

# PRIDE SEEDS

*Seed conglomerate ranks as world's fourth-largest producer yet keeps small-business feel*

BY ALYSIA SHIVERS

"AGRICULTURE TODAY IS JUST A GREAT INDUSTRY to work in," says Stephen Denys, vice president of sales and marketing for Pride Seeds of Canada. A decade ago, this was not the case as younger generations didn't see value in continuing the family farm. Now with an aging workforce and a shortage of incoming talent, agriculture is bursting with opportunity.

Looking ahead, this fairly recession-proof industry is facing the challenge of feeding a few billion more mouths by 2050, which is why Pride Seeds, producer and seller of hybrid corn-and-soybean seed, is in a race to increase its productivity so that its farmer customers can increase their yields and their bottom lines. "We've increased our business by 30 percent in three years," Denys says of the fourth-largest seed-corn company in Canada—with its eye on soon becoming number three. To accomplish this, the 60-year-old company strives to grow its reputation as

## AT A GLANCE

**LOCATION:**  
PAIN COURT, ON

**EMPLOYEES:**  
44 (CANADA)

**AREA OF SPECIALTY:**  
HYBRID CORN-AND-SOYBEAN SEED



*Vice president of sales and marketing Stephen Denys (center) with Pride's Québec regional managers at a large farm show in Ste-Liboire, Québec, celebrating its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary.*

a market innovator by quickly introducing new genetics together with biotechnology traits accessed from key technology partners, and by servicing its customers with a fully trained and very knowledgeable sales force.

Pride Seeds, started by the King family in the 1930s, remained a family business until 1988 when various pieces of the company were sold off as part of a family succession plan. The seed portion of the business was purchased by Sanofi in Paris and six years later was sold to Limagrain, the largest French seed company in the world. Today Pride Seeds, a brand officially introduced to Canada in 1950, is owned and operated by AgReliant Genetics, one of the largest corn-breeding and -testing programs in the world that focuses on growing the Pride Seeds brand in Canada. And despite several changes in ownership, Pride Seeds remains successful and continues to thrive.

"The company has always done a good job of retaining its core staff," Denys says. "There's a strong culture of teamwork and collaboration. That's at the heart of the business." At its Canadian operations, Denys and his two management partners—vice president of finance and administration Kelly Atkinson and vice president of production Grant Craven—lead a staff of 44 whose average tenure is approximately 19 years. As Denys points out, many stay with the company for the long haul primarily because it is a great place to work. "We have a large-company ownership but a small-company feel where employees have input on direction and results," he adds. This also behooves Pride Seeds externally as biotech companies find it to be a good, reliable partner and farmers feel that they have a local connection to a global corporation.

Pride Seeds' focus on genetics differentiates it from the competition and positions it as the seed producer and distributor of choice in its customers' minds. It has superior-performing products, and its outstanding field team brings a lot of credibility. To achieve the most benefit from its two biggest strengths, Pride Seeds has set specific goals for the coming year. Denys says that the goals are to increase its own sales by 25 percent and to grow an average of 20 percent on each of its customers' farms.

Corn was the mainstay of the business and remains so to this day, but soybeans, which were introduced in the '60s and '70s to most Canadian production areas, have also taken off in Canada due to the development of varieties that can withstand the climate in shorter-season production areas. "We adapt to the latest technology advances as we go," Denys says. "It's not a sexy industry, but it is an exciting industry to be in and will be into the future. After all, there is one given—we all need to eat at least three times per day." **CEQ**