



"No-fly" zone is just a myth, says farmer Marc Grenier

## Windmills didn't ground spray plane

BY ALLAN DAWSON  
Co-operator staff

NEAR ST. LEON

Marc Grenier couldn't be more pleased.

There's a canary-yellow spray plane skimming gracefully across his winter wheat, laying down a fine mist of Tilt fungicide in its wake. And it's not just because the application is timely on a field too wet for Grenier's ground sprayer.

"This blows the theory that you can't apply spray with airplanes around wind turbines," he said with a broad smile.

That's the story some opponents to wind farms have told people in the area, he said. Matt Bestland, past president of the Manitoba Aerial Applicators Association, has said the association has declared wind farms a "no-fly" zone.

"Our insurance provider has told us exactly this, that they have great concerns for the ability for aerial applicators to work in and amongst these wind farms and there would be an insurance issue," said Bestland, who operates Best-Land Agro Inc. at Brunkild, in an interview earlier this year.

But James Penner, owner of Gretna-area applicator J & J Air, which sprayed Grenier's field, said his insurance company allows him to spray around windmills so long as the pilot believes it's safe.

"We really don't have a problem with the blades or the mill itself," Penner said later in a telephone interview. "It's so high. It would be different if there were cables coming off."

"I don't think we've had one where we have a 'no-go' situation, but we spray when it's nice. If it's exceptionally hot, we park. We don't push it."

Hot air has less lift. That means a half-mile turn under normal flying conditions might take three-quarters of a mile.

Transport Canada says aerial applicators can spray around windmills if the pilot believes it is safe to do so. A pilot who has an accident involving a windmill could be found guilty of breaking Transport Canada's safety regulations — but the same



**SKILLED PILOT:** J & J Air of Gretna applied fungicide to a field of winter wheat that was too wet for ground spraying June 13 amongst the windmills of St. Leon.

applies to accidents involving hydro lines, hydro towers or any other obstruction.

J & J Air sprayed almost three-quarters of a section June 13 for Grenier, who farms with his brother Allen. There are four windmills on that section, stretching 80 metres high (262 feet), with blades that reach 40 metres higher. There are 10 other windmills within a mile.

**"We really don't have a problem with the blades or the mill itself."**

— JAMES PENNER, J & J AIR

J & J Air has been flying among St. Leon's windmills going on three years, Penner said. The 63 towers are tall, but the bottom of the blades are still 40 metres (131 feet) off the ground. Spray planes fly 10 to 20 feet above the ground.

Flying amongst windmills adds to the risk, but it can be done, and Penner said he assigns his most experienced pilots to the task. What concerns him more, he said, are the "met" (meteorological) towers put up to measure wind patterns. Most are grey and blend in with the sky.

"They are such a hazard and they put them up willy-nilly and they aren't marked on our maps," said Penner, adding that they should be prominently marked.

Penner, whose company works for Pembina Co-op in the St. Leon area, has high praise both for co-op employees and Algonquin Power Systems Inc., the firm that owns and operates the St. Leon wind project.

The wind farm operators, he said, "are exceptional. They will turn (the turbines) off, they will turn them, they'll do what we want and they don't question it."

Jim Duff, who manages the St. Leon project, said it wouldn't make any business sense not to accommodate farmers. "We're here for at least 25 years," he said. "This is a partnership.

Without the landowners there's no wind farm."

Shutting down four windmills for a few hours on a calm day — the only type of day when spraying can take place — costs Algonquin almost nothing, he said, because during calm days the windmills are not producing electricity.

Algonquin can help farmers plan their spraying, Duff said, since the company pays for wind forecasts that look ahead a week so it can inform Manitoba Hydro about how much power it will be able to supply the public utility. That in turn helps Hydro plan its power exports. The wind forecasts are very accurate three to four days into the future, he said.

Grenier said he's impressed with the co-operation between Algonquin and J & J Air.

"We have a number of windmills on the land we farm," he said. "We've never had an issue we couldn't resolve. For example, we had discussions on where they would put roads (to the windmills). They are very easy to work with and very approachable."

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### Brazil curbs soy rust spread

RIO DE JANEIRO/ REUTERS

Brazil is again set to ban planting of winter soybeans in three centre-west states from June 15 for three months to prevent the spread of Asian soy rust disease, private analysts Celeres said in a weekly report.

Farmers who ignore the winter planting ban may have their crops destroyed or be fined.

Despite last year's winter planting ban, the disease, which thrives in warm and wet conditions, resulted in the loss of 2.67 million tonnes of soybeans this year, similar to losses in the previous harvest.

Farmers spent \$2.2 billion, mostly on fungicides but experts said that sprays were often used at the wrong time.

Despite the production loss, this year's crop is officially estimated at a record 58 million tonnes.

### Syngenta aggressive on vegetable seeds

TOULOUSE, FRANCE/ REUTERS

Swiss agrochemicals company Syngenta is aiming to overtake Monsanto in the global vegetable seeds market, the head of the business unit told Reuters.

Andre Goig, Syngenta's global head of vegetables, said the unit had regularly outpaced average market growth over the past 10 years and was closing in on market leadership.

"The vision we state very clearly, is to be the undisputed or recognized leader in the vegetable industry," Goig said in an interview at a Syngenta research centre in Toulouse.

Syngenta's vegetable seeds business had sales of \$420 million last year, accounting for about 5.2 per cent of its total revenues. Monsanto's vegetable and fruit seeds business had sales of about \$570 million last year.

### Russia lowers production forecast

MOSCOW/REUTERS

Russian Agriculture Minister Alexei Gordeyev has cut his forecast for 2007 grain output to 76 million tonnes, the lower end of a previous forecast of 76 million to 79 million tonnes, Russian news agencies reported June 13.

"Taking into account weather factors, it is expected that the grain harvest is going to be 76 million tonnes, (2.6 million) less than last year," Interfax quoted Gordeyev as telling President Vladimir Putin.

Gordeyev said drought in many important grain-growing regions in the central and southern parts of the country may cause losses of between 20 per cent and 50 per cent, Itar-Tass and RIA-Novosti reported.

Gordeyev said that, if domestic grain prices rose too high, the government was prepared to sell to the market around 1.5 million tonnes of grain it had bought at intervention tenders in previous years, Itar-Tass added.

## Southern Manitoba has North America's best wind

BY ALLAN DAWSON  
Co-operator staff

NEAR ST. LEON

Jim Duff says the winds in south-central Manitoba are blowing as much as expected, which is good news for the St. Leon wind project he manages.

"We have the best wind in North America, excluding offshore," Duff said in an interview.

That bodes well for future wind projects in the area.

It takes a minimum wind speed of four metres per second (14 km/h) to generate electricity with a wind turbine. St. Leon has "good wind" because it's relatively constant throughout the year, although it does vary with the season. There is less steady wind in the summer months, but it's made up during the fall and winter.

When the St. Leon wind project was first discussed five

years ago there were skeptics — not just those who doubted the \$200 million project would ever get off the ground, but also doubts about promised employment. There was talk of building an office and maintenance building and creating eight to 10 full-time staff.

That building is up and occupied and it houses 14 employees, most of whom maintain the windmills, Duff said.

Each needs maintenance

twice a year, including an oil change and lubrication. It takes a day and a half to service one wind generator and there are 63.

Meantime, the St. Leon community uses the windmills as a tourist attraction. It already had an interpretive centre based on the large population of salamanders often found in the area and has added the wind farm to the mix.

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