

## THE ONTARIO AGROLOGIST

A conversation with Jaye Atkins, P.Ag., Chief Executive Officer, Agricultural Credit Corporation (ACC) based in Guelph. ACC is the second largest administrator of the Advance Payment Program in Canada serving growers and producers.

### **Why are your programs, such as the Advance Payment Program, important in meeting the needs of today's growers and producers?**

The Program allows the borrowing of up to \$400,000 with the first \$100,000 interest free and the remainder of the loan at prime. It is federally-funded and in operation for 20 years. It is the federal government that pays the interest on the \$100,000. Our challenge is getting knowledge of the Program out there so producers can benefit. So we are very active speaking to commodity associations and agricultural groups across Canada to make their members aware of the Program.

### **How has the ACC positioned itself to meet producer needs in a growing competitive agri-finance sector?**

ACC is a not-for-profit organization. We provide the channel for access to interest free and low interest funds. We also recognize the challenges on the business side of operations so have taken steps to reduce the traditional loan application paperwork. Coming in November, we are releasing the ability to do on line applications. We can assure producers that we have a knowledgeable complement of staff on hand to help producers complete their applications over the phone and answer any questions.

Today, ACC administers loans on over 5,000 different agricultural products across Canada. So if you grow it or raise it in Canada we can administer the Program on it. In particular, ACC is helping Canadian producers in niche, and

emerging new agricultural markets. As an example, we fund biomass products, forage, sod, Christmas trees, goat, mink, miscanthus and all the traditional production. We are still doing a lot of grains but markets outside of traditionally supply managed commodities represent a growth area today. Producers in these new areas have difficulty accessing funds so the Program fills a financing need where, historically, producers have difficulty getting financing.

We pride ourselves on being knowledgeable in agriculture. So if a grower wants to talk about cranberries in Nova Scotia or chrysanthemums in BC we have the people. To be knowledgeable in 5,000 different products while knowing the marketplace and commodity trends, it's the education, training and experience we get as Professional Agrologists that allows us access to the resources of a network of licensed and accredited Professional and Technical practitioners to fill information gaps.

### **You have indicated the value of qualified and knowledgeable staff linked to professional designation. Does professional licensure enhance the credibility of ACC staff?**

When we are talking with organizations and producer groups we promote the fact we are Professional Agrologists. We can demonstrate that we understand the grower and producer perspective and that we understand on-farm operations. The designation is what gives us credibility with producers. That level of comfort is important today. There are too many in finance and



lending that claim to be ag experts but lack the designation that proves competency. We tell producers that a P.Ag or T.Ag is not just handed out or is a piece of paper you got attending a 2 day course. I believe respect and credibility is in short supply today, but not within ACC. Being designated professionals helps us be better finance people. Having the P.Ag. is good for our business, good for our customers and is a good business practice.

### **For growers and producers how can they get more information on your programs or contact ACC?**

We provide financing in all areas from planting, through harvesting, storage and right until the product goes to market. Contact any of us including me and we would be happy to explain the Program and work with any grower or producer on an application. Getting low and no interest funds out there to those that need it is what we strive to do every day. Agriculture is our only business and helping producers is our number one objective.



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