a home for it?”

## MEET THE STAFF



**Trevor Bacque**  
**Communications Manager and**  
**GrainsWest Managing Editor**

**T**revor Bacque joined Alberta Barley as communications co-ordinator in 2012 before launching *GrainsWest* in 2014 alongside sales and design lead Tommy Wilson. The award-winning quarterly magazine is a joint initiative of Alberta Barley and the Alberta Wheat Commission. In 2016, he assumed the role of communications manager at Alberta Barley. Trevor also serves as the current vice-president of the Canadian Farm Writers’ Federation.

Trevor studied journalism and communications in Calgary. Before joining Alberta Barley, he spent two years working as a rural reporter in Rocky View County. One of the first agricultural stories he wrote was about former Alberta Barley chair Matt Sawyer and his wife Tara being named Alberta’s Outstanding Young Farmers in 2011.

Despite not coming from a rural background, Trevor quickly grew to enjoy the agriculture industry, especially the people working hard to produce crops across the country year after year.

When he’s away from pens and paper, Trevor enjoys playing squash and travelling with his wife.