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Saskatchewan wheat pool: A profile of one Canadian grain cooperative

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The key to security for farmers is a mechanism that provides them with a greater control over their own destiny." E.K. Turner, President of Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, thus sums up why he thinks his cooperative has grown to become a major force in Canadian agriculture.

How does a cooperative achieve such a position of significance? How does it arrive at more than \$1.2 billion in annual product sales, nearly \$500 million in gross assets, and a staff of 4,000 employees? The story of Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, Canada's largest agricultural cooperative, offers a prime example.

As one of its nation's major businesses, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool provides service to about 70,000 farmer-owners annually and is actively engaged on behalf of members in promotion and the development of agricultural policy. Speaking out on the needs of agriculture has been its prominent activity since its formation in 1924.

Indeed, the lack of proper agricultural policies was what led to the creation of the organization. It was formed, along with the Alberta and Manitoba pools, in response to frustrations with the grain handling and marketing systems of the day. The pools provided members with orderly marketing and a measure of stability in the marketplace. Today their main role, in addition to offering services members want, is to convince government and other decision centers of the need to assist the successful functioning of the industry.

Commercially, the pool's growth has been spectacular, with grain handlings of 155 million bushels in the 1950's, doubling to 300 million in the 1970's. Livestock handlings tripled over that period. The value of assets in the 1950's was \$105 million. That grew in the 1970's to about \$500 mil-

SASKATCHEWAN WHEAT POOL

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by IAN BUCKLE/Director
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Saskatchewan Wheat Pool

lion, more than a fourfold increase. And net earnings, which averaged \$5 million in the 1950's, were \$23 million in the 1970's, or almost five times as large. (A record \$54 million was recorded in 1979-1980.)

Saskatchewan Pool is the number one grain handler in Canada, with about 1,100 elevators in Saskatchewan and with terminal elevators at Vancouver and Thunder Bay. Through elevators and service centers, its farm service division sells fertilizer, chemicals, seed, livestock supplies, twine, steel bins, and light equipment.

Saskatchewan Pool's livestock division traditionally handles about half the cattle and calves marketed in Saskatchewan, in addition to a quarter of the hogs and 40 percent of the sheep and lambs.

Working with other cooperatives, the pool has extended producer control into food processing, manufacturing, and distribution through CSP Foods Ltd.; into international grain marketing through XCAN Grain Ltd.; and into fertilizer manufacturing through Western Co-operative Fertilizers Ltd. (which owns a phosphate rock supply in Conda, Idaho).

Though its commercial operations are significant, the pool's "agricultural policy" role is of equal importance. Using a province-wide system of elected representation, the organization's farmer-owners advance ideas and identify concerns and needs. The pool's board of directors, made up of farmer-businessmen, translates ideas into programs. Delegates in each district elect one of their number as director. The 16-man board makes the company's farm policy and commercial operation decisions at week-long meetings each month.

Indeed, Saskatchewan Pool feels it has recorded measurable achievements as a common voice for members. "There is a continuing need for farmer involvement in policy development and promotion," says I.O. Wright, corporate secretary. "Such activity is as necessary as member ownership and control of elevators and other facilities and services."

Chief executive officer Ira K. Mumford is confident about the future, "because pool members will continue to elect delegates and directors who see the broad picture and can relate their own farm business growth to the pool's decision-making process." 