

## Tour Held at Hemp Research Plots

*By Audrey Kotak*

The new Plains Industrial Hemp Processing Plant just west of Gilbert Plains was the site of a field day/tour on August 18th. Approximately 80 people came out for a barbeque lunch and a tour of the Parkland Crop Diversification Foundation's hemp plots.

Hemp specialist Keith Watson from Manitoba Agriculture, Food & Rural Initiatives (MARFI) emceed the event which began with comments from guests in attendance.

Manitoba Minister of Agriculture, Food & Rural Initiatives Stan Struthers spoke briefly, noting the unique level of expertise and dedication of local farmers as well as the involvement of all levels of governments and plant owner Robert Jin in getting the plant to it's current advancement. He mentioned the importance of hemp as part of crop diversification.

MP Robert Sopuck echoed his agreement and added how important such projects are to the growth and development of rural communities.

Tom Green, Director of Operations with Manitoba Harvest, a hemp seed crushing facility in Winnipeg said that his company wants to support the hemp industry as a whole including both fibre and seed uses. He talked about the progress the company has made in the development of the grain part of the hemp industry over the past 10 years. He mentioned a number of products that are now making their way into mainstream markets.

Keith Watson explained the progress of the plant including the three main buildings. One shed will house incoming raw material and another will hold finished product. The processing will take place in the large middle building.

Engineers from China must come to install the processing equipment to ensure that warranties are valid. At the moment, Immigration Canada has not yet approved visas for their visit. It is still hoped that things will be ready to start processing before the end of the year. At full production, it is expected that 30 - 35 people will be employed at the facility.

It is estimated that the plant would require approximately 5000 acres of hemp to supply the raw material at full production. Keith noted that many farmers have bales from previous years that may be of use as they do not deteriorate as quickly as many other crops do.

Jeff Kostiuk from Parkland Crop Diversification introduced the various varieties in their research plots.

Keith spoke about each plot which will be evaluated for grain and fibre. He described the value of the nutrients in the seed and explained the different types of plants. The plots were designed to test for results from various seed treatments, seeding depth, seeding rate and other factors affecting hemp production. He noted that the seeding was late this year because of spring conditions and this has resulted in shorter than normal plants.

A small portion of the plot was cut and visitors were invited to take a plant apart to see long fibre and the hurd. He noted that long stocks with smaller circumference are best for use in the processing plant.

Shawn McKay from Composites Innovation Centre talked about their current projects. Among others, they are working on using hemp in vehicle parts similar to fibreglass parts. A number of products currently being produced around the world were also on display.

Keith outlined the prices Mr. Jin will be offering for the various qualities of material ranging from \$50.00 to \$150 per tonne. He may be purchasing some this fall. Mr. Jin was in attendance to answer questions from individuals.

Demonstrations also included swathing the hemp and cutting with a mower.

The afternoon was sponsored by Parkland Crop Diversification Foundation in partnership with Parkland Industrial Hemp Growers, Parkland Agricultural Resource Co-op and Plains Industrial Hemp Processing.