

## A Message From the Director

Welcome to Spring 2026!

As I write this, we are hopeful that we are experiencing the last winter snowstorm of the season. With shovel in hand, it's hard to believe that spring planting is just around the corner. Still, despite the lingering snow, the added moisture is welcome as we look ahead to a productive growing season. With the field season fast approaching, there is no shortage of activity at the CDC. I'd like to take a moment to share what's ahead this summer, along with a few noteworthy announcements. This past winter, our leadership team hit the road to engage with many producer commissions and our industry partners to gain input on our next Five-year Strategic plan. These conversations have been invaluable as we work to define our priorities and strengthen our partnerships going forward. Construction of the Harrington Plant Growth Facility remains on track for completion later this summer. We look forward to beginning our work in the facility this fall and will be hosting a grand opening event to recognize the many partners whose financial support made this project possible.



We are also pleased to highlight recent ADF funding announcements supporting several CDC-led research projects. Seven CDC researchers received funding across 13 projects, totaling more than \$2.17 million in ADF support. These projects are matched by Crop Commissions/ Producer organizations and span a wide range of crops and research areas, including wheat breeding, chickpea expansion, lentil and forage development, saskatoon berry production, and disease resistance. We sincerely thank the Ministry of Agriculture, along with the Crop Commissions and Producer organizations, for their support of these important projects.

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We have a busy summer of field tours planned, including three conferences highlighting advances in breeding, innovative technologies, and the scientific expertise behind modern crop variety development. Participants will visit the CDC's main research hub at the Kernen Crop Research Farm—home to more than 80,000 research plots each year—and experience first-hand the scale, innovation, and infrastructure required to move improved crop varieties from research to farmers' fields. We are also excited to once again partner with our commercialization partners and Crop Commissions to showcase our latest seed varieties at the Ag in Motion show in July.

CDC faculty continue to be recognized as leaders in their fields. Dr. Valentyna Klymiuk received an early career excellence award from Genome Prairie award, Dr. Bunyamin Tar'an was recognized with a prestigious teaching award from the University of Saskatchewan, and Dr. Tom Warkentin and Dr. Randy Kutcher were named distinguished agrologists by the Saskatchewan Institute of Agrologists. I was also humbled to receive the Bertebos Prize from the Swedish Royal Academy of Agriculture and Forestry this January — an honor I share with my entire team.

I would also like to acknowledge several important transitions. Dr. Pierre Hucl will retire at the end of June after more than 35 years of remarkable contributions to the CDC. His legacy is immeasurable, and we wish him all the best. Dr. Tom Warkentin and Dr. Randy Kutcher have also announced their plans to retire and will transition to 50% appointments on July 1. We are actively recruiting their replacements and hope to complete the hiring process this summer. Finally, our Breeder Seed Manager, Dave Benallack, retired on April 30 after 39 years with the Department of Plant Sciences and the CDC. The breeder seed for the vast majority of CDC varieties currently grown in western Canada was developed under Dave's watchful eye. He has left a lasting legacy, and we wish him all the best as he transitions into retirement. We are pleased to announce that Jaret Horner has assumed the role of Breeder Seed Manager, bringing more than 25 years of experience working within the CDC's pulse breeding programs. I wish all of you a wonderful spring and productive summer! Thank you for your continued support, and I hope you enjoy this edition of the CDC Insider.

Warm regards,

Dr. Curtis Pozniak Director, Crop Development Centre

## Awards

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Dr. Curtis Pozniak (PhD) was awarded the very prestigious Bertebos Prize from the Swedish Royal Academy of Agriculture and Forestry. This award is a biennial international award that recognizes outstanding research and development in food, agriculture, ecology, and animal health, focusing on innovation for sustainability. This achievement will mark only the second time in history that a Canadian has won the Bertebos Prize. Dr. Pozniak received the award at a special ceremony in Stockholm, Sweden by the Swedish Royal Academy of Agriculture and Forestry at its annual commemorative meeting on Jan. 28, 2026. The prize was awarded by His Majesty King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden.



Dr. Valentyna Klymiuk was awarded the Emerging Genomics Researcher award from the leadership and administration of Genome Canada for her contributions to genomics research and to advancing research in the Province of Saskatchewan. The award is presented to an emerging academic or research leader whose achievements in genomics or genomics-related research in Saskatchewan point to a promising career in the field.



Dr. Randy Kutcher was awarded a Distinguished Agrologist Award from the Saskatchewan Institute of Agrologists (SIA) on March 11, 2026. The SIA's Distinguished Agrologist Award is presented to a Saskatchewan agrologist for professional distinction associated with outstanding service and worthy contributions to agriculture, bioresources, food or the environment.



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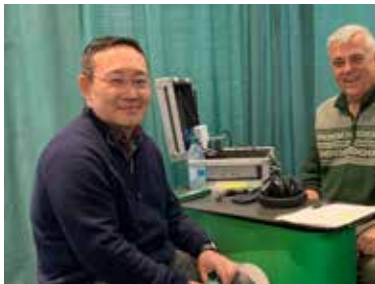
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Dr. Bunyamin Tar'an was awarded a University of Saskatchewan Students Union (USSU) Teaching Excellence Award, the highest honour the USSU bestows on instructors, and is a highly coveted award. The USSU Teaching Excellence Award recognizes professors and Teaching Assistants who demonstrate teaching excellence at the University of Saskatchewan.



## In the Community and Beyond

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Our faculty and staff participated in the 2026 Crop Production show, January 13 - 15 in Saskatoon. They engaged with producers and industry, spending the time answering questions and sharing insights into their ongoing research and fostering meaningful conversations throughout the event.



Post Doctoral Fellow Ana Laura Achilli along with Dr. Curtis Pozniak and Dr. Valentyna Klymiuk attended the 33rd annual International Plant & Animal Genome Conference (PAG), January 9-14, 2026 in San Diego, CA.



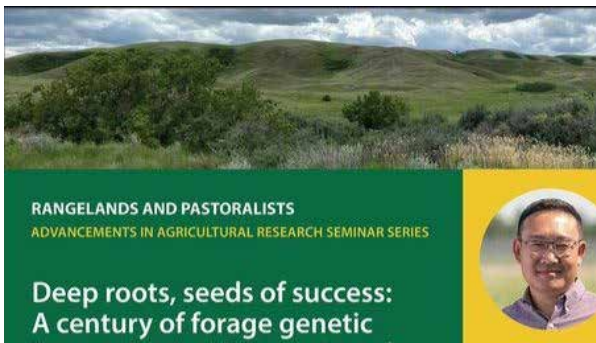
Dr. Randy Kutcher and Research Assistant Valentina Anastasini were presenters at the 2026 Top Crop Summit, February 26, 2026 in Saskatoon SK.



Several faculty and staff members attended the annual PGDC meetings held March 2-5, 2026, in the Kinnear Centre at the Banff Centre in Banff, AB where 15 new crop varieties were supported for registration.



Dr. Bunyamin Tar'an was an invited expert at the SaskWheat and SaskOilseeds joint coffee talk session held January 22, 2026 in Yorkton SK.



Dr. Bill Biligetu presented a seminar in the Advancements in Agriculture Research series in conjunction with the United Nations International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists on March 18 2026.



Dr's Aaron Beattie, Chris Willenborg, Bunyamin Tar'an and Bill Biligetu, along with graduate students Makenna Mitchell and Marika van den Berg attended the Accelerated Crop Breeding for Climate Resilience in Rice workshop in Bogor City, West Java, Indonesia, April 13-17, 2026.

## In the Media

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Dr. Tom Warkentin was featured in Top Crop Manager magazine for his work in developing new and improved pea and soybean varieties.



Dr. Bill Biligetu was featured in the Swift Current Online Ag news website for his work on improving forage varieties.



Dr. Aaron Beattie was featured in the Alberta Seed Guide in an article that discusses his work on improving barley and oat varieties.



Dr. Ana Vargas was featured in the College of Agriculture and Bioresources annual Ag-Knowledge update magazine for her work on improving lentil and faba bean varieties.



Recent PhD graduate student Dr Fan Yang was featured by the College of Agriculture and Bioresources for her PhD research of covered smut disease affecting barley,



Dr. Valentyna Klymiuk was featured in the Globe and Mail for her work to improve wheat varieties by bringing in diversity from wild relatives.

## Recent Graduate Students Defences

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Ana Pontes de Azevedo successfully defended the MSc thesis entitled “Exploring the diversity, taxonomy, and host range of the *Fusarium solani* species complex- Wednesday, January 28, 2026.



Mason Plews successfully defended the MSc thesis entitled “Sod-seeding legumes into existing grass stands to improve forage production, soil organic carbon and nutrient cycling” on Monday, February 9, 2026.



Kun Lou successfully defended the MSc thesis entitled “Race characterization and lineage of the *Puccinia striiformis* f. sp. *tritici* population in western infecting pulse crops in Canada” Canada from 2017-2022” on Friday, March 13, 2026.

## Graduate Student Spotlight

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Daniela Moraes is an MSc student studying under the supervision of Dr. Adam Carter. Her research focuses on investigating the influence of the black glume trait on accelerating the dry down process in bread wheat, with the goal of reducing reliance on artificial grain drying. Daniela recently attended the Soils and Crops Conference in Saskatoon, SK, where she was awarded second place for her poster presentation.

