

The seeds of success

By Pat Rediger

Emerald Seed Products is aware that the plant their products are derived from may be Greek to potential customers.

The manufacturing company based in Avonlea uses fenugreek grown in Saskatchewan to create a wide range of products. “One of the challenges in growing and developing our market has been that many people haven’t heard of fenugreek,” said Nathan Sudom, CEO of Emerald Seed Products. “When we go to tradeshow and try to talk to people about fenugreek, they often have no idea what it is.”

But the lack of consumer knowledge about fenugreek has not deterred Emerald Seed Products from exploring new markets. Today, the company’s products are exported to the U.S., Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, Israel, Bangladesh, South Korea, France, and the Philippines.

“We’ve had many successes and failures,” Nathan said. “One of the important things is that when we’ve made a mistake, we’ve tried to learn from it and push forward. There has been no charted path to follow. One of the hardest aspects of marketing is trying to sell a new product, especially when you’re a small company and have limited resources.”

Emerald Seed Products was launched in 1994 by Nathan’s father Blaine and his business partner Cal Kelly. Early on, the owners were approached by Al Slinkard, who is considered to be a key builder of Canada’s half-billion-dollar pulse crop industry. Slinkard has advised pulse growers in virtually every municipality in Saskatchewan over the past 28 years while authoring over 300 books, journals and extension publications.

Slinkard, who has developed many lentil and pea varieties, was interested in developing a manufacturing process that would effectively and efficiently extract the fenugreek fibre from the seed for use in the diabetic market.

As Nathan notes, what followed was a major learning process including significant time spent on research and development. During this time, Emerald Seed Products developed a new processing facility from scratch.



Nathan Sudom of Emerald Seed Products Photo by: Calvin Fehr Photography
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Making “a better Saskatchewan”

By Dave Yanko

With household debt at record levels and interest rates rising, there's never been a more important time to support business and personal finance classes for students, says Regina high school business teacher Jordan McFarlen.

“We need to make sure we're infusing these subjects into our curriculum to help make a better Saskatchewan,” says McFarlen, recipient of the 2017 Young Professional of the Year Award from Saskatchewan Young Professionals and Entrepreneurs. “I'd like to encourage people to get active with a high school in their community, either as a guest speaker or to encourage the school to offer business courses.”

McFarlen, 30, is head of the business program at Campbell Collegiate and former president of the Saskatchewan Business Teachers' Association (SBTA)—he's currently a member of SBTA's executive. In partnership with teacher Carissa Holinaty, now teaching business at another Regina high school, McFarlen revitalized and grew Campbell's business program to an average of 500 participating students annually from about 150 eight years ago. He believes a good deal of the program's success lies in the fact that students are able to apply what they learn. “Whether it's filling out an income tax form or learning how to start a company, it's very relevant and very hands-on learning.”

Curricular courses at Campbell include accounting 10, 20 and 30; business and social technology 10, 20 and 30; work exploration 30; and personal finances 30. Campbell's extra-curricular business club is open to all students and features speakers on a range of business and personal finance subjects, and supports charitable causes in the community.

McFarlen says a grounding in business education is useful to all students no matter what career path they choose. During a recent trip to Toronto he had lunch with four alumni of the Campbell program at the University of Toronto. “One of these students was in first year at Rotman School of Management, one was in second year engineering, another was in the second year of architecture and the fourth was in his second year at OCAD University looking at mobile app design,” he says.

“Understanding how business and accounting work will help you no matter what you go into.”

Business program students who pursue a post-secondary education in business, meanwhile, typically are successful because they have knowledge of the subject matter and an understanding of the concepts involved. “An introduction to accounting class at university often serves as a kind of wake-up call where they might lose a few students,” says McFarlen. “If our students know the content up to the first or second midterm, for example, they have a smoother transition.”

Program graduates on a business career path commonly move on to study at Paul J. Hill School of Business at the University of Regina and N. Murray Edwards School of Business at the University of Saskatchewan. However, McFarlen says one of his students was accepted to Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania, considered by many to be the top undergraduate business school in the United States. Others have gone on to study at Richard Ivey School of Business at University of Western Ontario, Smith School of Business at Queen's University and UBC Sauder School of Business in Vancouver.



“Understanding how business and accounting work will help you no matter what you go into.”

through business education



Jordan McFarlen of Campbell Collegiate

Photo by: Hogarth Photography

McFarlen says business leaders in Saskatchewan are taking note of the program and supporting it.

“We’ve been very fortunate that the business community has gotten behind us and given us a lot of support. Leaders like AGT Foods President and CEO Murad Al-Katib—entrepreneur of the year for the entire world—has come in and spoken to our students for the past two years.” Saskatchewan and Regina Chambers of Commerce have been supportive by offering students access to business events where they can learn about issues facing the business community and chat across the table with a CEO or vice-president of a company.

Campbell won business school of the year in Saskatchewan for four of the last six years. The award is based on a competition that each year alternates between Hill School of Business and Edwards School of Business. Teams of six students from participating high schools across the province compete in personal finance and entrepreneurship categories. “They receive a case study or business challenge

where they need to make a decision and present their recommendations to a panel of industry judges that may include university professors, local entrepreneurs and finance professionals,” says McFarlen. However, only 12 to 13 Saskatchewan high schools with the largest business programs compete every year. McFarlen and other business education leaders are working hard to help more high schools offer business programs or expand the offerings of those that provide a limited program. Saskatchewan’s Ministry of Education is studying the subject and he says educators are excited at the prospect of a renewed business curriculum for the province.

McFarlen believes effective high school business programs also must help prepare students for jobs that don’t yet exist by teaching them to think entrepreneurially about their careers. Students must learn to identify needs, wants, problems and opportunities in their organization so they can make sure their job or company doesn’t become obsolete.

“They need to know how to recognize opportunity and seize it.”

O&T Farms “all about proving our value”

By: Virginia Wilkinson



Tim Wiens of O&T Farms

Photo by: Calvin Fehr Photography

From local trucking through large egg production to international feed production, O&T Farms has been a leader in Western Canada's agricultural sector for 50 years.

The company currently provides Omega-3 rich feed components to the world through its patented product and technology.

"It's about keeping your eyes open, having a desire to learn and grow, and an overall willingness to change," said Tim Wiens, President of O&T Farms.

O&T Farms was founded by brothers Ted and Oscar Wiens in the late 1960s initially as a Manitoba trucking company, which transported cream and eggs from Manitoba producers to the Canada Safeway processing plant in Winnipeg. By 1967, recognizing an emerging opportunity, Ted moved to Saskatchewan and established an egg farm that would supply Safeway's Saskatchewan market, while Oscar continued to run their trucking company.

Over time, O&T Farms' egg production grew. By 1974, Oscar and Ted had sold the trucking company, and Oscar had joined Ted in Saskatchewan to concentrate on the growing enterprise.

The company grew to become one of the largest egg producers in Western Canada. By the mid-80s, Ted began to focus on developing international markets. It was as a result of this new international market focus that the company then bought AgDevCo, a provincial Crown Corporation, and began working on agri-value projects overseas.

At the same time, always interested in enhancing the nutritional quality of its hens and eggs, the O&T Farms team began looking at ways to enhance the nutritional quality of the feed provided to their birds. The team began experimenting with the use of nutritional feed supplements such as pulses and flax, monitoring the results on their hens and eggs. Through this process, they were able to refine their product into a highly nutritional feed for their birds. Interested in turning their findings into

a saleable product, the company began looking at how they might market the new feed supplement.

O&T Farms invested heavily in dry extrusion processes, which allowed it to develop high-quality, nutritionally enhanced feed ingredients rich in healthy Omega-3 fatty acids. It also began working with universities on product testing.

It soon became apparent that with its expertise in feed, and its ability to test its products on its own flocks, O&T Farms was well-positioned to serve an emerging market for nutritionally-enhanced livestock feed ingredients, derived from grains and oilseeds.

Burnbrae Farms, the Ontario-based egg producer, became O&T Farms' first important customer. Since that time, sales have grown steadily. Today, O&T Farms produces seven feed product lines, including its flax-based linPRO™, which is sold to the largest egg producers in the US.

"It's about innovation and value added. We're taking farmers' products, adding value and sending them all over the world," said O&T Farms CEO Elan Ange.

In 2014, O&T Farms hired a specialist in animal and poultry science, continuing to partner with universities, undertaking nutritional studies and trials on its products, and focusing on improving the nutritional value of those products.

This recent work has enabled the organization to expand into a new marketing direction, allowing it to serve different sectors of the livestock industry, and offering its customers the ability to develop other Omega-3 enriched egg, meat and dairy products.

Because of the volume of feed shipped, O&T Farms leases its own rail cars. "All of our new markets are being served by rail," says Wiens.

Today, O&T's list of customers includes many international egg producers, including the US

brand leader Eggland's Best. Besides the United States, the company currently exports its Omega-3 enhanced feed products into Korea, China, Thailand, Bangladesh, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates, and holds patents for its products in over 40 countries.

The company continues to focus on innovation and growth. Over the past four years, O&T Farms has moved into the dairy market with its linPRO-R™ product that is currently being tested at two American universities for its nutritional benefits in relation to better health and increased conception rates in dairy cows.

"It's all about proving our value to meet our customers' needs, and we've done that pretty well," said Wiens. He is proud of the company's resilience and is confident that O&T Farms will continue to adapt and lead in the ever-changing international food market well into the future.

Townfolio puts community

By Pat Rediger

Before starting Townfolio, founders Davie Lee and Ryley Iverson discovered that companies looking to realize business opportunities in smaller communities were facing a significant problem: TMI (too much information).

“In many cases, these companies would approach a municipality’s economic developer, who would provide them with a 50-page PDF with all the information they need. They call it a ‘Community Profile,’” Iverson said. “The problem is 50 pages is a lot if you’re looking at 20-30 municipalities.”

Lee experienced this problem personally, as he had previously been working with an Irish government agency that helped companies expand into Canada. Lee’s job was primarily finding information and data on municipalities and he realized it was a difficult and time-consuming process to find substantial information.

After moving from Toronto to Saskatchewan, Lee reconnected with Iverson (the two had known each other through work) and Lee pitched an idea to help fix the problem of inaccessible community profiles. For Iverson, it wasn’t a tough sell. He has a background in the economic development space and also grew up in Saskatchewan, witnessing firsthand how there was a saturation of certain businesses in Regina and Saskatoon while smaller areas struggled to attract business.

In November of 2015, Lee and Iverson launched Saskatoon-based Townfolio, which they market as an online community profile network used by municipalities and businesses to access hard-to-find public data and discover local opportunities across Canada.

“We have millennials urbanizing, baby boomers retiring and some of these small communities are fighting to be noticed. Who’s going to take over these businesses? We’re talking core services,” Iverson said. “We looked at it from a perspective of, ‘How do we put these small communities on the map and help them promote themselves, or let it be known that there are business opportunities in these communities’.”

Instead of browsing through lengthy printout copies of community profiles, Iverson explained that companies can log on to <https://townfolio.co>, which stores numerous community digital profiles. When a municipality decides to utilize Townfolio’s services, Townfolio aggregates their public data from over 30 data sources, visualizes the community’s data into interactive charts and automates the community profile for you.

When someone visits the site, they can search or browse through random communities, narrow it down by communities who currently have business opportunities, and also search for industries that communities want to attract.

For example, if you were to search for Shellbrook, you’d be brought to a digital community profile that shows a picture of Shellbrook and a snapshot of its prominent industries (agriculture, services, construction, manufacturing and tourism). There’s also a short written and video bio posted on the site. On the side navigation pane, there’s contact information for the town’s chief administrative officer and links to important information about the area such as demographics, labour force and taxation. Many of these areas consist of charts and graphs that Townfolio has visualized.

If you’re instead searching based on business opportunities, you would find that Unity is looking for a bowling alley, Weyburn is in need of a grocery store and Langham desires a restaurant. Townfolio is also working on a compare feature that allows users to do a real-time comparison of how multiple locations stack up when it comes to demographics, labour force, quality of life, etc.

Having done a considerable amount of research before launching the product, Townfolio was confident in its features. Prior to the company’s formation, the founders spent six to eight months interviewing municipal governments and economic developers to gather information that would help Townfolio build a software relevant to their needs.

“Customers were saying to us that if we built a solution that required them to enter the data themselves, they would not join. They said they didn’t have the time, budget and technical skills to manage their data, make it visually appealing, and promote the community for investment,” said Iverson.

As with any new business venture, Townfolio has experienced some setbacks. Iverson noted that selling to the government with no track record is extremely difficult, so the vast majority of the company’s sales have been organic. The company frequently attends trade conferences, setting up displays and making presentations.

Another problem involved attracting businesses to small municipalities, even with a more user-friendly software. “We were thinking too small. We were challenged by our clients to think bigger,” Iverson said. “This is not just a Western Canadian or Canadian

profiles on the digital map

product—it's a global platform. The process to attract business doesn't happen overnight. However, some real interest has been shown in investing with numerous clients. One of our biggest accomplishments is that our software is now generating income for our clients. We think there is a real opportunity for Townfolio in developing nations."

Townfolio has received recognition for its work. The Spin Master Innovation fund named the company one of the most innova-

tive start-ups in Canada in late 2016. Three clients using Townfolio's software have received a national marketing award in the last two years from the Economic Developers Association of Canada, including the Saskatoon Regional Economic Development Authority.

Townfolio currently has six employees but is closing a round of financing that will enable it to double its workforce. The company has expanded into the U.S. and is in discussions

with Europe, and will be going to a conference in Africa to present to representatives of a handful of countries.

"We are focusing a lot on outreach to the business community and letting them know about the platform," Iverson said. "We want to connect with small businesses and let them know the opportunities where they can start or expand."



Ryley Iverson and Davie Lee of Townfolio

Photo by: Hogarth Photography

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"A lot of trial and error went into it," Nathan said. "They had to bring in new equipment and there were a lot of theoretical lessons to be learned with the new facility. They approached farmers and other business people they knew to acquire capital to build the facility. They were optimistic—like any farmer has to be. They kept overhead costs low and didn't have any high management fees to pay for."

From the beginning, Emerald Seed Products sought out Saskatchewan farmers to grow the fenugreek. Due to the lack of information out there, Nathan said the company had to educate growers. It publishes growing guidelines that are updated every year.

"We're always learning new things about what our products can do," he said. "I read a lot of research papers. People are surprised by this, but that's where it all starts."

Although Emerald Seed Products was initially started to enter the diabetic market, the company discovered there wasn't much potential for growth. The company received a welcome surprise, however, when they were able to enter the mining industry with their product FenGum®.

The other products the company has developed include Nutrifen® (natural animal feed

additive) and Canafen® (fenugreek food grade gum for use in food and nutraceutical applications).

Nathan said the process of introducing their products internationally has been one based on building relationships.

Thanks to a relationship developed with a distributor in South Korea (Daehan Chemtech), Emerald Seed Products was able to move into that region. The company attended a trade show in South Korea and formed a research and development partnership with Dankook University. A year later, the company went back to South Korea to tour farms and talk to farmers.

"My dad said this was our turning point for us and it brought about a lot of growth," Nathan said. "It was our foot in the market and it showed everybody that we're moving our product into a very reputable market."

This year, Emerald Seed Products has been recognized for its success: Nathan won the 2017 Saskatchewan Young Professional and Entrepreneur (SYPE) Silver Spade award for Young Entrepreneur of the Year, while the company received the 2017 Family Enterprise Exchange (FEX) Regina Family Enterprise of the Year Award.

Prior to joining the company, Nathan was a senior accountant at Virtus Group LLP. He joined his father's company as marketing manager in March 2013, became the chief operating officer in January 2014 and CEO in July 2016.

"In the beginning, my dad posed this as an opportunity to me and I said I might as well try to take it. I felt I'd be kicking myself in the end if I didn't try to do it," Nathan said. "My experience has provided me with a lot of value."

Moving forward, Nathan is confident that Emerald Seed Products can take their products derived from a little-known plant and build on their global network.

"The company is growing, although with potash prices being down, it's definitely having an impact on us," he said. "We have six people working for the company including myself. It's a fairly efficient operation and we want to keep it that way to remain competitive. We're confident in our research that we're doing and confident that our product can add value to these companies. We are planning to push more into the mining industry and grow our presence there. We also really want to push harder in Asian animal feed."

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