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Going solo

Province gives \$9 million boost to farm insurance

by PETER MITHAM

ABBOTSFORD – The province has stepped in to backstop farmers facing hard times thanks to a growing number of weather-related and market challenges.

During comments at the BC Agriculture Council's annual gala in Abbotsford on January 29, BC agriculture minister Lana Popham announced changes to the province's AgriStability program that she said would make \$9 million available to producers.

"We will eliminate the reference margin limits, and we are going to increase the compensation rate from 70%

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Perfect sleeper

Tony Neels of Mountain Shadow Acres in Rosedale hopes using chopped straw instead of sawdust will improve the health and comfort of his dairy herd. Neels made the switch while renovating his barn for robotic milking. Mountain Shadow Acres was one of six farms on the annual BC Dairy Expo Farm Tour, January 29. David Schmidt's story is on page 25. MYRNA STARK LEADER PHOTO

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Province pares ag budget

by PETER MITHAM

VICTORIA – Two years of funding increases for the province's agriculture ministry came to an end with the February 18 provincial budget.

BC finance minister Carole James tabled the budget with a speech that touted the government's pledge to create opportunities for businesses to succeed, calling out Vancouver crop protection company Semios and plans for food hubs among successes in the

province's agriculture sector.

But the budget itself cuts nearly \$3 million in funding for the BC Ministry of Agriculture's operating budget, with the biggest hit being taken by the agriculture science and policy budget, which will fall by \$2.3 million. The budget for the ministry's executive and support services is also set to lose \$72,000.

Offsetting the losses are increasing: \$70,000 for the Agricultural Land Commission and \$16,000 for the BC Farm Industry Review Board.

The net result is a budget of \$95.4 million, down from \$98.2 million in the current fiscal year. The budget for the coming year remains above the \$93.1 million allocated in 2018.

BC agriculture minister Lana Popham has long relished having the biggest budget of any agriculture minister in the province's history, funding that allowed her to undertake initiatives such as relaunching Buy BC as well as encouraging

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