

## Chapter 9 Agriculture—Mitigating Pests in Crops and Pastures

### 1.0 MAIN POINTS

Saskatchewan accounts for 43% of Canada’s total field crop acreage.<sup>1</sup> Crops and pastures are at risk of damage from regulated pests, which are either an animal, insect, or disease that the Ministry of Agriculture declares a pest. The Ministry is responsible for mitigating the impact of these regulated pests on crops and pastures.

By December 2025, the Ministry implemented two recommendations we first made in 2020 about its processes to mitigate the impact of regulated pests, and we deemed the third remaining recommendation no longer relevant.

Effective August 2024, the Richardson’s ground squirrel (gopher) and grasshoppers are no longer regulated pests, so we deemed our recommendation related to determining gopher populations no longer relevant.<sup>2</sup>

In 2025, the Ministry prepared guidance for producers on detecting, reporting, and developing response plans for late blight, bacterial ring rot, and Norway or brown rats. The Ministry posted this guidance publicly on its website in January 2026.

Effectively mitigating regulated pests help to reduce the adverse impact these pests cause to Saskatchewan’s crops and pastures (e.g., reduced crop yields, poor quality pastures).

### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

#### 2.1 Background

The Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for protecting plant health and managing agricultural pests by declaring regulated pests as well as supporting municipalities and producers to prevent the spread of harmful pests under *The Plant Health Act*.<sup>3</sup> The Act allows for the Minister, through regulation, to declare any animal, insect, or disease deemed as likely to be destructive or dangerous to any crop, grain, livestock, or other property to be a pest.<sup>4</sup>

At December 2025, the Minister of Agriculture declared the following regulated pests: bacterial ring rot, brown or Norway rat, feral pigs, late blight, and potato wart.<sup>5,6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/96-325-x/2021001/article/00008-eng.htm](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/96-325-x/2021001/article/00008-eng.htm) (24 March 2026).

<sup>2</sup> There are many species of gophers. Richardson’s ground squirrel is one species and are commonly referred to as gophers.

<sup>3</sup> Prior to August 2024, the Ministry of Agriculture’s responsibility to regulate pests was set out in *The Pest Control Act*.

<sup>4</sup> *The Plant Health Act*, s. 3.

<sup>5</sup> *The Plant Health Regulations*, Appendix, Part 1.

<sup>6</sup> Bacterial ring rot is a very infectious bacterial disease, which includes symptoms such as wilted stems, leaf rolling, and early plant death. Late blight is a fungus that infects and destroys the leaves, stems, fruits, and tubers of plants.



Effective August 2024, the Act:

- Allows the Minister to declare a pest emergency if prompt action is deemed necessary to control or prevent the spread of a pest. If necessary, the Minister can prohibit the removal of crop from an area, prohibit the use or order the destruction of any crop that may contribute to the spread of any pest, order the destruction of any pest, or order any other measures to control a pest.<sup>7</sup>
- Gives municipalities the authority to control regulated pests. A municipality may appoint a pest control officer to enforce the Act and related regulations within the municipality. Pest control officers investigate and take measures they consider necessary to control pests.<sup>8</sup>
- Makes producers or landowners responsible for controlling identified regulated pests. Every owner and occupant of land shall take measures to control, destroy, and prevent the spread of a pest, or destroy any crop on any land or other premises owned or occupied by that person that may contribute to the spread of any pest.<sup>9</sup>

The Ministry makes its Crops and Irrigation Branch primarily responsible for coordinating Ministry pest management programs. The Branch has approximately 12 staff with a direct role in pest surveillance, extension, or diagnostics. In 2025–26, the Ministry budgeted approximately \$1.5 million for pest management.

## 2.2 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

This chapter describes our second follow-up audit of the Ministry's actions on the recommendations we made in 2020.

We concluded, for the 12-month period ended July 31, 2020, the Ministry of Agriculture had effective processes to mitigate the impact of regulated pests in crops and pastures in Saskatchewan except for the areas in our five recommendations.<sup>10</sup> By 2023, the Ministry implemented two recommendations.<sup>11</sup>

To conduct this audit engagement, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate the Ministry's progress toward meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. Ministry management agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

To carry out our follow-up audit, we interviewed Ministry staff to discuss key actions management had taken since our first follow-up audit in 2023 to implement the remaining recommendations. We also assessed its guidance documents for pest management.

<sup>7</sup> *The Plant Health Act*, ss. 3 and 8.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, ss. 14 and 20.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, ss. 5(a)(b).

<sup>10</sup> *2020 Report – Volume 2, Chapter 19*, pp. 109–127.

<sup>11</sup> *2023 Report – Volume 2, Chapter 17*, pp. 159–165.

## 3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out each recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at December 31, 2025, and the Ministry of Agriculture's actions up to that date.

### 3.1 Guidance Provided to Producers

***We recommended the Ministry of Agriculture proactively provide producers with written guidance about detecting and reporting the presence of late blight and bacterial ring rot.*** (2020 Report – Volume 2, p. 121, Recommendation 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement February 8, 2021)

**Status**—Implemented

***We recommended the Ministry of Agriculture, working with its key stakeholders, provide producers with written guidance on developing response plans for grasshoppers, late blight, bacterial ring rot and brown or Norway rat.*** (2020 Report – Volume 2, p. 123, Recommendation 4; Public Accounts Committee agreement February 8, 2021)

**Status**—Implemented

The Ministry of Agriculture provides producers guidance for detecting, reporting, and developing response plans for late blight, bacterial ring rot, and brown or Norway rat. The Ministry no longer considers grasshoppers a regulated pest under *The Plant Health Act*.

The Ministry created guidance documents for producers to understand late blight, bacterial ring rot, and brown or Norway rats and made the information available on its website in January 2026. We found the Ministry developed its guidance based on good practice information from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency as well as from other provinces (e.g., British Columbia, Alberta). For example, the guidance for late blight and bacterial ring rot included details such as:

- Symptoms, with photos of diseased plants and produce
- Disease spread (e.g., use of infected seed)
- Best practices for prevention and management (e.g., clean and disinfect all equipment, use certified disease-free seed potatoes)
- Surveillance and testing (e.g., soil sampling and tuber inspection)
- Reporting and notification requirements (e.g., producers with suspected or confirmed disease detection must notify the municipal pest control officer or the Ministry as soon as possible)<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *The Plant Health Act*, section 5, requires landowners and occupants to notify the Ministry of Agriculture or the municipal pest control officer in which the land is located within five business days after the detection of any regulated pest.



We found the Ministry's information for late blight, bacterial ring rot, and brown or Norway rat also provided guidance on developing response plans for these pests outlining key steps required to rapidly respond to a pest outbreak. For example, the guidance requires a municipal pest control officer to investigate after a report of a suspected or confirmed pest occurs. If confirmed, the municipal control officer may issue directives for remediation to the owner or occupant of the land. We suggest the Ministry could further improve its guidance by including timeframes (e.g., time to complete investigations) to provide consistent expectations for municipal pest control officers.

Having published guidance for detecting, reporting, and preparing response plans for late blight, bacterial ring rot, and brown or Norway rat allows for early pest detection and response planning for any outbreak. It also helps producers minimize the risk of crop losses or pasture damage from pest infestations.

## 3.2 Richardson's Ground Squirrel No Longer a Regulated Pest

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***We recommended the Ministry of Agriculture revisit how it will conduct surveillance to determine populations of Richardson's ground squirrel.***

(2020 Report – Volume 2, p. 120, Recommendation 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement February 8, 2021)

**Status**—Recommendation No Longer Relevant

The Ministry of Agriculture no longer considers the Richardson's ground squirrel (gopher) a regulated pest.

Effective August 30, 2024, under *The Plant Health Act*, the Ministry determined the Richardson's ground squirrel to be a nuisance pest, not a regulated pest; therefore, we deemed our recommendation related to determining gopher populations no longer relevant.<sup>13</sup>

The Ministry's goal is to help eradicate regulated pests. However, the Richardson's ground squirrel is a species native to Saskatchewan, which limits the ability to eradicate this nuisance pest. The Ministry indicated it will continue providing support to producers in reducing Richardson's ground squirrel populations.

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<sup>13</sup> The Minister of Agriculture declares regulated pests (e.g., bacterial ring rot). Nuisance pests are any insect, animal, or disease determined to be a nuisance by the Director designated responsible for administering *The Plant Health Act* by the Minister. The 2025 nuisance pest list is available at [pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/148868/2025-Nuisance-List.pdf](https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/148868/2025-Nuisance-List.pdf) (30 March 2026).