

Hardy, resilient, pragmatic

Why Prairie Clean Energy is proud to call Saskatchewan home

By Mark Cooper, CEO, Prairie Clean Energy

Nearly 29 years ago, in October 1995, I moved to Saskatchewan. I came here with my parents and my brother from Toronto. Although I'm sure I could have pointed out Saskatchewan on the map, and I knew that Roy Romanow was the Premier, there was practically nothing else I knew about this province.

I remember, vividly, our first night in Regina. We were staying at the old Travelodge on South Albert Street prior to taking possession of our home. That night we drove out onto the open prairie. It was so expansive, so awe-inspiring, and quite frankly so intimidating. Then, as if in a movie, we started seeing fires pop up across the horizon. I know now that these were fires set by farmers to burn their waste straw – probably flax straw. 29 years ago, though, I wondered just what I'd stumbled into by moving to Saskatchewan.

25 years later, I became CEO of a company that I had started earlier with some friends called Prairie Clean Energy (PCE). PCE collects that flax straw, preventing it from getting

burned, processes it into energy-dense pellets, and sells those pellets around the world. In so doing, we turn waste into energy, reduce the unproductive release of all that carbon and produce new revenue streams for Saskatchewan farmers.

That journey, from awed kid to an even more awed CEO, was possible because of the things that make Saskatchewan so unique.

Our province has a geography larger than the country of France with a population that is about half the size of Paris. We are a gigantic mass of land and a tiny number of people. Most income earners in Saskatchewan earn that income either directly or indirectly from the land and resources. Even those who don't, say in the service or government sectors, mostly exist to support those who do. We are, primarily, a resource-based economy.

It's why we hear so much about Saskatchewan having the food, the fuel, and the fertilizer that the world needs. Because we do.



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The nature of such an economy is that it tends to build hardy, resilient, and pragmatic people. A geography as vast and as sparsely populated as ours also tends to support innovation. When there literally isn't anyone else around to help you solve a problem, you figure out how to do it yourself.

Somehow amid an economy and geography that lend themselves to rugged individualism, we here in Saskatchewan have found community and belonging. I'm quite sure that everyone in Saskatchewan is no more than four degrees of separation from each other, and possibly three degrees from Derek Lothian. Historically, we've been good at looking out for one another and extending support and kindness to each other. It's possible that some of the toxicity and divisiveness of modern-day politics and social media is starting to decay some of that connectedness that has defined Saskatchewan but it's still stronger here than in most places I know.

So, when I reflect on how we've managed to grow Prairie Clean Energy, I can't help but fixate on the fact that what has happened here literally could not have been possible in any other place on Earth. That's not just hyperbole:

- First, we grow more flax here than anywhere in the world, so this is where the flax straw that fuels PCE comes from;

- Next, we were able to build relationships with farmers across the province because of the tight communities and connections that existed, and we were able to turn those relationships into mutually profitable partnerships because we trust each other and both parties honour their word;
- When we needed help from governments, we could meet face-to-face with decision-makers, and have them come out and see our work in action. Where else can that happen? Not in Toronto, I'll tell you that; and
- Because we're doing something no one has ever done before, we rely on the ingenuity and stick-to-it-iveness that Saskatchewan builds into us and all of our team.

As PCE grows into the multi-national large-scale company that we can become, we will always remain headquartered here in Saskatchewan. That's not a product of chance but of choice. We will stay here, because we were built on the values of Saskatchewan, and they are ingrained in our identity as a company. After all, you can take the kid out of Saskatchewan, but you can't take the Saskatchewan out of the kid. While I wasn't born here, this is my home, and I couldn't be prouder to have some small part to play in helping to leave it better than I found it. #

