

Ken Steinwand Honored by PRFSA

In 1995, the Peace Region Forage Seed Association (PRFSA) was formed. The association brought together the longer histories of several associations in the Peace River region of both Alberta and British Columbia. Growers and local members of the Canadian Seed Trade Association added their years of experience and expertise working for the industry, to the association. However, one key component of the association, the local processors and grass/legume seed companies, came aboard to make the association a complete entity. This association between the growers and processors came about due to the vision, hard work and diligence from Ken Steinwand.



Constructing storage shed at original Peace Valley Seeds plant.

Ken maintained his role as partner and manager throughout this time. The plant acted primarily as an agent for Brett Young Seeds, contracting and buying grass and legume seed from farmers from throughout the Peace. In 2001, the 3 remaining partners (Charlie Andrewchew was bought out in 1976) sold the operation to Brett Young Seeds. Through his position as manager of Peace Valley Seeds, Ken worked with many grass seed growers throughout the Peace, becoming respected as a major player in the development and progress of the grass seed industry in the Peace. While manager of Peace Valley Seeds, Ken would schedule an annual flyover of the Peace River country to survey the number of creeping red fescue acres in the area. This effort would take two or more days, but yield in-valuable data on crop acres and conditions.

In the early 1990's, the work towards forming the Peace Region Forage Seed Association was in place, but still needed the cooperation and acceptance from the local seed processing industry. The "Trade" was originally not in favor of being associated with a grass seed association. However, with Ken at the side of the growers, and backing this formation, all the processors finally agreed to become part of the Association and support the PRFSA's mandate. To accomplish this, Ken met with the various trade companies and their representatives, gathering vital information, and showed how supporting such an organization could benefit the future of grass and legume seed production in the region. One key element allowing for the support of the trade was the knowledge that the PRFSA would not become involved in marketing of seed, but focus more on research and awareness/extension. With Ken's extensive experience, he acted as the first "Seed Trade Representative" on the PRFSA's Board of Directors. Ken held this position for 2 terms, and helped "mother" this organization from infancy to its present status as a viable association, representing all grass and legume seed growers in the region.



In 1968, Ken moved up to the Peace River country to work at the Central Peace Seed Cleaning plant in Rycroft. Following his stint as the manager at this local seed cleaning coop plant, Ken accepted the position of General Manager of the Peace River Seed Coop (1975), and moved across the rail track! He held this position for 3 years. In 1978, Ken became a buyer for Brett Young Seeds, and along with partners Charlie Andrewchew, Peter Dyck (Brett Young Seeds) and Dick Speare (Speare Seeds), formed "Peace Valley Seeds" company in Rycroft. The site of the Peace Valley Seeds Processing plant, just east of Rycroft, was originally a grass seed buying station for Brett Young Seeds. But in 1978, after the partnership was formed, seed processing equipment was installed. The official opening for the plant was on July 1st, 1979, and operated as Peace Valley Seeds for over 20 years.



Pictured here, from L to R: Al Ross (pilot, Spirit River), Ken Steinwand (Peace Valley Seeds), Michel Nas (DLF Netherlands) and Ken Nickel (B.C. Ministry of Agriculture), 1997.

Ken remains in the area, residing in Rycroft with his wife Joyce, and close enough to keep an eye on his family and grand kids! He keeps busy helping out on a local golf course during the summer months, and remains a valuable member of the community. From moving to the Peace Region to work in the local grain and oilseed cleaning plant, Ken witnessed, experienced and was part of the tremendous expansion of the grass and legume seed industry in the region through the 70's and 80's. He used his invaluable knowledge and vision to help form the PRFSA, and was a major driving force in the grass and legume seed industry in the Peace.

Collected by David Wong, Market Specialist, Alberta Agriculture, 2013