

Don Pedersen Added to PRFSA Wall of Fame



Don (middle) with son Kent (2nd from right) and grandson Kyle, at a forage seed field day.

In 1954, Don's father relocated their farm to the Dawson Creek area of the Peace country, farming 1200 acres, growing primarily wheat and barley. Don, now 16, moved to Dawson Creek to complete high school and begin farming with his father. Don's father farmed with his sons until 1961, when the boys took over. During this time, Don found himself completing tech school, and receiving diploma's in welding and diesel mechanics (1956 to 1957). 1961 found Don marrying Hazel Abel, as well as start farming his own 480 acres, along with his two brothers, who ran their own farms.

In the early 1970's, Don began investigating the production of legume seed, with the use of honeybees. Arlin Wilson, a honey bee keeper from Yakima, Washington, USA, came up annually with his honey bees to pollinate the abundant alsike and red clover fields in the region. Don took interest in the honey bees, and eventually went from 25 hives to up to 220 hives, at which time Don's wife Hazel took over this aspect of the farm. His introduction to Arlin Wilson resulted in visits to Washington state to visit Arlin, gather information and "see how things were done down there!"

One of Don's Washington trips resulted in him trying out leafcutter bees, in solid blocks. The initial use was for pollinating clover fields. Although this venture resulted in "Zero" success, Don's fascination in the use of this type of bee eventually resulted in his entry and success as an alfalfa seed grower.

Always interested in all aspects of farming, the late 1970's saw Don enter the world of alfalfa seed production. Using resources available through the Agriculture Canada research station at Beaverlodge (Dr. Peter Pankiw), Don's foray into alfalfa seed production, using alfalfa leafcutter bees, led him into, not only alfalfa seed production, but a major player in the forage seed industry in the Peace country.

Although he was born in southern Alberta in 1938, Don Pedersen was well entrenched in the Peace River country of Canada by the 1960's, becoming one of the regions' most progressive and respected grass and legume seed growers. Don's initial foray into forage seed production began with bees, honey bees. And this move into using honey bees for pollination opened up Don's ingenuity and smarts, opening the door for successful grass and legume seed in future years.

In the 1930's, Don was initially raised on his parents' farm in the Milk River area of Alberta. But due to allergies affecting his mother, Don ended up being raised in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia, while his father maintained the farm in Milk River.



Don Pedersen's hard fescue field at Dawson Creek B.C. Don, 4th from the right, showing his field to a company delegation from DLF Trifolium, Denmark (2004).

Since alfalfa leafcutter bees were a new, unproven tool to be used in alfalfa seed production, success only came after many years of trial and error, and of course, was influenced by Mother Nature along the way. Don's initial purchase of 100,000 alfalfa leafcutter bees eventually lead to an operation of over 20 million bees, pollinating up to 800 acres of his own seed while custom pollinating 500 to 600 additional acres throughout the Peace. Seed was retailed privately, while excess bees ended up throughout the Western American states.

It was during this period, early 1980's, that Don became one of the initial growers responsible for the formation of the Peace Branch of the Alberta Alfalfa Leafcutter Bee Association. This organization has now evolved to become the Peace Region Forage Seed Association (PRFSA), but still carries the footprints left by Don. The original association was very active in the forage seed industry, working on research projects through the Agriculture Canada Beaverlodge Research station, "Farming for the Future" projects, holding annual production seminars at Fairview College, chalk brood surveys, and published their own newsletters.

During this time, Don's son Kent became part of the farm operation, and the farm continued to expand, with land now purchased north of Dawson Creek in the Taylor area. (One other son, Dale, did not get involved in farming). By the early 1990's, Don, Hazel and Kent's' farming operation had grown to 2200 to 2500 acres of crop production. This river flat land along the Peace River proved to be more productive for the production of grass and legume seed. Kent began working full time with Don after completing high school in 1986.

The progression into other crops was next. In subsequent years, Don successfully grew other turf and forage seed crops, using known practices along with his own methods of adapting these new crops to Peace region conditions and practices. Other grass seed crops not seen in commercial production were all successfully grown by Don and Kent. Although Don had only grown creeping red fescue once, (the mainstay of grass seed production in the Peace region), he grew many other grass seed crops.



Don's meadow bromegrass field, Taylor Flats area along the Peace River.

Tall fescue, perennial ryegrass, hard fescue, meadow bromegrass, and sheep's fescue were all grown later, and resulted in good yields. The foray into production of these various grasses saw Don and Kent experiment with: a soybean planter for seeding, inter-row cultivators, a rotary hoe, inter-row sprayer, in addition of various unique management practices.



Smucker wick applicator for wiping glyphosate to eliminate quack grass in grass seed fields.

By now, the growers of grass seed in the region needed funding for their organization (PRFSA), and a levy commission was proposed. To accomplish this, Don worked with Ken Nickel in 1998, (British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture forage seed specialist), and visited all the processors in the region, explaining benefits for growers, processors and the seed industry as a whole. Through the hard work of many, the commission was established in 2004.

During Don's busy farming days, he also found time to venture into other business opportunities, which eventually resulted in Don and Kent becoming involved with "Lakota Herbs". Their successful involvement in this venture has led Don and Kent to subsequently retire from farming in 2005. Both are still involved with the Lakota Herbs business, with only Don's father's original homestead outside of Dawson Creek still in the family.

Don's contributions to the grass and legume seed industry have been well recognized and respected by the grass and legume seed industry in the Peace region, and as a result, he was inducted into the PRFSA wall of honor in 2006 at the 2006 Canadian Grass and Legume Seed Conference. In addition to his dedication to his family and farming operations, Don has held numerous positions on local boards and association.

He was a major contributor to the formation of the former Alfalfa Seed Producers Association, Peace Branch, as well the Peace Region Forage Seed Association. Don held the position of Chairman, among other positions, in both organizations. Don continues to live in Dawson Creek in the summer months with his second wife, Patricia.



Peace Region Alfalfa seed producers meeting, Fairview College, with Don Pedersen sitting on a growers panel (1980's)