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Transport solution could take years

BY SCOTT LARSON, THE STARPHOENIX MARCH 27, 2014

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The backlog of Saskatchewan's record 96-million tonne harvest waiting to be transported could be a headache for years to come, says a UofS agriculture professor.

"If we get another big crop it will get even worse," said Richard Gray, who helped organize the Grain Handling and Transportation Summit 2014.

The summit brought together stakeholders and experts to share information about the current state of grain movements and to discuss solutions.

Gray said the current rail transportation problems could cost farmers up to \$4 billion this year alone.

There are no short-term solutions to clear the 20 million to 22 million tonne backlog, he said.

Instead there needs to be more capacity throughout the transportation system - from more rail capacity to port capacity.

"If we (just) solve rail (issues), West Coast terminal capacity becomes the bottleneck," Gray said.

The most grain West Coast terminals have moved in a year is around 22 million tonnes and Gray said that should be closer to 40 million tonnes.

Exporting through West Coast terminals is the most cost efficient and it's also destined for where demand is growing - Asia.

"In the long run Asia is where the market is," Gray said.

Even with the federal government announcement requiring railways to move an additional 1,000 rail cars per week beyond the rail shipping plan, it will take approximately 60 weeks to make up the current handling backlog.

And there is a likelihood of more transportation competition from other commodities like potash, oil and container traffic.

"We could be several years before it gets better," Gray said.

The summit was hosted by the Department of Bioresource Policy, Business and Economics and supported by the College of Agriculture and Bioresources at the University of Saskatchewan.

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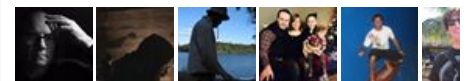
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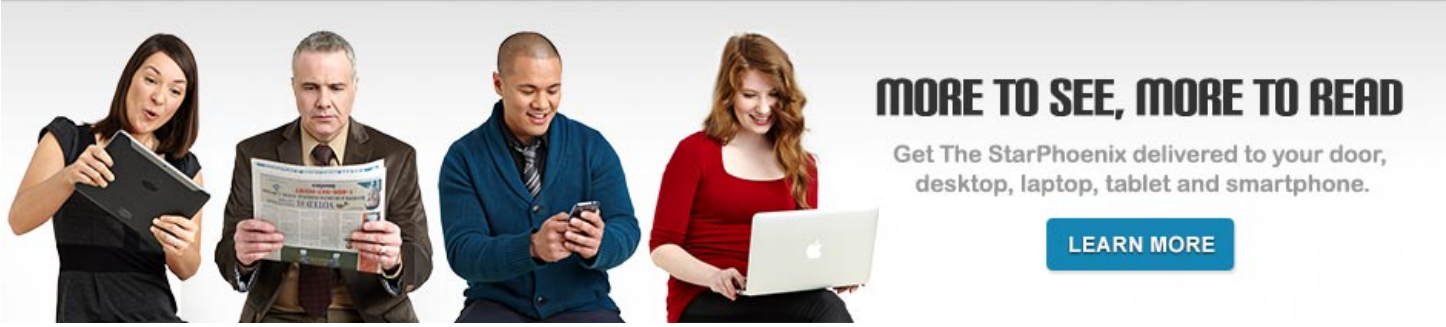
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