

# VOIP access brings seminars to West

■ Farmers with dial-up web connections are able to sign up for web seminars.

By Tom Button  
Freelance writer

RIDGETOWN, Ont. — Randy Hammel, a grain producer who lives near Medicine Hat, Alta., recently sat in on a web seminar to hear farm business guru David Kohl of Virginia Tech college.

He did it without leaving the farm.

And, he didn't have to upgrade his internet connection from dial-up to high speed.

As many farmers across the West struggle with lack of high-speed availability, a federally funded program has pioneered a way to condense these so-called webinars so it can deliver farm business seminars across dial-up web links.

The result is that 1,200 farmers and farm advisers across the country have signed up for the free web seminars this winter, up from 200 last year when high-speed connections were needed. That's more than twice as many as organizers predicted. More than a third of those who signed up are from the West.

"This is my first experience with webinars," said Hammel, who wanted the seminars to give him practical access to conference type information.

"I'm on dial-up and it was very simple to sign on and participate."

Grant Pederson, a farmer and farm consultant near Outlook, Sask., also signed on.

Unlike Hammel, Pederson has high-speed access, so he participated in the web seminars last year.

"It connects me with the outside world," Pederson said. "I'm constantly recommending webinars to other producers and referring to information that I heard at one."

The dial-up innovation comes from the Canadian Farm Business Management Council based in Ottawa. According to executive director Wendell

Joyce, the council, funded by the federal agriculture department, had tried unsuccessfully in the past to cross the dial-up bridge that separates most farmers from much new web technology.

Last year they tried a system in which growers received images over their computers while listening to a speech over their telephones, knowing that it wouldn't work for many because they conduct their voice and internet connections over a single line.

The webinar technology was designed by Ottawa-based Galbraith Communications using voice over internet protocols, or VOIP, which are the basis of new internet telephone services.

When farmers sign on, the screen is

essentially split into two windows. On the left, they see the speaker via live video and on the right they see the progression of the speaker's slides, just as they would if they attended the presentation in person.

According to designer Cory Galbraith, farmers with high-speed connections can watch both screens. Farmers with dial-up turn off the video, and instead of the talking-head image, they see a still photograph of the speaker. Dial-up subscribers can still view all of the slides and hear the full voice presentation.

Farmers on dial-up can also join the question and answer sessions that cap off the hour-long sessions by typing in questions or comments for the speaker to address.

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Galbraith said the dial-up system will work in most rural regions. It requires a minimum speed of 20 kilobytes per second.

In most Windows systems, farmers can check their dial-up speed by right clicking on the connection icon in their lower task bar or by calling up their main connection window.

The series of 16 farm business webinars ends Feb. 27 with a presentation by Michigan State university agricultural economist Ed Mahoney, who has specialized in farm diversification through direct marketing.

However, earlier webinars are available by clicking the archives tab at the [www.farmcentre.com](http://www.farmcentre.com) website.

Kay Grulich, the farm business council's program manager, said as more farmers sign on, the technology will likely expand to carry more types of information.

That's just what Pederson wants to hear.

"There is a tremendous role for webinar technology to bring me information that I may not get otherwise."



## Potash Corp.'s fourth-quarter profit rises

TORONTO (Reuters) — Potash Corp. of Saskatchewan Inc., the world's top fertilizer producer by market value, has reported a healthy fourth-quarter profit, helped by record potash shipments and higher prices.

The company earned \$117.1 million, or \$1.09 per share, up from \$100.1 million, or 88 cents per share, for the same time a year earlier.

Potash Corp. said record fourth-quarter potash shipments to offshore customers and higher prices for all three nutrients pushed its earnings higher during the period.

The company said the favourable conditions should continue in 2006, prompting it to boost its outlook for both the quarter and the year. It sees full year earnings between \$5.25 and \$6.25 per share and first-quarter earnings in the range of \$1 and \$1.25 a share.

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