

With the vast majority of the prairie population now residing in southern urban centres, the original economic mainstay of the region, the rural farm, has undergone major changes in recent years. The increased mechanization of farming has made the old quarter-section farm unprofitable. The average prairie farm now comprises some 230 ha, as agribusiness corporations buy up and consolidate individual holdings.

New technology-intensive industries, forestry, fishing, manufacturing and tourism have all contributed to the prairies' economic diversification and well-being. However, mining, petroleum and natural gas extraction, and related petrochemical industries have done the most to alter the economic complexion of the prairies.

The prairie provinces now account for almost 98 per cent of the oil produced in Canada. Alberta, the national leader, accounts for nearly 85 per cent of this total. Both Calgary and Edmonton have profited as centres of the industry, with the infusion of large amounts of investment capital and the establishment of large oil refineries.

