

Saskatchewan Through the Eighties

Fifty years ago the province was Canada's poorest, dependent on one-crop agriculture, its farmers broke and resentful. Today Saskatchewan produces sixty per cent of Canada's wheat, a third of its oats and barley and almost a third of its oil seeds. It has vast mineral resources and great plans. It intends to increase grain exports by fifty per cent by 1985, double its rate of uranium

production and expand the potash output substantially.

The extraordinary change reflects more than good fortune (although good fortune has not been lacking). The CCF/NDP governments have invested billions of dollars in flexible public businesses called crown corporations. Through these the citizens own many of the mining and refining facilities of the province and produce much of their own power.

Agriculture

Saskatchewan's annual gross farm income is over \$3 billion.

The province has more than half of Canada's prime farmland, divided among 70,000 big farms (averaging 950 acres). Most Saskatchewan towns are farm towns.

More than half the farmers (53.1 per cent) raise wheat. This year production is expected to be over twenty per cent higher than last. The Canadian Wheat Board buys and markets the pooled wheat at home and abroad.

A half dozen federal and provincial marketing and insurance programs protect the farmers from the cyclical disasters that once haunted them. This spring, for example, the federal government paid \$43,000,000 to 150,000 western farmers as compensation for losses suffered during the embargo of grain shipments to the USSR last year.

When Saskatchewan was losing population and there was a general concern that family farmers would be replaced by national or multinational agribusiness operations, the province began buying farms from farmers who wished to retire (today a farm may be sold for \$250,000 or more) and leasing them to young farmers with an option to buy. The land bank has worked well and the family farm is surviving. Non-residents of Saskatchewan may not buy more than ten acres of farmland.



Soil, topography and climate favoured the development of a wheat-based economy in Saskatchewan.



An oil rig on a Saskatchewan farm, a common sight in Canada's second oil producing province.