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IT'S TWO CAREERS

Husband and wife Sonia and Gordon Decker strengthen their farm partnership ▶ 12

Cleaning up 'sweat equity'

Yesterday's standard turns explosive ▶ 40

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It's two careers

For Sonia and Gordon Decker, the goal is for each to have a rewarding, satisfying on-farm career... which turns out to be good for the farm too.

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They run a farm. Does that mean they can develop their own subdivision too? Albert Boonstra and Sean Braun are confident the answer is yes.

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This divisive practice is only getting more explosive on more farms. "If you don't get paid in money," one farm adviser is telling young clients, "you didn't get paid at all."

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Farming is evolving faster than any of us realize, with farmers solidly in charge. To see how, just read the stories in this issue and apply their messages to an entire industry.

A few weeks ago, our broader *Country Guide* team hired a bus and invited the agency people who make the ads, write the releases and develop the marketing communication strategies for Canada's ag input industries to join us for a day of touring actual farms, all more or less within sight of their offices in the Toronto and Golden Horseshoe area.

It's our second year for these tours, and before I say anything else, I want to commend the farmers who agreed to open up their farms to our group, despite the busyness of the season. As always, the best thing about agriculture is the people in it.

Long after our tour members forget exactly how much a bag of seed costs, or why our clay soils need to be managed so carefully, they'll remember that our farmers are clear-thinking, intelligent professionals, and exactly the sort of people they'd want to grow their food and manage our country's farmland for the future.

Not everybody needs it, but the farm organizations that provide training and assistance to enhance the public speaking skills and the confidence of farmers are doing an incredible job. We can't recognize their work loudly or often enough. Nor can we say often enough that groups such as Farm & Food Care Canada have excellent "ambassador" resources on their websites that are well worth taking a look at. To rephrase what I said at the beginning of this paragraph: not everybody needs it, but everyone can benefit from it.

I also wanted to say at the start that the old truth is still the main truth.

Communication isn't a one-way street. Now should we be shocked if it turns out that someone doesn't know something that we know they don't know, like whether grafting a tree onto a rootstock makes all our apples GMO.

After all, farming is also getting more and more sectoral all the time. The kids who grow up on grain farms around me rarely set foot in swine or chicken barns, or know about beef genetics or fruit harvest quality.

When friends ask me why I'm still writing about agriculture when there's such a big world out there, I tell them there's nowhere else I'd rather be. "Farming," I tell them, "is all about smart people making smart decisions."

I'm not always a bandwagon kind of guy, ready to echo the latest buzzlines from the trendiest ag groups. But "smart people making smart decisions" is a line I'll defend anywhere, any time, seven days a week.

I hope you'll keep that in mind as you make your way through this issue of *Country Guide*, where we bring you smart thinking from a lot of smart people on topics ranging from new ways to structure a farm for long-term profitability and satisfaction to Gerald Pilger's sobering questions about whether we're losing our international competitiveness.

Read Marie Smith's report too — titled "It's two careers." I hope it will lead to many smart conversations on many smart farms.

Are we getting it right? As always, don't hesitate to let me know. I'm at tom.button@fbcpublishing.com.

CountryGuide

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Go to the Research & Resources page at www.ontariosoilcrop.org

The challenge of organizational renewal

By Lilian Schaer

Attracting new members is a challenge many agricultural organizations are faced with. And when they do join, how can they be engaged, encouraged to keep coming back, and perhaps even consider taking on a leadership role?

The Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA) has made the topic of organizational renewal a priority. A Conversation Café at the 2016 annual general meeting encouraged members to share why they joined the organization and what made them stay involved.

Learning and networking

Education opportunities and networking/socializing topped the list, but common themes like more effective communications, attracting new members of all ages, and the need for more people to become active volunteers were also expressed.

Membership and activity levels vary across OSCIA's county and district organizations. The Northumberland Soil and Crop Improvement Association, for example, has an active membership and 30 per cent of its directors, including the entire executive, are under age 35.

A facilitated discussion between the group and OSCIA representatives indicated that engagement to satisfy the social, educational and entertainment needs of young farmers and communication were key areas of focus. Many younger members were initially introduced to

the organization by a family member, resulting in second and third generation directors.

Family connection

Eastern Ontario cash cropper and beef producer Warren Schneckenburger has been immersed in soil and crop activities his whole life and is a third generation president of the Dundas County chapter. He became active on the local board after graduating from university in 2008, and has just wrapped up his first year as provincial director for Eastern Valley.

"We are very fortunate that we have a very active group: we have eight or nine major events during the year and that's a draw that attracted me," he says. "Being introduced by my parents was a start, but it was mostly the education that drew me there, and the opportunities to learn and network."

Dundas' larger membership makes it easier for the association to spread the task of organizing events across different committees. Schneckenburger realizes that's not an option for smaller groups but he subscribes to the "if you build it, they will come" philosophy, suggesting that even smaller events like barbecues and twilight meetings can get people engaged and meet their needs for education and social connection.

A voice in the North

Samantha Hawkins, who farms with her husband in the small northwestern Ontario community of Eagle River between Vermilion Bay and Dryden, has been a member and director of the Kenora

District Soil and Crop Improvement Association for two years now.

She attended her first meeting as part of work she was doing with a local online food co-op, but stayed as she discovered the association was a great source of knowledge and contacts.

"I quickly realized that this was where the key players in local agriculture were and if I had any hopes of doing anything productive with my new farm, then this was the place to be, with the people who would know about working the land in this area," she explains. "I enjoy going to monthly meetings as it's a great place to ask questions, and I love the voice the organization gives us in the North."

Building engagement

A few key conclusions arose from the AGM's Conversation Café:

- Involving younger members by giving them responsibility in the organization and encouraging them to take on leadership roles can help take the pressure off long-time volunteers.
- Integrating new communications channels like social media and text messaging can be more convenient for younger members, but email and even printed newsletters still play a role.
- The organization won't sustain itself – as a truly grassroots organization, every member can make a difference.

More information on the OSCIA's renewal activities can be found at www.ontariosoilcrop.org.



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A new Tier 3

MTZ Equipment adds the aggressively priced, high-horsepower Kirovets tractors to its lineup

BY SCOTT GARVEY / CG MACHINERY EDITOR

Any farmer who's ever worn a hat with a machinery-brand logo on it has likely heard of Belarus tractors, although that doesn't mean all those farmers ever believed that Belarus really measured up to the top-selling North American-built machines, whether in green, red, blue or yellow.

That's fair enough, because right from their introduction to Canada in the early 1970s, Belarus never intended its tractors to be everything that the more familiar brands were striving for.

Instead, the brand's promoters fervently believed the economy-priced tractors built in a factory in Minsk, Belarus, were more than equal in one very important way: they delivered no-frills, brute horsepower on a shoestring budget.

I can remember talking to one Saskatchewan farmer many years ago who had an entire fleet of Belarus machines. He claimed the low purchase and repair cost of his machines helped keep him in business during the lean '80s when low farm gate commodity prices were punishing the industry.

The original Canadian Belarus distributor ceased operations a decade or so ago, and so, for all intents and purposes, the brand went away. In 2015, however, it officially came back, this time with a new distributor and a new brand name, MTZ.

Because of potential legal issues surrounding the Belarus brand name in Canada, the new company simply chose to import models wearing the factory's alternate nameplate.

"It's the same manufacturer, for sure," explained Arie Prilik, vice-president of sales and marketing for MTZ Equipment, the brand's new North American distributor during our interview at the time. "They were sold in Canada under the Belarus brand name and the factory itself is Minsk Tractor Works (which is where the MTZ acronym comes from). It's kind of like Chevy, Pontiac and Oldsmobile. The factory was always using two brand names."

MTZ Equipment has actually been operating in Canada since 2009, but Prilik said the company was busy during that time obtaining emissions certification for the tractors' engines and setting up a dealer and parts distribution network.

Once again, price is what the company sees as a major draw for attracting farmers to the brand. But in today's market there's one extra new and compelling advantage marketers are pushing: there are no sophisticated engine emissions systems to contend with.

"The biggest claim to fame for our tractors is we're still allowed to bring Tier 3 engines, which are much simpler than the more complicated Tier 4s," Prilik said. "Environment Canada is running a program called Transition, which allows us to bring in Tier 3s until 2018. It's based on a U.S. program. It allows for a limited exemption. We just have the right timing, I guess. The majors ran their exemptions within the first year of the program, because of the volumes they make."

Aside from the absence of emissions systems, marketers also emphasize the overall simplicity of the tractors' designs. But don't confuse simple with outdated, said Prilik. The lower-horsepower four-cylinder tractors in the line do get only basic synchronized transmissions. However, larger, six-cylinder models are also available with either a power shift or CVT option. And most tractors offer some standard features like a built-in hydraulic joystick control, radial tires and a quick-change PTO shaft, which can be unavailable or extra-cost options in the "economy" models with other brands.

Initially, the brand launched a range of 84- to 212-horsepower models. But in that first interview, Prilik said there were firm plans to add more tractors to the line. He explained that in the future MTZ Equipment even planned to break into the high-horsepower, articulated tractor market by adding models built at the Kirovets factory in St. Petersburg, Russia.

It seems the future has now arrived for MTZ. The brand has just added the 428-horsepower K744

The 428 horsepower Kirovets K744 joined the MTZ tractor line in Canada in June. Base price for this tractor is just US\$198,000.



A K744 was on display at Agritechnica in Germany last November. The relatively spartan cab interior includes HVAC, radio and tinted glass.



Kirovets model to its line, with the first examples newly arrived in Canada in June.

"At only US\$198,000, MSRP (base price), this affordable, powerful tractor allows farmers to reduce significantly their input cost and keep more money in their pockets," the company declared in a May press release. "Loaded with most popular options (duals, PTO, in-cab hitch control) the tractor is priced at US\$227,730, saving US\$130,000 to US\$200,000 compared to similarly equipped major competitors."

Taking advantage of that legal emissions rules exemption, the K744 arrives with a Tier 3 OM460LA turbocharged Mercedes Benz diesel under the hood, so it won't require DEF or a particulate exhaust filter.

Behind the K744's German engine is a 16F/8R partial power shift allowing on-the-go gear changes within each of four forward ranges and two reverse. The tractor rides on a suspended front axle and has a respectable 300 l/min. hydraulic flow rating.

It also comes equipped with a category III and IV three-point rear hitch, which has a lift capacity of 9,000 kilograms. "Self-locking" differentials help improve traction.

MTZ Equipment is also looking to increase its network of dealers across the U.S. and Canada. For more information, check out mtzequipment.com. **CG**

The front axle is mounted on a standard leaf spring suspension.

A category III/IV three-point hitch has a lift capacity of 9,000 kilograms.

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THE BUSINESS OF BEING YOUNG

BY ANGELA LOVELL

Ryan Boyd believes regenerative agriculture is the right strategy to get him off the expansion treadmill



About 10 years ago, Ryan Boyd came to his father Jim with some new ideas, and Jim knew it was time to listen. Ryan talked about a new strategy, adopting regenerative and sustainable approaches in order to enhance their productivity.

“Dad was more than willing to try something else,” Ryan says. “He’d always believed the best way to improve the business was by acquiring more acres, spreading out the overheads, and just working harder. But now he was beginning to get burned out.”

As he says this, Ryan pauses for a moment, then continues, “He was ready for some new energy and some new ideas. I’ve been extremely fortunate. Both my parents have been supportive, and open to change and trying new things.”

Ryan, wife Sarah, and two-year-old daughter Piper are the third and fourth generation on SG & R Farms Inc. just north of Brandon near Forrest, Man., with around 2,000 acres of annual crops and 1,400 acres of perennial pasture where they calve 300 cows.

Since that conversation with his father, Ryan’s focus has been to better integrate the cattle and annual crops into a single intensively managed system. Here’s how it’s turning out.

FINDING THE LOW RISK OPTION

With a BSc. in agriculture from the University of Manitoba to fall back on, Ryan had come back to the farm in 2006 to put into practice some of the innovative theories he’d learned at school about cropping and extended grazing systems.

PHOTOGRAPHY: SANDY BLACK

"It was an economic incentive to start with because, when I came back, it was your typical farm that had a reasonable amount of assets but wasn't generating that much cash flow," Ryan says. "I didn't want to continue to expand acres, because that requires more machinery and creates a cycle that feeds on itself. I was a beginning farmer with no equity and the first year wasn't very prosperous, so that really shaped my views on how much risk I wanted to take. The cattle seemed a low-risk option. We could increase our productivity by leveraging our management with the cattle and the grazing side of things."

Ryan spent a lot of time attending Grazing Club meetings and field tours, and got some invaluable advice from other holistic managers and intensive grazing gurus such as Gabe Brown in North Dakota and Neil Dennis from Wawota, Sask.

"I started thinking about the soil health side of things because we needed to build organic matter and increase water infiltration on our farm, but I started to see how the soil biology plays a critical part in all that too," says Ryan.

The mentoring he got from people like Dennis, a recognized pioneer in planned grazing and using high stock density to regenerate land, was invaluable, adds Ryan.

"I spent a couple of days with Neil Dennis when we just were setting things up and trying to figure out how to design our paddocks and the grazing system. That had a huge impact on what we do. I took the Holistic Management and Ranching for Profit courses as well in 2006, and that opened my eyes up in a big way to the economic benefits of making everything work together."

Ryan began by moving calving to June and establishing a simple rotational grazing system, moving the cows every two weeks through three or four paddocks.

In 2006, Ryan also under-seeded about 1,000 acres of grain crops to forages for grazing the following summer. He began to use a combination of the annual forages and perennial pastures for intensive grazing, using higher stock densities, and grazing for shorter periods, then moving the cattle daily to allow long periods of rest and regrowth.

Recently he has extended grazing into fall and winter by grazing corn, and he has integrated a 15-species, annual polycrop to provide green feed and extended grazing. The cumulative impact of these systems has improved soil quality, increased productivity on the same acres, and led to better cattle health.

LEARNING THE ROPES EARLY

The Boyds were preparing for transition long before Ryan came back to the farm. He rented his first 50 acres from his grandfather when he was 16. "As a kid I was already making decisions on buying crop inputs and selling the grain," he says. "Then I bought land from Dad when

I was 18, so that started a more formal transition plan. It was a joint effort to start, and as time went on I have gradually taken on more responsibility until now I make most of the decisions day to day."

They are still working on how to finalize

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

EXPO-CHAMPS

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A healthy balance of cattle and crops isn't just better for the balance sheet, say father Jim and Ryan Boyd, it's better for the soil too, which will pay long-term dividends.



the transition and make the necessary corporate transfers, but parents Jim and Joanne finally get some extended vacation time during the winter months, while Ryan continues to tweak a system he believes will ensure the continued viability of the farm.

"I have a fresh set of eyes and maybe more of a vested interest in the sustainability of the farm at the beginning of my career than somebody who's at the end would have," says Ryan.

"We wouldn't be doing what we're doing if I didn't think it was making my farm more sustainable," Ryan says. "I don't need to hit home runs; I'd rather hit base hits every year than hit it out of the park this year and then go the other way just as far in the hole the next year.

"We have definitely taken the sharp edges off the weather extremes by doing what we're doing, and by being a mixed farm. We have the scale now where we have enough cows to offset the grain side, whereas we didn't used to as far as revenue

When I came back, it was your typical farm that had a reasonable amount of assets but wasn't generating that much cash flow," says Ryan. "I didn't want to continue to expand acres... a cycle that feeds on itself."

streams go. The diversity in enterprises has made us much more resilient to the market."

Down the road, the Boyds intend to continue to improve productivity and increase profit margins, but Ryan says he's not hitching his wagon to increasing acres. "I thought land was overpriced 10 years ago, so I figured we needed to come up with some sort of system that didn't rely on more acres every year," he says. "If farmland becomes available close to home, I'm going to be taking a look at it because we do rent land that's not close to home, but we have lots of opportunity to make a

good living on the acres we already have just by continuing to improve our management."

But there are other reasons why the Boyds chose the farming life that have nothing to do with dollars and cents, and why Ryan doesn't see the point in getting too competitive over land.

"A big reason that we are farming is community, and I don't want to base my success on taking over the neighbours' land," he says. "I would be much happier if every neighbour's kid was farming, because then I would have more farming neighbours and friends going forward." **CG**



Innovation and the Aha! Moment

by Mel Luymes,
IFAO Director, Farm & Food Care Environmental Coordinator

We know that agriculture is always changing, but what does it mean to be *innovative*? I think innovation starts with an '*aha!*' moment. I would argue that it starts with a shift in perception.

A farmer friend and I had been butting heads for years as I bugged him to try cover crops and reduce his tillage. He thought it was an unnecessary expense and risk when his current system was working just fine.

This spring, we ripped around the neighbourhood for what I called an 'erosion tour.' The rills and gullies were pretty bad in certain fields and I could see he was getting angry. His system wasn't working 'just fine.' He said it was my fault and I'll never forget his reply when I asked why:

"Because five years ago I wouldn't have even seen this."

Bingo. And to clarify, this is not to say the soil erosion didn't exist five years ago, it is just that he wasn't paying attention to it.

I like to think that farmers are professional problem solvers. But how can we find solutions if we can't even see the problem?

Seeing soil problems requires more than perusing a printout of a recent soil nutrient test. It means getting out in the field with a shovel and taking a long hard look at what is going on beneath our feet: looking for compaction and structural issues, but also looking for earthworms and other biology.

Soil is alive and soil conservation depends on building levels of microbes and fungi that make water and nutrients available to plants and also increase the organic matter and aggregate stability of the soil. We can do this by mimicking natural soil ecosystems:

1. minimizing soil disturbance and keeping it covered
2. growing a diversity of crops, including cover crops and
3. including livestock and manure in the system.

In some cases, this means a 180 degree shift in our understanding of agriculture: doing away with plowing and summer-fallowing, putting fences back to graze cattle again, planting 'weeds' and letting them overwinter. This isn't crazy; I call it creative problem solving.

Another friend of mine had his '*aha!*' moment quite a few years back. He had been intensively growing and rotating a variety of crops for forages and thought he must be working the land too hard, so he took some soil tests to see what damage he had done. But he had done the opposite; in keeping the field green and growing, he had dramatically improved the soil organic matter. He saw that keeping a field bare doesn't *rest* the soil, it *destroys* it.

With all of its challenges, we farm in an exciting time because technology is catching up and allowing us to farm in this flow of nature. It's not the technology that is limiting us, it's our concepts.

A lot of times I hear farmers say *I tried no-till but there was too much cornstalk residue and it just can't work in my area*. And while I can't disagree with these experiences, this doesn't mean that no-till won't work, this only indicates that there is not yet enough biology in the ground to turn that residue into soil.

And there is no overnight fix to that problem. There is no paint-by-number solution because farming is an art. The solutions will take time, determination and, of course, innovation.

Want to see for yourself?

IFAO is planning a bus trip to visit a few of Ontario's innovative farmers in early September 2016.

Go to www.ifao.com for details and to register.







IT'S TWO CAREERS

For Gordon and Sonia Decker, the key to success is to make their roles on the farm into rich, rewarding careers

BY MARIE SMITH

Farming demands great decision making. Solid takes on agronomy, machinery, commodity markets and finance are just the price of admission these days. To thrive, farmers must deploy all that knowledge both for long-term goal-setting and also to make countless moment-by-moment decisions in the field and in the office, often under enormous pressure.

They must also make those decisions in a new kind of agriculture. Although today's farms are still family farms, the typical farm management team today can include not only a husband and wife but also parents, siblings, grandchildren and, increasingly, aunts, uncles and cousins as well.

To function as a high-performance team, all these family members somehow need complementary skills.

But how do you get there?

It turns out that the secret on many farms is to look at the challenge from the opposite end.

These farms ask: how do we make sure every member of our team is able to carve out a challenging and meaningful career for themselves?

This is the new question that elevates farming in the new millennium.

These farms find a way to balance the needs of the farm with the needs of the family in a way that makes both prosper.

Country Guide asked me to meet one such farming family to talk in detail about how they've done it.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

I caught up with Gordon and Sonia Decker in early June. They'd just finished seeding and were into spraying. The day we chatted, they were planning to take their kids, Courtney and Colby, to a Garth Brooks concert

in Saskatoon. It had been a busy week for the Deckers, as they juggled family activities with farm work. But in that sense it was also a typical week for them.

The Deckers have allocated the production and financial/marketing work on their farm into separate roles.

Gordon takes the lead on production while Sonia heads up marketing and finances, although both contribute to each area.

So what does a day in the life look like on their East Mount Farms near Strasbourg, an hour north of Regina?

On a typical day during the growing season, Gordon is doing field work bright and early, anything from doing a pre-burn to picking rocks.

But he makes a point to come in for breakfast.

"We like to have breakfast together just because we don't always have supper together," says Sonia. During breakfast, the family talks about after-school activities so they know where people are going. After the kids head to school, Gordon and Sonia usually talk about their goals for the day, whether they're in the hectic spring season or the winter.

Typically, during seeding, Sonia runs the drill until she needs to make supper. Courtney and Colby help out with meals and field work as well. If the kids need to be picked up from after-school activities, Sonia leaves the field and runs into town.

Gordon and Sonia appreciate all the after-school activities offered by their rural school — it's important to their family, Sonia says. They also decided they wouldn't sacrifice the kids' chance to participate in extra-curricular activities because of the busy pace of the farm.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

“Our farm is important to us but our family is more important,” says Sonia.

Yet finding that balanced routine has been a journey for the Deckers.

Gordon started farming shortly after finishing high school in the early '90s. Today, he and Sonia farm the same land that the Decker family homesteaded in 1904. Since the turn of the 20th century, the farm has grown to just under 4,000 acres.

Initially, Gordon farmed with his brother and father. When he and Sonia married in 1998, she worked off the farm as a dental assistant.

But, as so often happens in life, things changed. Gordon's brother left the farm to pursue other opportunities. Gordon's father was diagnosed with terminal cancer in 2004, and by 2005, Gordon and Sonia had bought the rest of the farm.

By then Sonia had left her off-farm job. She started out in the farm office, but before long she was helping in the field, too.

But Gordon needed more help on the farm, and Sonia was busy with the kids as well. Their oldest, Courtney, was just starting school, while their youngest, Colby, was barely into his toddler years.

So Sonia turned to the International Rural Exchange, which places young adults on Canadian farms so they can learn about agriculture and expand their cultural horizons. That year the exchange had more farms looking for help than applicants, but they did have a young German woman named Dorothy who wanted to work as a nanny.

Gordon suggested they host Dorothy so Sonia could work in the field. It was her first harvest in the field full-time. For four months, Dorothy took the children on hikes and taught them German nursery songs while Sonia and Gordon farmed.

Harvest always has its share of issues, whether it's weather or machinery breakdowns or just the long hours, and that year was no exception. “But it was easy because I didn't have to worry about my family,” says Sonia.

MAKING TIME FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development is big on both Gordon and Sonia's to-do lists. Gordon is a fan of the conference Agri-Trend holds in Saskatoon every December.

“They're very forward-thinking. And if there's something new coming into the agronomy side or the production side of farming, you'll see it at Agri-Trend,” he says.

But it was CTEAM (Canadian Total



PHOTOGRAPHY: EN VOGUE PHOTOGRAPHY • ENVOGUEPHOTOGRAPHY.CA

East Mount Farms operates as an integrated professional team, with Sonia taking the lead on marketing and finances, and Gordon heading up agronomy and machinery

Excellence in Agricultural Management) that introduced the Deckers to the nitty-gritty of farm management. The intense program, run by Agri-Food Management Excellence, covered everything from business planning to futures and options.

Even the personality tests helped Gordon and Sonia better understand each other's communication styles, something that's served them well both in their marriage and their farm partnership, Sonia says. Those communication styles are apparent through my interview with them. Gordon is quieter, but they both build on each other's thoughts throughout the conversation.

The Deckers have kept in touch with CTEAM farmers by attending organized alumni events and communicating in between. In fact, they rate their CTEAM cohort as one of the program's strengths. Participants ran a range of farm and agribusinesses across the country, but they had

similar thought processes about everything from production to human resources.

“There's a lot of learning that goes on inside the classroom at CTEAM, but there's a lot of learning that goes on outside of the classroom,” says Sonia. It's one of those things, the Deckers say, that you have to experience to fully appreciate.

TIME, TIME, TIME

The biggest challenge they've faced on the farm has been to create balance, which involves another tough challenge, time management. But professional development has helped them with that.

“With the courses we've done, we've learned a lot of things about how to be more efficient in time management. But sometimes making mistakes and learning from them helps too,” says Gordon.

Talking to other farm families about how they manage is also very helpful, Sonia adds.

She says they don't think they've done anything far beyond what other farm families have done, and are humbled that *Country Guide* contacted them for an interview.

Of course, professional development takes time, too. Even in the winter, finding that time isn't easy. Child care was a challenge when the kids were younger. Besides the one blissful summer with Dorothy, they'd also had the kids in day care with a neighbour, then in town.

Family has been a big help, too. Both grandmothers have taken the kids when Gordon and Sonia have been away from home for professional development. Gordon's mother, Bev Decker, lives in nearby Strasbourg and so is called upon more often.

Sometimes the kids trump professional development, though. Courtney and Colby are older now, 15 and nearly 12, respectively, which means the Deckers don't have too many years left with both kids at home, so they want to spend time with them. Lately that meant forgoing Crop Production Week for a family ski trip.

And keeping the household in orbit is

the number one priority for the Deckers. CTEAM organized a two-week trip to Brazil — a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. But the Deckers decided to step back because the kids were quite busy.

"Two weeks is a long time to ask Grandma to stay with the kids and run them around," says Sonia.

But they haven't forgone professional development entirely. Gordon and Sonia have a divide-and-conquer strategy when it comes to conferences these days. They look at the content of the conference and decide which one of them is best suited to take it in. The other person stays home to run the household.

In some ways, easing up a little on professional development has been the right choice professionally as well. It's been good to take the time to apply what they've learned to the farm, Sonia says. For example, the business plan they developed with CTEAM is a living document to be reviewed regularly.

Once they have more time, Sonia and Gordon plan to attend more CTEAM alumni events. Crop Production Week is on their wish list, too.

Sonia would also like to take more agricultural courses through the University of Saskatchewan's distance learning program, something she did years ago. And she hopes to hit Farm Management Canada's Agricultural Excellence conferences regularly in the future.

Farm publications and courses at the local agricultural college also offer learning opportunities that don't require time away from home.

Gordon too is always looking for ways to improve, whether it's something he can do himself or has to leave the farm for. "If we do see something, and we have time, we take advantage of it and do it," he says.

The ultimate goal with the farm is to have a viable business the kids can step into — but only if they want to.

It's a tough, ever-changing job. But even with all the advancements in technology and financial management, farming still comes down to putting the seed in the soil and smelling the dust at harvest, says Sonia.

"That's the part of it we just love," she says. **CG**



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CONSTRUCTION BOSSES

It's just after 3:30 in the afternoon when a lumbering orange school bus pulls into the yard at Braun Grain Farms, 20 or so kilometres northeast of Winnipeg. "The kids are pretty spoiled here," says their mom Kristy Boonstra as they bound off the bus and into the shade of a treed lawn, complete with vegetable garden and freshly cut grass.

It's the kind of country scene that Kristy's husband Albert Boonstra and his business partner, friend and cousin-in-law Sean Braun hope will entice city folks and others to buy into their new venture — a housing development on recently rezoned farmland.

"We didn't really think of ourselves as developers," says Boonstra later, coffee in hand at his kitchen table. "We never had really gone down that road, we were just farmers... well, I shouldn't say 'just', but we were farming."

It was an unexpected opportunity to buy 135 acres of farmland in 2009 that changed all that, he says. They had bought the property to expand their existing, multi-generational farm business, but it soon dawned on both men that a little patch of the newly acquired farm where it abutted the village of St. Francois Xavier might make a better subdivision than cropland.

"Just because of the location, we thought that maybe 10 or 20 years down the road it could be developed," explains Braun.

But before they knew it, the pair was meeting with officials from the rural municipality, learning the ins and outs of home construction, and cursing some builders while praising others. They were also borrowing a lot of cash, making their online video debut, and dipping their toes into social media.

There is one thing, though, that they still haven't done.

"We haven't made any money on it yet," says Boonstra with a laugh.

Not that either of them are losing sleep over it. If there is any aspect of life as a developer that their farm careers has prepared them for, it is borrowing large sums and taking on risk, says Braun.

"The ability to take on debt and not even blink an eye, to just keep going, I don't know if that is a positive exactly, but it's a skill we have," he says.

Does running a farm mean you'll be good at starting your own housing subdivision too? Albert Boonstra and Sean Braun are finding out

BY SHANNON VANRAES / CG FIELD EDITOR

Boonstra agrees that being comfortable with debt and knowing how to manage it has been key to the process. "The ability to see the big picture and not get wrapped up in the here and now is important," he stresses. "We know we built something of value, it's not selling right now, but like farmland it's only going to increase in value and that's a skill we learned through farming."

Back in 2009, however, the farmers hadn't even begun to seriously consider developing what is today White Horse

Estates. It was only when the municipality of St. Francois Xavier approached Braun and Boonstra with a plan to rezone the land as residential that things picked up speed.

Located only 20 minutes west of Winnipeg, just off the Trans-Canada Highway, the municipality hoped to inject more life into the village while also increasing the local tax base.

"We want to encourage growth, more people living here," says Reeve Dwayne Clark, who has held the position for the last



two years. He says while he wasn't reeve of St. Francois Xavier at the time Braun and Boonstra struck their development deal, developing new subdivisions is a continuing priority for the municipality, which is one of the fastest growing in the province.

Between 2001 and 2011, St. Francois Xavier saw its population jump by 21 per cent, Clark says, "So we don't want to put up a lot of obstacles when it comes to (development)."

To that end, the municipality is helping out at White Horse Estates by maintaining the roads there, even though the development agreement doesn't require them to do so until the project is complete.

"We had it pretty easy because we had a (rural municipality) on board, so we weren't pushing anything uphill, but it was still very hard and very difficult and very cash hungry, which is similar to farming," says Boonstra.

Even so, the duo still weren't convinced they would take the project all the way to completion, figuring they would get all necessary permits in place, then seek an established developer to take over. But finding a

developer willing to venture outside Winnipeg proved difficult, and those that did expected a huge share in profit.

"And we still had to take the risk on with them," says Boonstra. Under the deal, he and Braun would put up the land, the developers would put in the cash to cover development, and profits would be shared 50/50. "But we'd have no say in that really," says Boonstra, "and you're leaving a lot of money on the table."

It was then they began looking at what it would take to take on the project without the help of a developer, and as a first step and they began work on a five-year business plan.

"We started to look at it more closely and asked, how hard is this? We just had to hire someone to do the work and we already had a plan... which was an accepted plan by the planning district," Boonstra notes.

But that also meant finding a financial institution willing to loan two farmers money to break new ground, literally.

Boonstra and Braun first approached Sunova Credit Union, but while staff there provided great advice and gave them solid

numbers to work with, the credit union was only prepared to lend cash based on the land's farm value, not its development value. Before long, talks fizzled out and the would-be developers were back at the drawing board.

While recalibrating, the pair reached out to local realtors and embarked on what turned out to be a key aspect of securing financing: pre-selling lots in the development. Then, using an appraisal done by Sunova, plus information provided by the realtors and their own research, they approached the Starbuck Credit Union.

"They are local and we had heard from our accountant that they would work with local people and kinda stick their necks out a little bit for us," says Braun. "And when we went to them it went really well."

Starbuck Credit Union — now Noventis Credit Union — agreed to loan them 60 per cent of the development value of the land. It was now 2011 and the pieces were starting to fall into place just as the housing market rebounded from the global downturn of 2008. By the end of that year they received

“We know we built something of value,” says Boonstra (l), with Braun. “That’s a skill we learned through farming.”

conditional approval for a 36-lot subdivision from local government, and in 2012 shovels were in the ground.

Roads were built, municipal sewer and water extended, power brought in and homebuilders brought onboard to fulfill the pre-sale purchases. Braun and Boonstra then oversaw the construction of two show homes in 2015.

"Having the builders signed up for the pre-sales, that legitimized our business plan and put real numbers in that people were willing to pay," explains Boonstra. "So once the lending was in place, we felt we didn't need to partner up with a developer anymore."

Caution wasn't thrown to the wind, however. The final business plan called for 65 lots to be built in three phases. The



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“It was important that we did it without any farm money,” says Braun (r), with Boonstra in one of their two show homes. “It really legitimized it because we didn’t have keep pumping outside money in.”

It was a challenge to get financing, and to work with contractors while also keeping their attention on their main business of running an 8,000-acre farm.

first phase offered 15 lots, 11 of which now have houses on them, including the two 1,625-square-foot show homes, listed just shy of \$500,000 each.

“Our stake in it was developable lots that were saleable, so we were trying to either sell to the builder or to someone private who can build their own house on it,” says Boonstra. “We did it in phases because of the cost, so we were careful about putting out cash.”

The decision to build 15 lots in the first phase was based on both finances and design concerns. Phase two, which includes an additional 20 lots, is complete and ready to go as well.

“We haven’t officially opened the second phase yet, but all the infrastructure is in — the road, sewer and water — so the lots are there ready to go, but we’d like to sell out phase one or most of phase one before we actually sell lots in phase two,” says Braun.

Boonstra adds that 80 per cent of lot cost is incurred before the lots hit the market. The final 20 per cent of development cost primarily comes from fees charged by the municipality once lots are listed for sale. Each lot is between a third- and a half-acre, and prices begin at \$99,000.

“We might have jumped the gun on the second phase... we could have waited for another year, although it’s nice to have it there,” Boonstra says, noting the housing market has cooled again since White Horse Estates experienced its first rush.

POSING FOR THE CAMERAS

To drum up interest and sales, Braun and Boonstra have now ventured into the world of marketing. Working with Winnipeg-based Mindscape Studios, they have collaborated on a series of promotional videos that are as much about country life and the land as they are about White Horse Estates.

“We weren’t comfortable with it at first, to tell you the truth,” says Boonstra, with a shake of his head. “It’s just not our personality... farmers by nature are a little more humble and that is why sometimes we get a bad rap, because we don’t put our stories out there and tell people what we’re doing, we just go about our business.”

Braun agrees with a nod, saying, “we wanted to stay low key at first, but then we did realize we needed to get the story out there.”

Former journalist and Mindscape co-owner Gosia Fazio convinced them that telling their story was the way to go, even if it took some reassuring to get Braun and Boonstra in front of the camera.

“They were just terrified and they were each trying to throw the other one under the bus,” says Fazio, recalling their first meeting with a laugh. “But at the end of the day... the biggest strength they have is their connections to the community and who they are as people.”

“Our way of looking at our clients’ needs really does revolve around the truth about who they are. I think it has to be the truth about who they are if you are

going to really connect with people. That’s because people don’t really remember what you do, they remember why you do it.”

The end result involved not just Boonstra and Braun, but their whole families speaking about the deep roots they have put down through generations of farming, and how that influenced their decision to invest in the community by embarking on the development path.

“We jumped off that cliff and I’m really glad we did it,” says Boonstra, adding the experience has also given him a new appreciation for the need to tell farming’s story to new audiences. It’s something he plans to now apply to his farm business.

“I mean a lot of people don’t know what farming looks like, and they don’t always trust it, so getting our story out there with this, it applies to our farming as well,” he says.

But having the videos produced is only part of the marketing battle. It has also meant establishing a presence on social media, something that both Braun and Boonstra acknowledge they could be doing better at. They are also examining the possibility of more traditional advertising, like radio spots or even television ads.

Word-of-mouth has been their main strategy up until this point, with friends, family and neighbours getting the news out about White Horse Estates, in addition to realty listings and Facebook. Jamie Knox is a realtor representing the development and said the fact that neither Braun nor Boon-

stra have a background in development is also a selling point, albeit an unusual one.

"It was very unique to me, and when I first heard about the project, I was like, wow," says Knox. "These people are the developers, but they are also your neighbours."

Braun, who lives in the village of St. Francois Xavier, says that if people don't like something, they know where to find you and you'll hear about it.

"So we wanted to build something we can be proud of, we want to grow the community, increase the tax base, increase services, recreation," he says. "This is something our names are attached to, my kids go to school there, so this isn't just about a development."

Although Boonstra adds that while the health of the community is a factor, they are ultimately making decisions based on business concerns.

IT'S ALSO ABOUT FARMING

Developing White Horse Estates, named for a white horse statue marking the turnoff to St. Francois Xavier, hasn't meant a hiatus from the 8,000-acre family grain farm. Seeding, spraying, harvesting, planning, selling and shipping grain are still their main focus.

But given the balancing act they are undertaking, Braun and Boonstra both stress that having the support of their farm business partners — Braun's dad and Boonstra's father-in-law — is paramount. That support may have been easier to garner because of one key business decision made early on in the development venture.

"I think it was important that we did it without any farm money," emphasizes Braun. "It really legitimized it because we didn't have to keep pumping outside

money in. It's totally separate from the farm business."

And while the older generation may have raised their eyebrows a few times, Boonstra believes that good communication skills and mutual respect have kept everyone onboard. Good communication skills have also been integral to balancing the interests of the development's new residents and Braun Grain Farms, which still farms the land directly adjacent to the new homes.

"For the people that we have sold to, they all like that it is in a rural area, next to fields," Boonstra says. "I mean there will still be a problem if you drift onto their garden... but we've kept in constant communication with the people there and they like the view, they like seeing the crop come up and we've tried to communicate to them how it is all done."

As for when their crop of houses will reach maturity, that remains to be seen. Both Braun and Boonstra know it could be some time before they see the fruits of their labour.

"You don't make any money until your last 20 per cent of sales," explains Boonstra. "All those sales before that actually go towards covering the cost, so you aren't really going to make any profit until your last lots sell."

And the date when those last lots sell depends on how many lots you develop, he adds, noting that they haven't ruled out continued expansion once the 65 lots they have planned so far are sold. While the pair could have stopped at 15 lots, economies of scale prove an important incentive.

When it comes to specifics, the two farmers-turned-developers declined to go on the record with the exact investment

they have made in the development so far, but repeat they are aiming for 20 per cent profit at the end of the day.

"I think our numbers have dwindled from where we started, so we are probably a little less profitable now, but not by a lot," says Boonstra. "We're trying not to force it, and it's taking a little longer than we thought when we started, but I think a five-year plan was realistic."

Some unexpected bumps in the road did slow the project down along the way. A decision to go with a smaller, local contractor at one point ended in the realization you sometimes need to go bigger to have the capacity you need, and one of the three homebuilders they partnered with went bankrupt after a personal crisis.

"We did kind of regret having that one builder there, but that is easy to say in hindsight because we needed him at the time and we needed those pre-sales for the lending we needed that to get off the ground," says Boonstra.

Braun says that while putting on the developer hat has been an enjoyable experience, he isn't quite ready to call himself a developer yet, even if he's learned an amazing amount along the way. He does, however, have some words of wisdom for any other farmers looking to develop land as urban areas expand.

"Be prepared for it to go really slow, as far as selling lots... be prepared to put up a lot of money up front and be prepared for it to come back slowly," he says. "We still think of ourselves as farmers first, I mean this hasn't really taken off, so maybe someday when we start our next development we can call ourselves developers, but right now we are farmers first." **CG**

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A farm for all

For the Burns family, the goal has always been a farm with a place for the entire family. Now it's the reality too

BY ANGELA LOVELL

John Burns had spent eight years getting a PhD in chemistry and two years working at the Department of National Defence in Kingston, Ont., but his Saskatchewan farm roots began to beckon and he jumped at the chance to get out of the lab and do some off-campus teaching, which led him to the area near Wynyard, Sask., where he and wife Linda decided they would establish their own family farm in 1975.

Their daughter Kim was just one year old when Linda and John put down their new farming roots. Sons Dustin, Joel and Tyler were yet to be born, but it was out of the couple's concern for their children's future, and in their belief that they could create a sort of culture where everyone could find a purpose and a place if they wanted it, that they shaped their farm.

"The farm evolved out of my own personal philosophy. It was a place to experiment with the way we did agronomy. I felt there were better ways to manage the land and create better opportunities," says John, who was an early adopter of no-till farming in the area. "The farm was always for family, sort of a roots thing, a reference point as to who they are, and where they belong, a place to come back to even if they weren't necessarily involved in the farm."

John and Linda started with two quarters of land, but they had a vision to grow into a sizable operation that would offer benefits in terms of efficiencies. But with no family support to back them up, they were also trying

to create an element of safety, evocative of an era when neighbours helped each other out.

"Any land purchases or lease arrangements were with other neighbours who had a similar philosophy," says John. "There's a benefit to working together from a safety and confidence aspect, because you've got some collegiality. Somebody knows where you are if you need a hand. You're not trying to pull a tractor out by yourself."

A VISION FULFILLED

Windy Poplars Farm has pretty much fulfilled the vision the couple had 40 years ago. It has evolved into a group of four farms, all co-operating with each other and working towards the same goals and purpose. John and Linda still live on the original farm site.

In 2002, their oldest son Dustin left his engineering job and established Four Winds Farm with wife Kristi and their five children.

In 2008, youngest son Tyler and his wife Janelle joined the group and developed Wayward Wind Acres.

The fourth owner/operator of the group is not related, but neighbour Doug Reeve grew up with Dustin and helped out on the farm and is almost like a brother. Doug left his engineering job in 2003 to farm full time with his wife Bonita and children at Windy Ridge Acres.

Each partner owns their own land but they jointly own all other assets, such as buildings and machinery, and they make management decisions collectively.

"Each of us has a percentage of ownership, so we're not worried about whose crop is getting harvested when, or who yielded what," says Dustin. "We tackle the whole operation as a single entity when we're making plans and decisions around what to plant and timing of harvest and those kinds of things."

Flexibility and strong communication have been key components of the group's fluid evolution and are helping them to transition to the next generation.

"It's a loose arrangement where we become aware of what is needed and then react to fill those roles," says John. "Over time, everyone finds what they feel comfortable with and are best at. We have well-educated people, who know how to problem solve and we generally do that

“I married an engineer but it turns out he’s a farmer,” says Kristi Burns, here with Dustin. Happily, when his parents had set up the family farm, it was with exactly such an eventuality in mind



as a group. We all believe it's important that everyone is comfortable with the risk that each member is willing to take because farming is all about managing risk, and there are so many variables."

Communication is another crucial component of the management process, because flexibility isn't possible without everyone being aware of what's going on, and it's also a vital part of the transition process itself, says Kristi.

"We've been having weekly meetings when we're not seeding and harvesting, and I continue to be really impressed at how that has brought a level of comfort to the next

generation," she says. "On a weekly basis, we're being exposed to all of the different sides of management, and we're talking about them and taking on different roles. That continued exposure, and setting time aside as a management team to look at all aspects of the operation, and allow everyone to vote and have input has made a big difference for us and is building confidence for our ability to carry the farm forward."

A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL FAMILY

The Burns family is as multi-dimensional as their farm. Joel and Kim, two of John and Linda's children, have off-farm careers,

although Kim does assist with the book-keeping. As for the farming children, maybe it's the differences in their educational backgrounds and interests that allow them to work so well together. It certainly can't be a dull conversation around the kitchen table.

Dustin took an engineering degree at the University of Saskatchewan and worked for four years as a design engineer for a farm equipment manufacturer in Saskatoon before deciding that he pretty much shared his parents' philosophy about farming and wanted to farm fulltime.

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Kristi had no farming background, and studied theatre and English literature in university, but took a master's degree in martial arts, which she teaches locally, as well as home-schooling the couple's five children and handling a lot of the human resources work on the farm.

"I married an engineer but it turns out he was a farmer," Kristi says. "When we moved back to the farm, we just decided to embrace it, and for us it makes so much sense for the both of us to be working towards a common goal."

Tyler took an arts and science degree at the University of Saskatchewan, and wasn't always sure that he'd come back to farm. "My education didn't necessarily reflect an interest in coming back but there was probably only one summer I didn't come home to help out," he says. "Once I'd gone through a four-year degree in a six-year term, I just found myself coming back for good."

TRUST IS THE TWINE

But trust is the twine binding the group together. "The key to me is trust and respect. Everybody is important, and everybody's ideas are important and everybody's involved or invested," says John. "Whether that's owner/operators, family members, employees and even people we deal with in the input, financing and the marketing aspects, everybody has an interest in the success of the farm."

Windy Poplars Farm grew out of a vision that the next generation shares, which has a long-term focus with sustainability of the farm top of mind, says John. "When we started the farm, the thought was that the land belongs not to us but to generations, the opportunity comes through the land and hopefully you have the type of culture that respects land, people and individuals' needs and interests." **CG**

Weekly family and staff meetings, close connections among partners, shared machinery... it all adds up to more flexibility for the next generation to come back to the farm

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Job descriptions for new farm employees help them understand how the farm operates, what their job is all about, and what the employer expects of them. But family members working on the farm often think they don't need one for themselves. They've been on the farm forever, after all, so they already know what to do. Can't everybody else just figure that out?

Whether somebody working on the farm is a family member or not isn't really what matters, says Portia MacDonald-Dewhirst, executive director of the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC). "There needs to be clarity around the work to be done, and without that clarity, there can be duplication, errors, losses, and safety implications," she says. "You want to make sure that everyone in a workplace is clear on what's expected to be done, when it's expected to be done, and how it's expected to be done. It's a positive situation for everyone when the work requirements are clear."

Yet even MacDonald-Dewhirst admits having these kinds of conversations can be more awkward with a family member than an employee. "There are lots of dynamics at play in a family and there may be unwritten assumptions that a senior member of the family just expects somebody to know what to do."

So why stir up a potential hornet's nest?

Doing a detailed job description for a non-family employee by comparison can seem like a walk in the park.

MAKE IT FAIR

When a farm has employees and working family members, however, it's important to treat everyone equally and fairly. A job description can be a valuable tool to define roles and make sure that there are the same expectations of people doing the same job.

Perceptions of fairness are critical when it comes to motivation. If it's perceived that a family member who has the same job as an employee is treated differently, that can cause a lot of problems within the workplace.

"It will cause problems with not just one employee but the whole culture of the organization," warns MacDonald-Dewhirst. "That's certainly an added challenge for family farms. But if you can establish a culture that promotes fairness and transparency, that's going to create a workplace that's much more conducive to effective performance for everybody."

Eight years ago Dustin and Kristi Burns hired their first employee who was not a

It's their job

More farmers like John and Kristi Burns have family and non-family members working side by side, making it vital to set clear job expectations



family member. They quickly realized that human resource management was going to become ever more crucial to them as they grew their integrated group of family farms — Windy Poplars Farm near Wynyard, Sask. — that includes one other sibling, a close family friend, their families, and Dustin's parents.

"We were able to make use of some Growing Forward funds to do human resource and branding work with a consultant," says Kristi, who has assumed the lead role in HR management. "It allowed us, as managers, to sit down and say these are our farm goals and values. That gave us a solid sense of who we are and where we want to go with the farm, and I think that's key if you're going to be bringing on employees and other people."

TIGHT LABOUR MARKET

Agriculture may have lagged behind other industries in recognizing the value of human resource management, but that's changing as the labour market becomes tighter. Farmers are learning to be more strategic and intentional about their human resource management and staffing, because it's harder to find people to work on the farm.

"When you can't fill an open position it becomes the most important thing, and when you find somebody to fill that position, you want to make sure that you keep them there, and that you really motivate them to be as effective as possible," says MacDonald-Dewhirst, add-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24

Effective HR

If your farm is struggling to figure out the roles and jobs, Dick Wittman, a farmer and consultant from Idaho, offers a practical solution in his guidebook “Building Effective Farm Management Systems.” The case study in chapter five really brings it home with ways to deal with conflicts and how to write job descriptions for select positions by looking at what the farm needs first. It includes worksheets, tasks and a clear way to figure out who is responsible for what on a multiple-person family farm and even how they should be compensated. The guidebook can be downloaded at www.wittmanconsulting.com.

Tips for writing a job description

What do you need to think about before you sit down and write a job description? Here are tips from Portia MacDonald-Dewhirst, executive director of the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council:

1. Forget whether the job description is for a current or prospective employee or a family member. There should be no difference in the job description for either.
2. Make sure you have identified what your values, mission and goals are. Who are you, what do you want to achieve and what's important to your organization?
3. Think about and identify all the tasks and then document in detail all aspects of the work that needs to be performed for the job from end to end. You may be surprised at the length of the list.
4. Document how you want each task done and when. Don't forget about tasks or aspects of the job that only need to be done less frequently but are still critical to the position.
5. Write down the expectations you have for the person doing that job. Include specific skills, knowledge and educational requirements, but also underlying critical competencies (softer skills) that reflect the values of the organization and will ensure they are a good fit and stay motivated. These could include good communication skills, sharing the organization's core values, or respecting diversity in the workplace.

ing, “Build loyalty and commitment so that they don't leave.”

At Windy Poplars Farm the owner/operators of the farm group have all sat down together and developed job descriptions and figured out a strategy for recruiting and retaining employees.

“HR is such an important, emerging piece on farms,” says Kristi. The strategy, she explains, is “to offer really meaningful employment and find a good farm/life balance for not only the owner/operators but our employees as well, and try to make it sustainable for them to be here.”

The farm has implemented an employee benefits program and it offers educational opportunities. They hold regular Monday morning meetings that bring all the owners and employees together to discuss the work plan for the week and address any issues or concerns.

“We do wage reviews and employee reviews twice a year, and that really fosters an opportunity for communication and feedback,” says Kristi. “We have lunch with our employees every day, and I think that's one of the things that's helped us build a good working relationship with them. They feel that they are part of a family farm and that there's a place for them here. They're not somehow apart because they're not related. I think they're aware of our family and our kids on the farm, and they're much more careful with our assets, with our equipment and with our buildings because it's not just a job. They feel connected.”

EVERYONE NEEDS TIME OFF SOMETIMES

It's also important to be flexible with employees — and other family members — and to understand that they also have a life beyond the farm. “I don't think it comes naturally to farmers to be flexible with employees but it's something we're working hard at,” says Kristi. “If we have an employee with a family member that is ill or someone that needs to be in a wedding party in September, we can't say, ‘Well, you have to work, we're harvesting.’ We have to be able to say we'll have enough people and resources in place so you can go. A very good way to get rid of your employees is to be inflexible and treat them as if they have exactly on the line what you have on the line. We are certainly very mindful of that.”

But it's just as important that fam-

ily members working on the farm stay motivated and are where they want to be, rather than feeling obligated to a job they really don't want. “Whether they're family members or not, you want them to want to be there, to be excited to be working on the farm, it's their first choice. They're going to do better if that's the kind of commitment that they have to the business,” says MacDonald-Dewhirst.

NEW ROLES FOR FAMILY MEMBERS

Rather than writing formal job descriptions for the family members, the Burns's farm has gone through an exhaustive process of defining and documenting the roles and responsibilities of each person involved. These have evolved naturally over time, and must be fluid enough to allow the flexibility they need to run a complex operation.

“We have to be adaptable from year to year,” says Dustin. “We need a flexible management team as far as what they're willing to do. The key for us is not to create categories or pigeonhole anyone, but to identify the task, how we're going to solve that task, and what our resources are, especially our people resources to deal with those challenges as they arise.”

One thing the family is very conscious of is abiding by the standards they expect of their workforce, which vary between 10 and 12 depending on the season.

“Historically, as a family, it's been — weather's coming, we have to get out there and get it done now, but we've had to shift that focus because whether or not we feel that's something that we can do as the owners, we can't expect that of our employees,” says Dustin. “We've had to slow down and make sure that we model safety as a priority and quality control. We'd rather someone has to wait at the other end than have people rushing around and causing an accident, or being hard on equipment.”

As family farms grow and as more non-family members get injected into the team, it becomes even more important to be open, fair and transparent about everything that you do, says MacDonald-Dewhirst. “I can't stress that enough because people will leave their jobs — even if they are family members — if they don't perceive that there's fairness in the workplace.” **CG**

Producer input on National Agricultural Occupational Framework

The Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council (CAHRC) recently asked producers to provide their input to help develop a National Agricultural Occupational Framework. The framework provides tools such as detailed job descriptions for different segments of the agricultural industry, which each farm operation can then customize to suit its own needs.

CAHRC sought input from producers from different industry segments, including cow/calf producer Jill Burkhardt. “We were asked to assign what we felt were appropriate tasks for different positions on the farm, so for an entry level employee, a more seasoned employee, a foreman, manager and owner/operator,” says Burkhardt, who farms with husband Kelly, and father-in-law Gary on their fifth-generation farm near Gwynne, Alta.

“As an example, you wouldn’t have an entry level person mixing feed rations; they would be more likely to feed the cows and perform more assisted, supervised tasks,” Burkhardt explains. “But a seasoned employee who had more of a farm background could mix rations and would be doing more of the day-to-day tasks, while a foreman would be making more daily decisions with help from the manager. So we were looking at a hierarchical chain of command and trying to determine what tasks fit into each role.”

Now, with their son, 10-year-old Connley, beginning to help out on the farm, Burkhardt says the framework will be a useful guideline as he progresses in his role.

“I look at it as an evaluation process. As my son is growing up on the farm it will give us a way to gauge what he’s capable of doing, what he’s done, what roles is he fulfilling now, and the roles he’s ready to move into,” she says. “I can see applying the framework as a guide to help him mature on the farm and move up in his different roles and responsibilities.”

Burkhardt sees great value in the National Agricultural Occupational Framework documents and tools — which should be available on the CAHRC website soon. “It

will be a great resource, and even if people don’t write actual job descriptions, it will be a great online tool to be able to assess what position a person could occupy or is occupying on the farm,” says Burkhardt.

Resources for the farm

The following resources are available from the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council website:

- The recently released National Agricultural Occupational Framework provides detailed tools such as job descriptions for different segments of the agricultural industry that can be customized to reflect the needs of each farm operation.
- AgriJobMatch is an online job board for the agricultural industry that also has customizable job advertisement and job description templates.

- The AgriHRTolKit is a downloadable kit that offers instructions and tools about how to do HR better for agricultural producers and farm managers. Online access is \$99 a year.

“As my son is growing up on the farm, it will give us a way to gauge what he’s capable of doing.”

— Jill Burkhardt



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LIBERALS

boost tax on quota

Planning to sell quota that is held in a corporation?
Get some strategic tax planning, quick

BY MAGGIE VANCAMP / CG SENIOR EDITOR

Not surprisingly, the national media focused on proposals like the new tax-free Canada Child Benefit program when the Justin Trudeau government presented its first federal budget back in March.

Buried underneath all the feel-good news, however, were some potentially painful changes to Eligible Capital Property (ECP) tax rules for incorporated businesses.

Common examples of ECP include incorporation expenses, customer lists, franchise rights... and farm quota.

For supply-managed farmers who want to sell quota that is held in a corporation, these changes will impose an extra tax burden on the gain in value, and the change is going to happen soon.

Starting on January 1, 2017, the capital gains arising from the sale of farm quota will be treated in a new way, with potentially costly implications for famers.

"The new federal budget will result in a significant increase in the upfront income taxes you'll pay when selling quota that is owned by your farm corporation," says Lisa Kemp,

chartered accountant and partner with BDO Canada in Lindsay, Ont.

In general, the idea is to move away from ECP to a new property class under a Capital Cost Allowance (CCA) account. All businesses with an ECP account at December 31, 2016 will have to transfer these assets to a CCA account.

That may not seem important, until you go to sell those assets.

Currently, these capital gains are treated as normal business income with a maximum income tax rate of about 26 per cent. However, starting in 2017, capital gains from quota sales will be treated as investment income with an initial tax rate of about 50 per cent.

For example, consider broiler quota that was bought 20 years ago for \$30 per unit and put into a farm corporation with a current value of \$130 a unit. The capital gain is \$100 per unit so if the farmer sells 50,000 units, half of the gain (\$50 per unit, which totals \$2.5 million) under the new rules will be taxed as investment income. That gain will be taxed up to 24 per cent more than under the current system, so potentially, in this case, \$600,000 more will go to pay taxes.

That's on top of the \$650,000 currently being paid.

One mitigating factor is that the taxed portion of the gain can be distributed to shareholders as an ineligible dividend. Although this is subject to a potential partial tax recovery when taxable dividends are paid, it could still be a big hit for many farmers wanting to retire.

The bottom line is that next year, business owners' exit strategies will become much less tax-effective than was possible under the phased-out ECP. "Income tax estimates that producers may have previously had done regarding a potential quota sale will no longer be valid for quota sales after 2016," says Kemp.

The official government statement was that this change is intended to simplify ECP under CCA rules, something that was initiated in 2014. However, if that's the case, it raises a question as to why depreciation was set only at seven per cent (and then descends) for those assets.

The resulting message to small business is to penalize the use of smart business structures.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28

Starting next January, capital gains from quota sales will be treated as investment income with an initial tax rate of about 50 per cent, warns BDO's Lisa Kemp. "The new federal budget will result in a significant increase in the upfront taxes you'll pay."

Networking: Critical to Your Professional Success

BY KIM GERENCSEK

Farmers are always networking. Not only is it human nature to need interaction with others, it brings us closer together, builds camaraderie, and allows us all to grow in some way, shape or form. Farmers have been networking for generations. In the early days, before cell phones and social media, it was gathering at a local merchant's establishment, and later progressed to the café or coffee shop, all while also including the hockey and curling rinks, the equipment dealer, the post office, and the fowl supper.

Networking took on a whole new level when committee and industry groups began to form. Groups such as a cattle feeders association, wheat, barley, or canola growers groups, etc, etc, brought farmers together from greater distances and allowed them to glean best practices from other areas of the prairies.

As time wore on and farms grew in size, networking time became less and less. Every small town coffee shop that used to be buzzing every day 20 or so years ago is now very quiet, if it is even still in business. Fewer towns have busy rinks to draw people in through the winter, and hour long conversations at the post office are now almost unheard of.



Today we use social media and mobile technology. We have connections that are hundreds of miles away, some of whom we've never met, yet we connect with them regularly and feel like we "know" them. This, too, is networking. Albeit without the face to face human interaction.

That personal interaction can be seen very clearly in the beer gardens at any farm show any time of year. People will travel hours to pay \$15 admission to a show that would take more than one full day to cover, but they'll spend half that day consuming several \$7 beers in the beer gardens. Why? Face to face personal NETWORKING!

CAFA embodies personal networking. Every month, each chapter will gather to share best practices and learn from each other. We all bring our "farm first" approach in business to a discussion that benefits us all. It is amazing how opinions and perceptions can change during any of these discussions, always on topical (and often controversial) issues. Openness and respect always.

Nowhere else can you find a group of highly skilled specialists with such diversity of expertise all of whom focused on you, the farmer. CAFA offers

professional development to its qualified advisors, and creates opportunities to NETWORK. We have a few farmers that are CAFA members, and they are unabashed to describe the benefits of being in such a group.

The membership fee is nominal when compared to the value and benefit you can enjoy by being a member of CAFA. Find out for yourself: all chapter meetings are open to guests, see when your local chapter is meeting next at <http://www.cafanet.ca/events/>. You can find more about CAFA and about your local chapter on the CAFA website www.cafanet.ca

Contributed by Kim Gerencsek, CAFA member and chair of the Regina Chapter.

Gerencsek owns Growing Farm Profits™, a farm management consulting firm focusing on improving farm business performance. More than ever, farm owners and managers recognize the importance of elevating their management skills and abilities. Growing Farm Profits helps farmers make sense of their numbers, make informed decisions, and set a sustainable business strategy so that growth, transition, or legacy goals can be met. Learn more at www.growingfarmprofits.com or call 306-533-5474.

For farmers, is it simply a grab at some of the proceeds from lucrative quota sales, or a tax warning to address the high value of quota?

TAX STRATEGIES

As part of this package, the 2016 budget also now allows small balances of ECP to be carried over to the new CCA class to be deducted more quickly. Under the current ECP regime, 75 per cent of an eligible capital expenditure is added to the new CCA account and is deductible at seven per cent per year on a declining-balance basis.

As a result, if you are planning to buy quota, you might want to talk to your accountant about buying it soon to maximize the depreciation. The changes also allow up

to \$3,000 in incorporation costs to be deducted as a current expense, so about 80 per cent of newly incorporated businesses will be able to deduct the full amount of the incorporation expenses in their initial year.

However, the big impact is on a sale of quota. If your quota is in a corporation, it might be a good time to look at your tax liability situation on the sale of that quota. Beyond outright selling it before the end of the year, some farmers might consider doing a share freeze and reorganization of quota ownership within the same family, perhaps through the use of a second corporation. "While this will result in prepaying income taxes before a third-party quota sale, the objec-

tive would be to pay the quota tax under the old rules at more favourable income tax rates," says Kemp.

Should you undertake a corporate reorganization or a non-arm's-length transaction to crystallize the gains before the end of the year?

This might not be wise for all situations, but in some circumstances it may be worth considering.

Kemp says if you're thinking of selling corporate-owned quota soon and want to keep and reinvest the money in your corporate business, there may be motivation to do so before December 31. Also, some planning might help someone who is looking to get money outside of their corporation and take out corporate surplus tax efficiently. **CG**

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PG. 32 Novel soil test: The new SoilOne Report aims to see soil the way your roots do.

PG. 36 An end to horsetail? Don't get your hopes up, says OMAFRA's Mike Cowbrough.

CROPS GUIDE



The newest soft red winter wheat from Dow Seeds grows to medium to tall height and offers above-average yields.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DOW SEEDS

New in winter cereal varieties

The long-term outlook for cereal yields is up. Here's why

BY RALPH PEARCE / CG PRODUCTION EDITOR

We might refer to the category as “winter cereals” but everyone knows winter wheat is the undisputed leader in the field, and the picture for the crop took an even more positive turn late in 2015. An early soybean harvest and a long, warm fall, plus a greater commitment to longer rotations, made for an incredible planting season for winter wheat in Ontario.

But what's even more interesting is that the good news for winter wheat goes beyond lucky weather and a fortunately early soybean harvest.

For cereals, the future is looking brighter, thanks to a renewed commitment to public sector breeding in Eastern Canada and a heightened awareness of soil health and sustainability issues. As commodity prices fluctuate, many growers are looking to maximize production, boost their on-farm efficiencies and take more of a long-term perspective toward creating value.

All of that translates to some interesting developments for cereals, including more winter rye varieties and hybrids becoming available, plus opportunities for malting barley in Eastern Canada and a five- to 10-year outlook for new cereal varieties from public sector breeders with an eye on Eastern Canada growers.

It's against that backdrop that *Country Guide* brings you its second year of our “What's New?” series, starting with this look at the latest in winter cereals. Five companies are featured with their latest offerings in winter wheat and rye varieties. As always, we recommend you talk to your seed dealers for more detail.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30

BRAMHILL SEEDS

A new offering with excellent supply at Bramhill Seeds is Marker, a soft red winter wheat with exceptional potential. In OCCC trials in 2014, its two-year yield index in Area 2 was 114 per cent and 112 per cent in the three-year index in 2015. Also in 2015, its three-year average for Areas 1 and 2 combined was 109 per cent. Marker offers excellent standability and bushel weight, large plump kernels, short straw, and protein levels of 11.2 per cent in 2015 field trials. In terms of disease resistance and tolerance, it's one of only three varieties that rate moderately resistant (MR) to fusarium head blight and show good resistance to leaf and stem rust. It's recommended for seeding rate at 140 pounds or 1.6 million seeds per acre.



The dark green colour of CM 7363 makes it a pleasing sight throughout the growing season.

PHOTO COURTESY OF C&M SEEDS

C&M SEEDS

SOFT RED WINTER WHEAT

CM 7363 (name pending registration) is a new soft red winter wheat with excellent tillering and winter survival and an attractive dark green colour through the season. CM 7363 also has strong fusarium tolerance and very good standability, and it responds very well to intensive management programs. The company says, "It stands and it yields." CM 7363 appears to fit well on all soil types but shows top performance in Area 1.

HYBRID RYE

The first hybridized cereal rye variety available for growers is proving it has big potential. C&M says last year's introduction of Brasetto provided growers with exceptional standability, large heads and excellent disease tolerance. Now Bono is available and



Heading uniformity can provide better fungicide coverage, with the potential for improved control of fusarium head blight.

ELITE SEEDS

UGRC Ring is a soft red winter wheat developed by the University of Guelph's double haploid winter wheat breeding program. Its double haploid origin guarantees very good plant uniformity in the field, which should translate into enhanced uniformity at heading and maturity. That heading uniformity also allows for more complete fungicide coverage of all heads during spraying and consequently superior fusarium head blight control. This cultivar has gone through the OCCC registration trials from 2011 to 2012 and has been tested in the Ontario performance trials since 2013, totaling 33 site-years of testing. UGRC Ring has a high grain yield and good pastry qualities supported by very good specific weight and falling numbers. It had better winter hardiness than the checks during evaluation and is therefore well adapted to the winter wheat growing areas of Ontario. Its yield increase under intensive management practices in the performance trials is 13 per cent over three years in Areas 1 and 2. Ring also has good resistance to powdery mildew and leaf rust, and is in the moderately resistant class to fusarium.

new for 2016. Hybrid rye is seeded at a lower rate because of its exceptional tillering capability, and Bono has a similar yield package to Brasetto, with the potential for slightly higher yields. Hybrid rye is also best-suited to ground on which winter wheat is not the ideal fit, particularly sandy soils. New marketing opportunities are emerging for both of these varieties, with exceptional end-use characteristic, including the potential for identity-preserved markets for growers who choose hybrid rye.

DOW SEEDS

DS-572-SRW is the newest soft red winter wheat variety from Dow Seeds, and is a mid-to full-maturity variety, suitable for Areas 1, 2 and 3. With medium to tall height, this awnletted head type provides above-average yields with excellent winter survival as well

as good overall disease tolerance. Seeding rate is 1.2 to 1.4 million per acre, with seed and test weights also listed as excellent.

SECAN

A fall rye variety from SeCan, AC Hazlet is now available to eastern Canadian producers. Developed by Grant MacLeod of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, this medium-sized fall rye has been commercially grown across the western prairies for the past 10 years. AC Hazlet's strong straw, excellent winter hardiness and high grain yield are not only suited for western producers, but will also translate well to eastern Canadian growing conditions where it is also being touted as a flexible cover crop and forage option. This variety is available from SeCan member, Horizon Seeds Canada Inc., of Courtland, Ont. **CG**

P.Ag.

THE ONTARIO AGROLOGIST

Ontario's registered Agrologists provide extraordinary services for the public and the industry each and every day. Each day, OIA's Professional and Technical Agrologists (P.Ag./T.Ag.) contribute to the agriculture industry by leading in the practice of the science of agriculture, ensure environmental and resource stewardship, and serve the agri-food and agri-business needs of a growing economy.

OIA designated P.Ags and T.Ags are independently assessed for qualification to practice just like engineers and accountants. They are required to conduct their business in an ethical manner. They are technically competent in their claim of knowledge and competency. Claims are supported by keeping up to date on the latest research and trends. Professional and Technical Agrologists understand their industry and each has created a network of individuals who assist and guide them when needed.

Ontario's P.Ags and T.Ags aspire to the highest standards of excellence in their field and boast an impressive list of professional awards, appointments and recognized public contributions to the province. Each day, OIA's Professional and Technical Agrologists dedicate their services to protect the public interest and serve the agriculture, environmental, agri-food and agri-business sectors with the utmost integrity, competency and professionalism.

When you see people with a P.Ag. or a T.Ag. designation you know that they conduct their business in a professional manner under the guidelines of the Profession of Agrology which require: Integrity, Competence and Objectivity. Independent third party oversight adds confidence to users of Agrology services



that they will receive high quality services complying with current legislative and regulatory requirements in an ethical and competent manner.

Why should independent assessment of competency, rooted in formal education, be important? After all, qualification assurance and formal education has been continually challenged within Agrology practice in Ontario. In comparison, in the 1930's, concerns were coming forward about the quality of information being given to farmers in Quebec. The result was the first Agrology Act in any Canadian province; legislation forming the l'Ordre des agronomes du Québec, in 1937. Out west, the need and demand for appropriate science-based extension to farmers increased in the 1940's. It became imperative that the agri-food sector be protected from those who were not trained, educated nor qualified to provide knowledge and sound advice about agriculture production. It was 1946 when the Government of Saskatchewan passed legislation for the creation of Canada's second Institute of Agrologists to be formed in Canada.

What was unique about the Acts in Quebec and Saskatchewan? They were based on a public interest model – founded on values and beliefs. It just made sense having publically accountable and qualified people serving the needs of



the farmer and the needs of the public. Soon after, Alberta, British Columbia and Manitoba passed similar public interest oriented provincial legislation. Other provinces followed suit; however, not in Ontario despite continued concerns about unqualified and unaccountable people selling product and giving recommendations.

Today, we have public values and beliefs driven preferences and demand for credibility. Consumers hold strong views and opinions when it comes to human health, plant and animal health, and the health of ecosystems and the environment. Inevitably, there will be differences of opinion. In agriculture production and environmental stewardship, the OIA realizes that not everyone will be able to agree on what constitutes "acceptable agricultural or stewardship practices." However, social license (believability, credibility, trust) in professions is linked to public accountability. Voluntary qualification to practice Agrology in Ontario means the certification landscape is a bit more complicated and can be confusing. The real purpose of professional practitioner regulation (P.Ag. and T.Ag.) will always be consumer protection. Professional and Technical Agrologists will remain the choice for credibility and trust in the agriculture, environmental stewardship, agri-food and agri-business sectors.

Getting down to biology

Finally there may be a soil test to help you see
your soil the way that your crop's roots see it

BY RALPH PEARCE / CG PRODUCTION EDITOR

Soil health is on everyone's mind these days. Perhaps it's tied to volatility in the commodity markets, or to the risk of consumer and government scrutiny. Or maybe more growers are interested in "doing things right."

No matter the cause, there's a long list of farm professionals welcoming the trend with open arms.

"Ultimately, the soil is the backbone of any farm operation — even if you're producing livestock and you're growing the crops to feed them," says Jack Legg, agronomist and branch manager with SGS Agri-Food Laboratories in Guelph.

"But," Legg adds, "soil is also the easiest to put on the back burner. There are so many operational and management decisions that have to be made every spring and fall that the years can pass by between routine soil sampling."

Legg agrees there are changes coming, particularly with environmental concerns, and he sees it happening quickly, including an emphasis on measuring what's being done on the farm and proving that agriculture is doing things "correctly."

Yet the question remains. How exactly are farmers supposed to show society they're doing a good and responsible job?

NEW PROGRAM

The new SoilOne Report provides an added parameter not found in most current soil tests, which are mostly based on chemical testing and less commonly on physical analyses. The SoilOne Report comes from the Soil Health Lab, a concept developed by Alpha-Agri in collaboration with SGS Lab.

The SoilOne Report adds a biological component to the final results, providing key indicators that create a more complex, multi-layered profile of a grower's soil. Carbon dioxide respiration, potentially mineralizable nitrogen, root health, and organic matter are all included under the biological heading. Additional



The SoilOne Report adds the means to determine biological activity in soil and to relate that to physical and chemical components.

tests for mycorrhizal infection rates, presence of nematodes and pathogenic fungi are also available.

The company says an initial SoilOne test provides a baseline or benchmark on a farm's soil health. Subsequent tests every two to three years will add data on changes in soil quality.

This particular suite of tests was influenced by the Cornell (University) Soil Test, which Legg concedes has been a tough sell for growers, primarily due to its cost. Initially, the Cornell package looked at 70 different soil parameters, then reduced that number to make the test more practical, meaningful, and value-driven for farmers.

With the addition of Christine George, whose background is in microbiology, the development of the biological component has been completed, and the SoilOne Report is now available.

"There have been biological soil tests in recent years, but they're difficult to reproduce," says George, who works in research and development with Alpha-Agri, based in Bluevale, near Wingham, Ont. "We've been looking at the Cornell test and they've done a lot of work determining what tests are reproducible, and can be used as a reference as the years go on. We're taking that and measuring the soil biology and the activity."

Legg adds that with the three components — physical, chemical and biological — any enhancement of one invariably improves the others. If you boost the biology of the soil, it helps with chemical and nutrient-cycling and also helps soil structure.

Most growers, notes Legg, are familiar with the chemical interactions within the soil, just as they are with understanding the need for supplementary phosphorus with a low soil P test. But is there a clear link between poorer bulk density — meaning low porosity and low water infiltration — and the challenge of roots penetrating through some level of compaction?

It's in line with a "total systems" philosophy, where instead of fix-



Ultimately, the soil is the backbone of any farm operation."

— Jack Legg, SGS Agri-Food Laboratories

ing one factor at a time, the focus is on improving overall soil health in order to nurture measureable improvement.

WHAT IT PROVIDES

On its own, the SoilOne Report won't help growers to eclipse the 400-bushels-per-acre mark the first time they use it. Instead, George says the test provides many of the same components as any soil testing package that's currently available. But what's needed is a wider perspective on what this type of soil test can provide.

"Farmers can choose between chemical or physical, or there are the biological tests available now, and those must be requested," she says. But growers also need to understand what they're asking for, and the kind of information the test will yield. "What we're doing with the SoilOne package is we're testing these physical, chemical and biological components, and putting those together into a final grade, so they get weighed against each other. So, how are these physical components affecting the biological, and how are the biological affecting the chemical?"

At \$320 for the combination

biological, chemical and physical report, there is a cost, but if the popular business adage (i.e., that if you can't measure it, you can't manage it) is true of the soil as well, there may be few options.

Certainly, it can be argued that the timing is right for this type of deeper, layered analysis of the soil and its properties. More producers are examining their practices, justifying some while contemplating changes to others. The report establishes a baseline score that marks a starting point with the hope that a grower will track the results of any modifications in on-farm practices, whether that's in three years or four, or longer.

One other important difference with the SoilOne Report is in its collection. Legg notes that with traditional bulk composite collection, soil samples are disturbed by the collection process. The goal with the new testing system is to obtain an undisturbed intact core for measuring bulk density, water infiltration and aggregate stability, among other potential tests.

Providing detailed information is becoming more important as consumers turn their attention to how crops are grown, including environmental issues such as runoff.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34

The value of soil testing

Which is more important: where you go, or how you get there?

In agriculture, there's the unmistakable allure of newer technology, with some growers upgrading every few years while others make do with what they have. The same may be said about soil health tests: some will argue that testing must be done in the fall, to determine what the crop has used in the previous growing season. Others make the case for spring testing to determine the nutrients that pending crops have available.

Yet most soil health experts and lab managers want only one thing: i.e. for farmers to test their soils on a regular basis. Whether it's in spring or fall isn't as important as being consistent and just "doing it."

That's the message that Adam Hayes, soil management specialist for field crops with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA), wants to convey. He maintains that it doesn't matter what soil health test you may take, whether it is a soil basic organic matter test or a comprehensive package of soil health indicators, there is still a lot of information to be gleaned.

"It is important to take the results from whatever the source, combine it with your knowledge of the field and your agronomist's expertise to determine how to maintain or improve the field's soil health," says Hayes. "A simple organic matter test can tell a lot about the health of a soil — if it's low, nutrient cycling, water-holding capacity and yields will be reduced."

A low aggregate stability score for a soil means that a small clump of soil will fall apart into individual soil particles very easily, and that soil will be more prone to wind and water erosion. It will also crust more easily, sealing off the soil surface so critical rains run off instead of infiltrating the soil. Soil structure will likely be poorer reducing the number of pores in the soil, making root growth difficult.

A high potentially mineralizable nitrogen level in the soil is an indicator of higher biological activity and more nitrogen cycling in the soil. The carbon dioxide respiration indicator measures the activity of the soil biology. Higher numbers indicate more activity. Higher soil biological activity means more nutrient cycling, more crop residue breakdown and more release of the "glues" that help form soil aggregates.

If one or more indicators are low or the overall soil health is low then a change in soil management practices may be necessary to improve soil health.

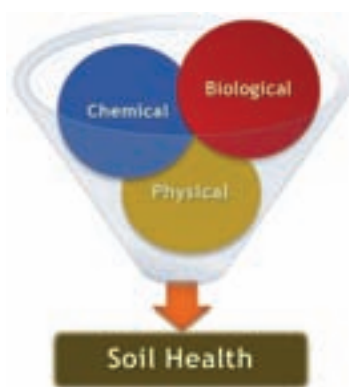
How are these physical components affecting the biological, and how are the biological affecting the chemical?"

— Christine George, Alpha-Agri

"The argument could arise that if you're taking a single core from your field, how representative is that?" asks Legg, adding that growers have to balance sampling intensity with cost and management practicality. "To best get around that, since all growers know their best- and worst-performing areas in their field, this could be a good comparison, not just from now to the future, but good versus poor production in the field."

CHANGES IN ATTITUDE

Legg and George agree there's still some inertia to overcome in convincing growers of the value: soil testing remains a lower priority, with only about 25 per cent of growers performing soil tests as recommended every three years. But the agri-food landscape is changing rapidly, and growers are facing another of these "crossroads" that are talked about at meetings and trade shows. On one side of the farm, there are the positive programs such as the 4R Stewardship concept and environmental farm plans.



The SoilOne Report adds a biological component to soil tests, with the understanding that all three are linked.

USED WITH PERMISSION OF ALPHA-AGRI

On the other side is the realization that there are more government restrictions and guidelines that are either in place or are in development, at the insistence of an increasingly demanding base of urban consumers.

Whether farmers are willing to accept these realities or use them as part of their exit strategy is a concern, yet it's also becoming increasingly irrelevant. Traceability and all of its components — environmental, food-borne issues and soil health/sustainability — are seeing some level of manipulation, monitoring or dictating from non-farming interests. The SoilOne Report could be one tool that helps foster a greater level of accountability.

"That's an important realization that I think more growers are recognizing — that the consumer is dictating what they want to buy," says Legg. "That means the retailers have to provide that product and, ultimately, at the farm level, growers should recognize it as an opportunity. If you're the first grower doing it, you're the first guy in line to sell to the big retailers or exact a premium for that product."

IN AN IDEAL WORLD...

It's an ongoing challenge, and there will be growers who refuse to comply with testing and the move towards sustainability or traceability. Yet a shift in attitude is often all it takes.

Arnold Wiegiersma, principal with Alpha-Agri, acknowledges the difficulty with trying to convince growers that accountability has a value, especially in a time of low commodity prices, high land values and increasing rents.

"But I did have a young farmer tell me, 'In 20 or 30 years when I sell my farm, if I control the his-

tory, not just chemically with what I've done and what I've put on, but what I've done to maintain *this* line, my farm has value at the point of sale," says Wiegiersma. "Because I've done everything to show you that I've managed it well for 20 years.' And he saw it as an asset."

Another shift in attitude may come from what qualifies as "success" on the farm. Legg states that yield is the current yardstick on whether a farmer has had a good year, and that makes sense given that yield drives the economics in farming.

"But I think we're due to start looking at quality, where maybe 170 bushels of a *quality* crop is better than 225," he says, acknowledging the challenge of finding quality-based end-users in a least-cost buying environment.

Or maybe quality will mean the crop is less prone to disease or insect infestations, so that we're minimizing risk by not just pushing the bushels but also by pushing the quality, Legg says. And something like a SoilOne Report should help the grower manage overall quality and health, he believes.

"And resistance to other things that we may not be able to control — like weather — but being able to control the health of your soil or at least direct the health of your soil, into helping your plant become more resilient to pests or drought or excessive moisture," adds George. "If our soil is able to deal with those potentially catastrophic events, then it may not be catastrophic for the crop." **CG**

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#PEST PATROL

with Mike Cowbrough, OMAFRA

Is there anything we can do about field horsetail?

I get asked about field horsetail management more than any other weed, and it's the one that I have the least amount of effective solutions for. Sure, you can get reasonably good top-growth control with the right herbicide, but the success is short-lived due to field horsetail's tenacity. I often joke that the best way to get rid of this weed is with a backhoe, since that is what you'll need to exhaust its massive root system. One Ontario farmer observed field horsetail rhizomes at a depth of six metres when digging a water reservoir (*Cody and Wagner, 1980*).

POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES: Like most weedy plants, there are alleged "medicinal" uses to treat hair loss, diabetes and arthritis. The above-ground horsetails can also take up and deposit silica in the walls of their epidermal cells, which is why they have been used to scour pots and tools (*Cody and Wagner, 1980*).

POISONOUS: Field horsetail contains thiaminase, an enzyme which will cause thiamine deficiency in horses. The side effects include weakness, a rapid pulse and muscular exhaustion (*Kingsbury, 1964*). A 1952 case study demonstrated that two of three horses that had contracted poisoning from horsetail responded favourably to injections of thiamine hydrochloride. However, the other horse, who for 35 days ate a ration consisting solely of hay contaminated with horsetail, did not respond to treatment (*Henderson, 1952*). This weed is rarely lethal to cattle (*Kingsbury, 1964*), most likely because thiamine can be produced in the rumen.

CROP YIELD LOSSES: Very little data exists on yield losses from field horsetail competition. Corn silage yields in Quebec were reduced by 95 per cent when field horsetail, at a density of 1.6 million shoots per acre, was uncontrolled all season (*Coutier and Watson, 1979*). Yet an Ontario study stated that "Field horsetail was not a serious competitor with corn" since corn grain yield was only reduced once (by 13 per cent) in four experiments when left uncontrolled (*Wagner, 1980*). However, the Wagner study provides no information as to the density of field horsetail in each of the experiments and one would assume that this yield loss relationship is density dependent. An Alberta study found barley yields were unaffected by field horsetail densities of 200,000 shoots per acre (*Hoyt and Carder, 1962*).

TILLAGE: Since the root system of field horsetail extends far below any tillage implement, tillage will only temporarily control this weed. However, when tillage is removed from a cropping system, field horsetail will dominate in the areas where it exists (*Légère and Samson, 2004*). Plowing in late autumn or early spring has been more effective than early autumn plowing (*Mukula, 1966*).

TIMING OF HERBICIDE APPLICATIONS: Control of field horsetail can be variable even when an effective active ingredient like MCPA is used. More consistent control of field horsetail top-growth is achieved when applications are delayed until the vegetative shoots of the plant are fully developed. A British study reported successful shoot kill when growth-regulating herbicides (e.g., MCPA, 2,4-D) had been applied to vegetative shoots once they had reached 25 cm in height (*Holly, 1953*). More recently, herbicide efficacy studies on field horsetail that have been conducted by the University of Guelph's Ridgetown campus point to better herbicide performance if applications are made when the majority of field horsetail shoots are 20 cm or more in height.



Should we be optimistic? Above, we see reasonably good top growth control of field horsetail with one of nine different treatments being evaluated in 2016 (left) compared to un-sprayed check (right). I'll keep you updated if there is anything worth noting. **CG**



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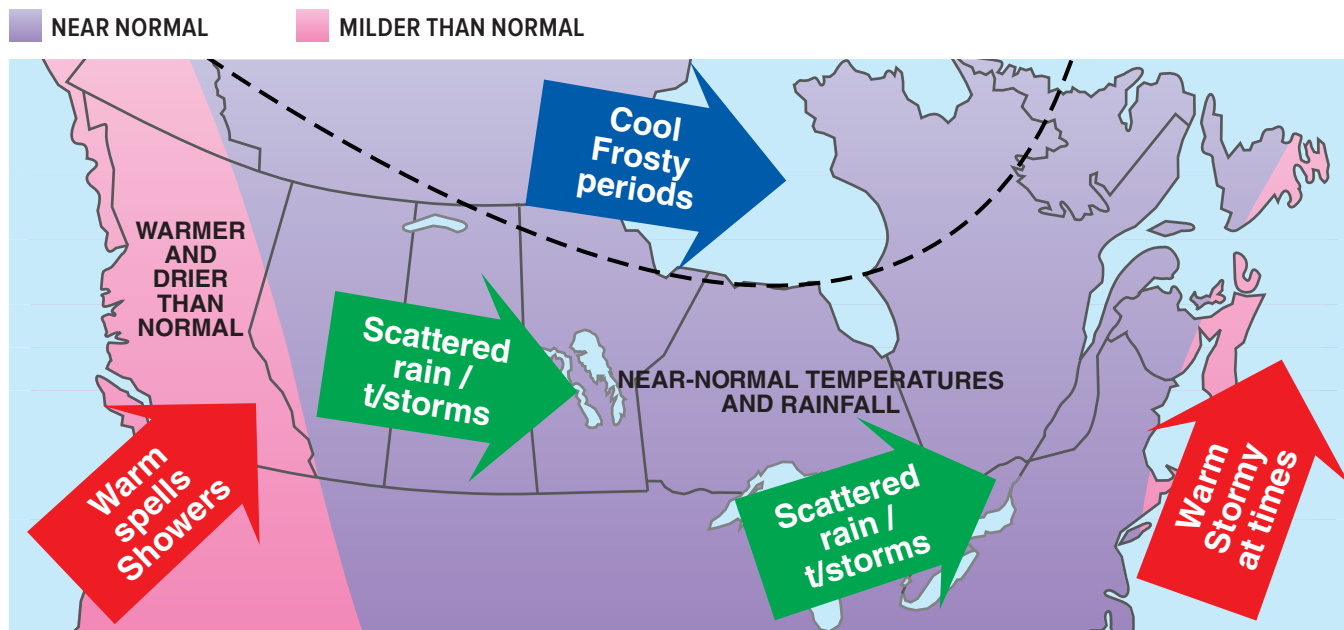


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Ontario

- **Aug. 7-13:** Mostly settled this week apart from scattered thunderstorms or showers, heavier here and there. Temperatures often in the 20s. Cooler and blustery north with occasional rain.
- **Aug. 14-20:** Comfortable temperatures prevail under generally sunny skies but look for occasional showers or rain on a couple of warmer, more humid days. Brisk winds at times.
- **Aug. 21-27:** Passing showers or thunderstorms occur on a couple of occasions, chance heavy in some localities, otherwise on sunny days expect comfortable temperatures in the 20s.
- **Aug. 28-Sept. 3:** Generally sunny with seasonable temperatures although scattered heavier showers or thunderstorms on two or three days. Cooler nights drop lows to near zero north.
- **Sept. 4-10:** Rain develops on two or three days this week with a chance of thunderstorms. On fair days look for temperatures in the 20s, otherwise teens with some frost central and northern areas.

Quebec

- **Aug. 7-13:** Pleasant weather on most days this week despite heavier showers or thunderstorms in a few locations. Temperatures near normal with a few warmer, humid days.
- **Aug. 14-20:** Highs reach the comfortable 20s on many days under sunshine. However, expect shower or thunderstorm activity two or three times this week, possibly heavy in a few areas.
- **Aug. 21-27:** Seasonable to warm temperatures but with a few cooler nights. Sunny skies interchange

with rain or thunderstorms, possibly heavy in places. Cooler, showery northern areas.

- **Aug 28-Sept. 3:** Frost in many central and northern regions on a couple of nights with occasional rain. Seasonable south with cooler nights. Sunshine alternates with showers or thunderstorms.
- **Sept. 4-10:** Warm to seasonable south with brisk winds and some rain or showers on a couple of days, chance heavy in places. Seasonable to cooler north with frosty nights and showers.

Atlantic provinces

- **Aug. 7-13:** Mostly sunny and seasonable to warm with a few showers. Expect hotter conditions in the west with some thunderstorm activity. Coastal fog and cooler on the coasts and far north.
- **Aug. 14-20:** Generally sunny this week despite scattered showers and gusty winds mostly in eastern regions. Seasonable to warm. Scattered thunderstorm activity west on a couple of days.
- **Aug. 21-27:** Storms threaten along the seaboard and east on a couple of days, otherwise look for pleasant, sunny and warm weather. Cooler north with some rain.
- **Aug. 28-Sept. 3:** Changeable as fair weather days interchange with rain and blustery winds. Fluctuating temperatures with cooler nights. Some lows near zero far north.
- **Sept. 4-10:** Unsettled on a few days this week with occasional rain and blustery winds. On fair days, warm settled conditions prevail but with patchy frost New Brunswick and north.

National highlights

**August 7 to
September 10, 2016**

Pleasant weather is expected to close out the late summer season across the country. Warm temperatures will dominate British Columbia and be accompanied by drier-than-usual conditions. Some of the warm air will work its way eastward across Canada from time to time, although this warmth will be offset by a few cooler periods, resulting in near-normal readings from the Prairies eastward to the Atlantic provinces. Scattered rain and thunderstorms should bring near-normal rainfall to most regions. In Atlantic Canada, generally settled conditions will be interrupted occasionally by storminess as a few weather disturbances or tropical storms travel up the Atlantic Seaboard.

Prepared by meteorologist Larry Romaniuk of Weatherite Services. Forecasts should be 80 per cent accurate for your area; expect variations by a day or two due to changeable speed of weather systems.



SOIL CONSERVATION COUNCIL OF CANADA CONSEIL CANADIEN DE CONSERVATION DES SOLS

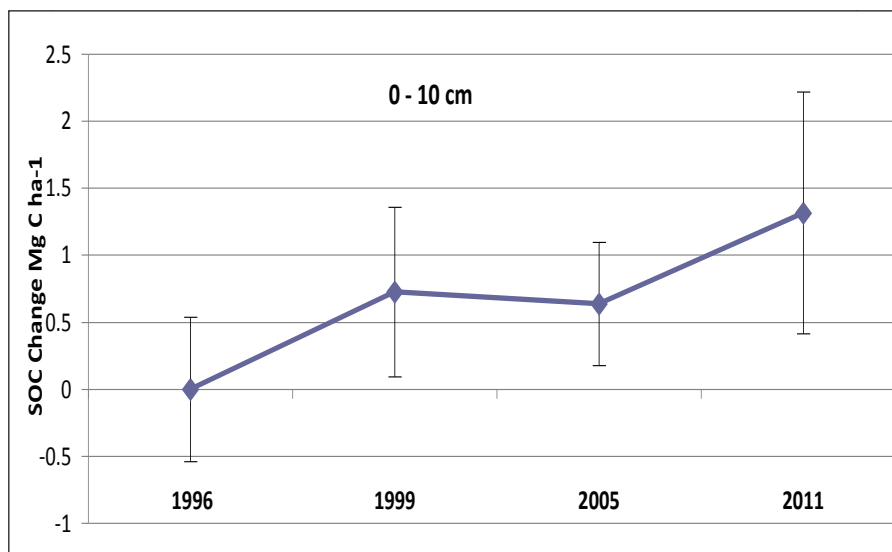
*The face and voice of soil conservation in Canada
Le visage et la voix de la conservation des sols au Canada*

Greenhouse gas reduction – agriculture's role

Science tells us that efficient, effective and profitable crop production practices that increase soil organic matter can help Canada reduce carbon dioxide (CO₂) greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Canada's soil resource can capture and store significant amounts of carbon from the atmosphere. This gives the Government of Canada an additional option in the overall strategy to meet our national goals.

The Prairie Soil Carbon Balance (PSCB), a comprehensive, 14-year study in 137 Saskatchewan fields concluded that farmers who use no-till, direct-seeding practices are contributing to the reduction of GHG emissions through the sequestration of soil organic carbon (SOC) in their fields. The Changes in SOC chart shows the dramatic and rapid increases in soil carbon that came with direct-seeding. The PSCB project is the first long-term study in North America which shows that soil carbon is increasing in commercial farm fields under direct-seeding cropping systems. The average increase was 0.23 Mg C/ha/yr (or up to 0.38 ton CO₂/ac/yr). In Saskatchewan alone producers have adopted no-till, direct-seeding practices on more than 23 million acres of farmland across the province. Farmers know the benefits of no-till to soil health, crop productivity, and the sustainability of cropping systems; these benefits are well researched and documented.

The PSCB project is a joint initiative of the Saskatchewan Soil Conservation



Source: *Prairie Soil Carbon Balance Project – Summary*, Figure 11: Changes in Soil Organic Carbon under direct-seeding (2011 sampled sites only) averaged across all Level 1 and Level 2 sites (direct-seeded only) from 1996-2011, for the 0-10 cm depth (n=80; statistics show 95% confidence interval for mean SOC change).

Association (SSCA) and Saskatchewan Pulse Growers (SPG), with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) scientists conducting the research (visit www.ssca.ca for the full report).

Canada recently set a target to reduce GHG emissions by 30 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030. The Federal Government and a number of Canadian provinces are establishing legislation and regulations that will allow for the development of GHG emission reduction programs. It is anticipated that a carbon tax and/or carbon offset trading systems will be components of the reduction effort. British Columbia, Quebec, Alberta and most recently

Canada recently set a target to reduce GHG emissions by 30 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030.

Ontario, have or are moving toward carbon reduction programs.

The Soil Conservation Council of Canada (SCCC) believes it is reasonable that Canadian farmers who are removing GHG emissions from the atmosphere through carbon sequestration or capture should be fairly compensated. Further, SCCC supports participation of farmers in the development of transparent systems to validate, aggregate and deliver offsets claimed for direct-seeded land.

Check your entitlement at the door

Unless you are a minor or a dependent, your parents are not obligated to leave you anything, whether you are male or female or farming or not. Inheritance is a gift, not something to which you are entitled.

Yet siblings and parents also have to respect the contribution of the next-generation farmer.

It's very important that everyone in the family knows what their parents' wishes are and what's going to happen according to their wills.

"Tell them how this will build and improve on a family legacy," says Cedric MacLeod of MacLeod Agronomics in New Brunswick. "The family needs to know that their farm is a foundation."

Jim Snyder, national director for agricultural practice development with BDO Canada, says parental leadership and family communication are imperative to a healthy outcome of estate planning and farm succession. He uses the example of a farm family that recently lost their mother. The father is in good health in his mid-'70s and made it very clear to his four children that his assets will be distributed equally. Each child will get a farm when he passes.

The father also emphatically told his two sons that the reason their two sisters spent more time doing housework was because he had assigned them that responsibility and that their contribution was every bit as valuable as theirs, just as their recently deceased mother's contribution had been equal and sometimes greater than his. "That ended the conversation and the kids really do love and respect each other," says Snyder.

Other times the absence of gratitude and respect drives further problems. Snyder knows of a very successful operation with more than enough assets and cash flow to support all family members and employees in a lush lifestyle. Yet, the two brothers are determined to make sure their sister inherits no shares in the farm, as well as not keeping the ones she already owns.

Cleaning up sweat equity

It used to show you were committed to farming. Now it's a dangerous source of controversy on more Canadian farms

BY MAGGIE VAN CAMP / CG SENIOR EDITOR

At his financial office in Stettler, Alta., Peter Boys reaches for stark language to make his point. "Slavery is alive and well on farms in the Prairies," Boys says.

Boys is referring to the practice of farmers not paying equitable wages to their children working on their farms, often under the promise of future ownership... someday.

Sometimes that day never comes.

Almost every farm adviser knows a case where a 60-year-old farmer has a 40-year-old son farming with him, and neither can be sure if their 80-year-old father/grandfather is going to leave them ownership of the farm in their will. Not only that, but for decade after decade, as well, the son and grandson got paid minimally (to avoid paying income tax).

Now, it turns out the value of the farm has escalated, and the non-farming members of the family are getting agitated about inheritance equality.

But where will the 60-year-old son be if he doesn't inherit the farm? And can there be any hope for a farm in the future of the 40-year old grandson, already married with two kids?

Recently, Boys had a client from a very successful farm who was paying his 23-year-old son minimum wage, stringing him along. Boys' advice was to pay the younger generation a reasonable wage, equivalent to the jobs the son might get locally off the farm. "They need to match what the other businesses are paying for day labour in the area or he'll be gone," Boys warns.

In this case, Boys also convinced the older generation to start giving the younger generation some ownership. It's an imperative step in his view. Being a shareholder, even a minor one, or helping them buy a first quarter allows the next generation to contribute to and participate in any future increase in value. More importantly, it gives

them hard equity, which in turn gives them a launching pad for financing.

There's also another important sub-text to such a conversation, showing the next generation that the parents respect their contribution, and showing them how important they are to the success of the farm. The next generation also gets a lesson in how important the farm is to their parents; it's the family legacy.

By paying the next generation a living wage and giving them a piece of the farm, the parents are beginning to shift the conversation to one between adults instead of parent and child. "The son didn't know where he stood," says Boys.

Manitoba-based farm family coach and adviser Elaine Froese thinks the problem is throughout Canada and much more common than we'd like to think. She is currently dealing with a similar case in Ontario, where a client's parents think \$1,000 per month is fair compensation. The son's working wife is ready to leave the marriage in frustration.

"Many farmers do not cash flow enough money for labour compensation, so I think they use the promise of 'sweat equity' to keep labour on the farm, and sometimes they forget (the promise of sweat equity)," says Froese.

On the other hand, Froese has seen gross overcompensation. She knows parents who want to give a multi-million dollar farm to one child just because he worked on the farm since school. This leaves nothing for the other children, and little for the parents to retire on.

Most standard wills leave instructions to pay off any debt and taxes and then split the remaining estate equally among the children, says Boys. In this case, he says parents who want to succeed the farm to one child and want to be somewhat equal to the other children have only a couple of options: The succeeding farmer has to remortgage to buy out the other siblings, or the parents need a large

separate savings, investments or joint-last-to-die life insurance policy to divide among them.

Yet it's also important to recognize that if the farm sells at the time of death, there's often a huge tax bill to pay. And also that whether it's a small or large farm, taking away a chunk of equity can damage the operation's viability.

Having to repurchase land that was already part of the farm operation can be an enormous challenge, says Boys.

And that's in a relatively civilized situation, which isn't always the case.

And if the mess does end up in court, one of the areas of potentially heated dispute is the valuation of sweat equity. In the precedent-setting Mountain versus Mountain case, a father verbally promised the son the classic "Someday this will all be yours." However, the will said something else and it took hundreds of thousands of dollars, a judge that considered sweat equity, and an appeal before the son got to keep the farm he had worked on all his life.

It was a very real, very rural mess that took place in bucolic Cheltenham, Ont. The reality is that it can happen anywhere and to any family.

The problem with these sweat equity understandings is they're seldom in writing, so it becomes the parents' responsibility to correct this in some form of differential distribution at transition.

"If it is not written down, it didn't happen," says Cedric MacLeod, who operates MacLeod Agroeconomics and farms in New Brunswick.

A written shareholders' agreement is a good place to start, including how dividends are to be

WESA, what?

A few years ago, after over 30 years of planning, the estate laws of British Columbia received a major overhaul via a new statute called the Wills, Estates and Succession Act (WESA). It replaced and combined several previous stand-alone estate laws.

Basically this law now requires that the proceeds of an estate be distributed equally, which can be problematic if one child is receiving more or if one child is expecting more in consideration of sweat equity.

It's predicted the definition of the spouse and the powers of the court to rectify and determine a document to be a valid will may potentially result in more litigation. Overall, it's generally quite favourable for persons who have been disinherited.

Contesting a will

Swarms of siblings, cousins, uncles, aunts, estranged, second and common-in-law spouses fighting over farm assets... it's easy to imagine the nightmare.

In the middle is a family farm being torn apart, neglected, sued and publicly sullied. The relationships — the very best part of a family working together — are beaten to a pulpy mess by greed, stupidity, poor communication and not writing things down.

As poignant as such cases seem, contesting a will isn't as easy or as successful as you might think. It's quite a process. At its core it means applying to the appropriate court to have a will struck down as invalid. The case has to be proven with sufficient relevant evidence.

Typically, wills are contested successfully if it can be proven one of three things was wrong. There was undue influence; the will was written with lack of mental capacity; or the will document itself has problems such as improper witnessing, lack of signature, or other formalities not observed.

"Dependent relief" is something different and refers to an application by a spouse or child to get a larger share of an estate under a valid will. The will itself would still stand, but the court is asked to give a larger portion of the estate to someone in the family.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 42

If it weren't for the messages from some of the leaders I connected with, I wouldn't have this clear vision nor the motivation to go after it. I can't thank you enough for that.

— Jen C., Ontario, AWC Delegate

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What's sweat worth these days?

"Sweat equity is worth exactly what you paid for it," says Jim Snyder, national director for agricultural practice development with BDO Canada.

In other words, if you didn't get paid for your efforts in dollars or assets, you didn't get paid at all.

It comes down to separating ownership from management. "If we can compensate each other based on contribution of labour and performance, it avoids so many other issues," says Snyder.

If you bring skills and knowledge to the farm, you should be paid correspondingly, agrees Cedric MacLeod of MacLeod Agronomics in New Brunswick.

Another way to look at it is earning capacity. Based on a 20 per cent contribution margin, if the additional new generation expects to be paid \$50,000 a year, they have to generate \$250,000 additional revenues to the farm.

We must track the value of what everyone brings to the farm, and pay them accordingly, says MacLeod.

Beyond straight wages, sweat equity actually has another component of value. This is the contribution of the on-farm family member to increasing the value of the business. If the family member enhances the farm's viability or brings business skills that make it more efficient or profitable, this needs to be recognized, which then puts a venture-capital twist on sweat equity.

"Treating unequals equally may be the most unfair thing you can do," says David Goeller, a transition specialist with the department of agriculture economics at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in his paper, *Putting a Value on Sweat Equity* (available by searching at www.extension.iastate.edu).

To value sweat equity, Goeller suggests you set a farm value at the point in time when your child came back to farm and equally divide that number by the number of heirs. Then

you need to figure out the net worth increase since that point in time.

Next comes the more subjective part: Goeller says you need to estimate a percentage for how much of that increase was due to the parents' and how much was due to the successor's contributions. This can get complicated because you need to articulate and evaluate your reasoning at the time of expansion. Did the farm buy the land next door because the farm was succeeding? Would they have bought or sold quota if the situation was different?

Next Goeller recommends dividing the parents' portion of the increase by the number of heirs and adding it to the first-step, pre-successor point of value you established earlier.

You might need to consider if the farming child or children received market-value wages for the time they've spent working on farm. You also might want to balance that with what the other child or children receive during the parents' lifetime, such as university tuition, school room and board, or maybe even a vehicle or a house in town.

John Baker, lawyer and founder of Iowa's Beginning Farmer Centre created a more detailed approach to valuing sweat equity. The centre conducts programs for farmers who want to transition their farm business to the next generation or people who want to get into farming.

Baker's spreadsheet is a fill-in-the-blank approach that establishes credits for many details, including inputs, liabilities, breeding stock and loan payments. On another sheet it has a valuation for elder care and property maintenance, time investments that are often overlooked and not valued in dollars yet they can be big factors in farm transfers and estates. His detailed fill-in-the-blank asset statement will help everyone understand net worth at various age stages.

It's posted on www.country-guide.ca for your use.

distributed. "If it's a profitable business, be like every other successful business. Take out some funds to invest in a nest egg," says MacLeod. "Don't be afraid to pay income taxes."

In a typical scenario, the older generation came home after college, they either inherited or paid minimal amounts for the farm, and then worked for years, taking out only small personal draws. Now closing in on retirement, they have no off-farm investments, so they feel they need to get paid today's full market value for the farm in order to fund their future.

"Don't bury it all in the farm," suggests MacLeod. "Set some aside for retirement."

THE MESSAGE IS CLEAR

The bigger message is clear. If farmers don't get their wishes and business strategies organized and written down, these problems are just going to continue to get larger and messier.

This is for a number of reasons. Not only are farm assets getting bigger and more valuable, but farm businesses are also getting more complicated and more people are involved.

The "equal versus fair" problem has become a looming issue as farmland values in many parts of Canada have skyrocketed well beyond the productive capacity of the land to pay for itself.

Moreover, the business and technical skills needed to manage farms today have gotten more demanding and the opportunity costs, risks and potential losses more significant.

Not only are estates getting bigger, matrimony, gender equality and the very definition of family has changed. Legal studies show an explosion in cases involving blended, complex or fractured families, where a spouse has remarried or entered into a new common-law relationship and may have children from multiple relationships.

To head off such litigation, familial relationships must be considered in estate and business planning. Parents need to communicate to the whole family so everyone knows ahead of time what's involved with the farm business and what's in their wills.

And they mustn't use it as a threat or a carrot.

And put it in writing. Otherwise, conflicts can lead to failed businesses, broken relationships, lawsuits, and lingering anger, Boys says, warning, "The bigger the dollars get, the bigger the hogs get." **CG**

Sweaty situations and solutions

More and more, it can make sense to sell land and get paid partly in labour

"Timing is everything," says Robin-Lee Norris, partner with Miller Thomson LLP in Guelph, Ont.

If the seller is flexible and recognizes the contribution the buyers have made or will make through their labour, acquiring ownership of land can be accomplished over time, and a sweat equity deal can be negotiated as part of a purchase involving a cash down payment.

Such transactions are often a combination of purchase agreement and shareholder agreement. "It is going to become more and more common for aging farmers," says Norris. "It will appeal to farmers who are attached to the land and want it to stay productive farmland. With startup costs so high, it may be the only way we are going to be able to transfer many farms to the next generation."

Another way to make a sweat equity agreement is by stating (in a written legal document) that the older generation will give a small percentage of ownership of the farm for every year the younger generation works (one to five per cent is common), in addition to wages for working on the farm. The next generation could become full owners over a set timeframe, or inherit the remaining interest when the older generation dies. Potentially, they could also buy the remaining interest or decide not to continue and cash out the value of their accumulated shares, or use that accumulated equity to leverage further expansion.


Sometimes in wills, someone will inherit an asset because of the work done over the years on the farm. As well, one child may be gifted a farm asset on the basis of paying the other children out over time, and that can accomplish something similar. For example, the will can give the beneficiary four or five years to earn enough to buy the others out.

With corporations, alternatively, sweat equity

can be transferred for shares in an ongoing basis when the older generation is still alive and involved in the operation. Basically the older generation does an estate freeze on their farming corporation where they freeze the value of their common shares and exchange them for special shares worth a fixed amount. The parents redeem those shares over time for their retirement income, and the corporation issues new common shares to the successors, who would then accrue all the future growth.

When the parents die, a timing clause in a shareholders' agreement is triggered. This avoids putting the farming children in a tight financial spot due to the non-farming children calling for payment or redemption of their inherited shares right away. Also, they can't redeem them all at once so the farming children have the opportunity to pay out their non-farming children over time.

Concludes Norris, "We are going to have to get truly creative and look at all of these options going forward."



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STRATEGIC. BUSINESS. THINKING.

When the fuse is too short

“My family is all a bit hot-headed. I am like my father and grandfather. We get angry quickly, but we cool down fast. The problem is that when I’m angry, I don’t really think about what I’m saying or doing.”

Strong emotions, whether positive or negative, significantly affect our judgment. They impair our ability to make good decisions, to be creative, and to find solutions. However, some people’s hot-tempered and impulsive nature goes further and can have destructive consequences for themselves and those close to them.

When in a state of anger, they will say or do things that cause long-term harm to others. People with hot tempers often regret their actions and words, but they can’t fix damage that is done, even if they work hard to repair their relationships.

Moreover, uncontrolled anger can jeopardize your credibility as a leader, and you will lose the trust and respect of your employees. People will see you as a threat, and nobody performs well under those circumstances. Beyond that, frequent outbursts are bad for your health. One study found that people who get angry regularly are more likely to suffer from coronary heart disease, eating disorders and obesity. Research has also found a correlation between anger and premature death. Further studies have suggested a link between anger and conditions such as anxiety and depression.

Hot tempers stem partly from nurture and partly from nature. Some people are born with a hot temperament, while others do not have effective role models teaching them how to manage anger. However, there is good news: Anger management is something an individual can learn. Moreover, there is huge R.O.I. to learning to control your anger, with payoffs in money, well-being, and relationships.

People with short fuses have quick reactions. However, except in cases of severe mental illness or dementia, individuals are always responsible for their actions, reactions and words. While we have limited influence on people and events, our reactions to them are totally our own.

For example, let’s say it rains on the hay. You can mow it or not, but one thing is sure: You cannot influence the weather. Do you want to cry, swear, or have a tantrum? For how long? An hour, a day, a week, a month, or all year long?

It’s up to you to decide. So when you are angry for all kinds of “good reasons,” go to the mirror, look yourself right in the eye, and ask:

- How much time do I want to invest in this issue?
- How much time do I want to lose to anger?
- How many lives around me do I want to poison?

Clients often tell me in coaching sessions: “Sometimes I feel great when I lose my temper, and then after a while I regret it.” This is because losing your temper does relieve tension in your body. In the short term, you might feel a release. However, the negative consequences are severe.

How can you find a more constructive way to manage your temper? Here are some tips:

- Anticipate a trigger and prepare for it. Imagine you are reacting calmly when faced with a person or event. Mental imagery can prevent angry outbursts because you can prepare yourself for a more appropriate reaction.
- Recognize the precursors to anger. You must be aware of your anger meter. When it rises, give yourself some space and quiet.
- Recognize your areas of vulnerability. We all have subjects or people that make us touchy. Avoid relationships with people you don’t like and avoid discussions on subjects you consider delicate.

- Take a momentary retreat. Learn to step back and ask for a time out when you feel too emotional to carry on a discussion. A 20-minute break can be enough to calm yourself down.
- Close your office door or find a quiet space, and meditate for five minutes.
- Exercise regularly. It helps you relax in tense situations. Go for a walk or a short jog or stretch. Do this whenever you start to feel upset.
- Learn to be assertive. Remember, the word is “assertive,” not “aggressive.” When you’re aggressive, you focus on winning. You care little for others’ feelings, rights, and needs. When you’re assertive, you focus on balance. You’re honest about what you want and you respect the needs of others. Learn to express what you want and don’t want before you get upset.
- Let it go. Choose your battles. Life is too short to be upset all the time.
- Hire a coach. If managing your anger is a problem, invest in yourself. Prevention costs less than repair.

Finally, remember that anger has real power to take your intelligence away from you. How many times a day are you willing to be less intelligent? **CG**



Pierrette Desrosiers, MPS, CRHA is a work psychologist, professional speaker, coach and author who specializes in the agricultural industry. She comes from a family of farmers and she and her husband have farmed for more than 25 years. Contact her at: pierrette@pierrettedesrosiers.com. www.pierrettedesrosiers.com



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Economic Concerns about GM Alfalfa in Canada

By Suzanne Armstrong

The Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario has long taken an attitude of “proceed but with caution” toward the introduction and use of genetic modification (GM) into agricultural crops. Our approach has been to weigh the merits and risks of each new modification. Over the past few decades genetically modified seeds have become a major part of the farming industry. These seeds have helped to produce higher yields and better plant health. Although the benefits of GM seeds are great, there is still call to use discernment when assessing their value in certain crops. The merits outweigh the concerns for many annual GM varieties, but this is not the case with GM alfalfa. The economic risks posed by introducing genetically modified alfalfa into Canada are too great for both conventional and organic farmers.

Alfalfa is widely used in Ontario and in Canada. Farmers use alfalfa as a forage crop (including for beef and dairy cattle) and for soil improvement. Because alfalfa is a perennial crop pollinated by bees, there is increased risk of unintentional spreading or contamination of non-GM alfalfa with the GM traits. The presence of wild strains of alfalfa also increases this risk. Because of this biological risk of spreading, its use poses significant economic risks for farmers who need to produce



GM free products to meet consumer demand at home and abroad.

Many consumers want the freedom in the market place to choose what they are eating and how it is produced. This is no less the case with genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Although genetically modified alfalfa has been deemed safe by Health Canada, consumers still want the freedom to choose. Some export markets, for example, demand GMO free products, and there is significant consumer demand at home for GMO free and organic products.

Because GMOs are not permitted within Canadian Organic Standards, unintended contamination of alfalfa on organic farms would cause significant problems and loss of the organic premiums for those farmers. This would be detrimental to an industry that is working to expand. At the moment there is significant domestic market demand for organic, especially for organic milk and dairy products. The sector is already challenged in meeting that demand. Because

alfalfa is broadly used the potential implications for organic farming are widespread. For conventional farmers also, many export markets do not allow genetic modification, and unintended contamination could restrict export opportunities for alfalfa-related products.

Beyond these risks, the glyphosate-resistant trait provides little benefit since hay production in Ontario is primarily done in a poly-culture fashion where alfalfa is planted with grasses and clovers. A viable coexistence plan to protect against contamination between GM and non-GM alfalfa, and authority to enforce such a plan, does not yet exist in Canada. Until either market acceptance locally and globally changes, or a suitable coexistence plan can be developed and enforced, the risks of introducing GM alfalfa into Canada are too great. We have therefore petitioned our government to ban the use of GM alfalfa for the time being until suitable means can be provided to protect farmers from any unintentional spread, and its economic consequences.

A professional organization of entrepreneurial farming families

Get the message right

Blame email and social media. They're making it easier than ever to say exactly the wrong thing

For farmers today, the ability to write clearly is more important than ever. Whether it's writing Facebook posts to attract customers, blog posts to educate the public, a business proposal for potential partners, or position statements on behalf of a board of directors, being able to express your ideas coherently is an invaluable tool.

And it can be even more than that, especially since emails and other e-posts are so notoriously easy to misinterpret.

Recently I read a post on Facebook, written by a dairy farmer who wanted to share the realities of modern farm life with a group whose members are interested in food. In this post, the farmer explained that he'd had to dump the morning's milking because milk from a cow being treated with antibiotics had accidentally gone into the bulk tank.

The farmer thought he was helping consumers see

how today's dairy producers bend over backwards to only ship the very best and very safest milk.

Some readers, however, thought they detected an angry tone in his email, which meant that they were taking away the very different message that farmers think food safety is getting in the way of their profitability.

Today, such miscommunication can go from bad to absolutely horrible in an instant. A few clicks of the "share" button is all it takes for your post to be read by people around the world.

And yet, farmers can't sit on the sidelines, stopping their communication efforts because of the potential dangers. Getting your point across via effective communication is essential these days.

So the question is: Is your writing hitting its mark?

And the answer to that question starts by asking two others: Do you know your target audience? And do you know what you want to accomplish?

For advice on how to write effectively and to ensure that our writing is on target, I turned to Susan Crossman, a Toronto writing coach and professional writer with 30 years experience.

First off, Crossman dispels the myth that not everyone can write, although some people do find the writing process intimidating. "They may have been told by their fourth grade teacher that they weren't good at writing and that has stuck with them. The truth," she says, "is that there is always more to learn. We are all on a continuum."

Next, Crossman emphasizes the importance of being authentic in your writing. "Honesty is key," she says.

To make the writing process go more smoothly, Crossman suggests you follow these steps before your fingers touch the keyboard.

Start by setting your goals, she says. "You need to have a clear idea of what you want this piece to do for you." Do you want it to confirm your standing as an expert, influence readers to take action, inform people about something important, promote a product, or simply give yourself a chance to vent?

By clarifying the purpose of your document, you'll stay focused. This in turn will give your writing more impact, she continues. "You'll avoid wandering into irrelevant territory that might confuse or bore your audience."

Next, think about your target audience. Your audience will determine the complexity of the language you should

SUSAN CROSSMAN: Pointers for creating an online presence

Think of your online presence as "cultivating a community, an online neighbourhood."

Then plan how to create multiple ways for people to find you and form a positive opinion about your farm business.

All of your social media should funnel back to your website. You will "Google better" if you are active on social media.

Blogs are a beautiful way to demonstrate how you do business. You can address the issues that are important to you and your customers in a professional way.

Instagram is a good tool for farmers to use since it is very visual.

With the Internet, you can influence people around the world. "Food supply is a global business. This is a very exciting opportunity."

use, the level of detail required, and the voice you use to connect. Learn everything you can about your target audience beforehand, she says. How old are they? Are they married? Do they have kids? What are their interests? What are their greatest joys and biggest challenges?

Knowing your audience will help you choose the best words, metaphors and imagery that will resonate with your readers, adds Crossman. For example, when writing for the general public, it's important to avoid the use of farming jargon or other words that are not common knowledge.

Likewise, if you are writing for a school group, gear your writing to the age level and interests of kids.

If you are writing marketing materials, what problem keeps your customers up at night and how does your product solve it?

Once you have a clear grasp of what you want to accomplish, and who your target audience is, you can begin your research. Crossman says that when people experience writer's block it's often a sign that they haven't done enough research. It's better to have more information than you need and then filter out the excess, she says. "It gives you the luxury of being selective about the information you include."

Before you begin writing, it's crucial to organize your research. Crossman shares a template that she uses for almost every writing project. She slots the information into one of four categories:

1. Why is the topic important?
2. What it involves.
3. How it works.
4. What are the future implications?

This system was developed by Dr. Bernice McCarthy, a leading expert on learning who studied how people process and retain information. By answering these four questions, you will appeal to everyone, says Crossman.

"I add an introduction and a conclusion, and I'm good to go," she says. "This is very powerful."

The last step before writing is to check for what's missing. Take a step back from your research and ask yourself what you've left out.

Once you have all the information you need, and it's all nicely organized, you can start crafting sentences to tie it all together, says Crossman, adding, "If you follow these steps, your document practically writes itself."

While adopting Crossman's strategy can make the writing flow more easily, however, she cautions against expecting the job to be painless.

For some people grammar is a challenge. They may never have been taught the rules or perhaps English isn't their native tongue, says Crossman. "A lot of brilliant people struggle with grammar but unfortunately poor grammar will detract from your message."

For those who want to improve their knowledge of grammar, Crossman recommends going to a website geared towards those who are learning English as a Second Language (ESL). On these sites you can start with the basics and work your way up from there, she says.

Creating linkages that connect one idea to another is also important for cohesive writing. Crossman likens them to "virtual bridges that readers can easily cross." Use conjunctions like "although," "as soon as," "unless," "until," "however," and "since."

Another important strategy for keeping people engaged in your writing is to inject lively words. Use a thesaurus to avoid reusing the same words over and over again. "A little variety will keep people reading," says Crossman. Avoid the passive voice by using active verbs, and use analogies, metaphors and questions selectively, to add depth to your writing.

While writing, many instructors recommend turning off your internal editor. Writing and editing use two different parts of the brain so try not to go back and forth between the two modes of opera-

RESOURCES

You will find tips and information on writing on Crossman's website at:

www.crossmancommunications.com

Crossman has authored two books on writing, available through Amazon:

- *The Write Way*
www.amazon.ca/The-Write-Way-Becoming-Successful/dp/189745340X
- *Content Marketing Made Easy*
www.amazon.ca/Content-Marketing-Made-Easy-Need-ebook/dp/B0164U6HX8?ie=UTF8&btcr=1&redirect=true&ref_=dp-kindle-redirect

For grammar help, Crossman recommends:

- English as a Second Language (ESL) websites:
www.eslgold.com
www.english-4u.de/grammar_exercises.htm
- Or to digest grammar tips in little tidbit:
www.quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl
- Or read one paragraph each day from "Manual of Style" by William Strunk Jr. (available at www.bartleby.com)

If you want to expand your vocabulary, sign up for:

- *Oxford Dictionary's Word of the Day* at:
www.oed.com

Free writing resources on the Internet are available at:

- Hub Spot
library.hubspot.com/
- Content Marketing Institute
contentmarketinginstitute.com/education/original-cmi-ebooks/

tion. Focus, instead, on getting a draft completed.

When editing, look for flow, spelling, grammar, overall organization and audience appeal. Does it meet the intended goals? Recognize that no piece will ever be perfect, and sometimes you have to say "enough is enough," says Crossman.

If you find this stage overwhelming, Crossman recommends asking a supportive colleague or friend to review it for you or seek the guidance of a professional editor, if needed. **CG**

KEEP YOUR BOWEL MOVING

Thanks to your autonomic nervous system, which regulates evacuation from your bowel, you probably take your bowel habits for granted... except when you can't.

At any one time, anywhere between two and 28 per cent of Canadians are affected by constipation, which can range from a single episode to chronic constipation. In fact, the real numbers are probably higher because you often purchase a non-prescription laxative, so the problem doesn't get reported.

The defecation reflex along with two anal sphincters (the external and internal) are responsible for your bowel movements. When fecal material enters the rectum, stretching of the rectal walls sends signals to the parts of the colon causing peristalsis or contractions. When these contractions reach the internal sphincter, this sphincter relaxes, and if the external sphincter is also relaxed you have a bowel movement.

You feel the relaxation of the two sphincters as the "urge to go," but luckily for you the external sphincter is not controlled by the autonomic nervous system, but by the somatic nervous system which you consciously control. Otherwise you would have no control over your bowel habits.

You delay defecation until a socially acceptable time, then with a deep breath you contract the abdominal muscles and elicit the defecation reflex. People who routinely inhibit the defecation reflex for longer periods of time are more prone to constipation because their reflex becomes blunted, for example long haul truck drivers. As well, there is a natural urge to go to the bathroom after eating a meal, which makes sense.

Many people believe that you should have a bowel movement each day, but this is not so. "Normal" bowel habits are considered to be anywhere from three each day to one every three days. Your normal routine is unique to you!

Solid fecal material is made up of approximately one-third dead bacteria from your bowel, one-third fibre and undigested food materials, and one-third materials like cholesterol that are excreted from your body. Water is always present and the amount depends upon how much liquid you drink. In fact, whatever you drink or eat may appear in your stools, taking 24 to 72 hours for something you put in your mouth to come out of the other end.

Obviously, a diet low in fibre and fluids will contribute to constipation. Some drugs, most notably narcotic pain relievers, slow bowel motility and cause constipation. Bowel obstructions or bowel abnormalities and pregnancy are implicated in constipation because they physically make normal bowel passage more difficult.

Functional problems such as depression, confusion, immobility, and inaccessible bathrooms may mean that getting to the bathroom is difficult, so constipation occurs. Diseases that interfere with the nervous system control of defecation often have constipation as a potential complication, for example diabetes, and Parkinson's disease. And, because nicotine increases bowel actions, quitting smoking can slow bowel functioning.

After ruling out any contributing factors to constipation, the recommended first steps are non-drug approaches. Common recommendations are regular bowel habits; a high

fibre and fluid diet; consumption of prune, apple, or pear juice with their sorbitol (a natural laxative); and exercise. Being overweight can complicate constipation, so weight loss is also a good idea.

Laxatives are commonly used to treat constipation, and are safe for use from time to time. However, for chronic constipation, they should be used only after a medical recommendation.

There are four general groups of laxatives. Bulk-forming laxatives such as psyllium are like increased dietary fibre, but you need to remember to drink plenty of fluids with them. Osmotic laxatives, for example polyethylene glycol or PEG and lactulose, increase the water content in stools and are often used on a regular basis. They cause less gas and bloating than the bulk-forming laxatives. Senna and bisacodyl are stimulant laxatives which increase bowel contractions. Emollient or stool softeners like docusate do just exactly what their name suggests, making stools easier to pass. Laxatives are also available as enemas and suppositories for faster action.

Keep in mind that bowel cancer is the third most commonly diagnosed cancer in Canada, and that a change in bowel habits is one of the first symptoms. So, if you notice a change in your bowel habits, don't just assume it's constipation and self-treat with laxatives. Get your symptoms checked! **CG**



Marie Berry is a lawyer/pharmacist interested in health and education.

NEXT ISSUE

How often do you wonder if a tube of cream or ointment is large enough to cover your rash? Next month we'll talk about applying creams and ointments, and give you some tips on using topicals effectively.

Dale's wife vetoed all of his best excuses.

"Who's going to finish the spraying if Jeff and I are both away all weekend?"

"Mark. That's why we hired him. You've trained him well. He'll be fine," Donna answered.

"What about the dog? We can't leave Buddy in the yard alone for three days."

"Your Dad can drive out and check on Buddy," Donna said. "Ed likes to have something to do."

"What if I just plain don't want to go?" Dale tried.

Donna laughed.

"We're going to Amy's wedding, Dale," she said. "Her parents wouldn't miss our kids' weddings."

"Of course not," Dale agreed. "Carl would drive all the way to Washington if he thought he could get a free meal there." Dale had never hit it off with Donna's cousin Sherri and her husband Carl.

"He's the cheapest guy I've ever met," Dale said. "Remember when we stayed with them and he took me grocery shopping? He wouldn't use a twist tie on the bag of onions. Said it would weigh less and be cheaper if he tied a knot in the bag."

"He was kidding," Donna said.

"He wasn't kidding at the check-out counter, when he said he forgot his wallet." Dale was still irritated by the memory. "I'm surprised he's not charging us by the plate to go to his kid's wedding. We'll probably get a bill in the mail with the thank-you card afterwards."

"Look Dale, Sherri's my favourite cousin. Her daughter's getting married, and we're going. If we leave by 10 a.m. tomorrow, we can have lunch in Fort Qu'Appelle and get to Melville in time for the ceremony at 2 p.m."

"Driving all the way to Melville," Dale muttered under his breath. "Can't even see anything up there. All the trees get in the way of the view."

On Saturday morning, the Hansons were ready to pile into daughter-in-law Elaine's SUV for the trip.

Leaving the farm behind

It's only for a weekend... or so they hope

"Looks like a nice day for a drive, anyway," Dale said.

"I don't know, they're talking about rain," Donna said.

"Those clouds won't amount to much," Dale said.

"Do you mind driving, Dad?" Dale's son Jeff asked. "Elaine wants to sit in the back with the kids, and I was up at 4:30 this morning to go spraying."

So Dale drove, Donna rode in the passenger seat, and Jeff, Elaine, their five-year-old, Connor and their toddler, Jenny, climbed into the back. "I feel like a kid again," Jeff joked.

"Of course it's the right road," Dale said, noticing that the road did look a little less-travelled than he'd expected. "And it's not going to rain."

Donna was quiet, looking at the ungraded road and watching the sky darken.

Jenny was making noises in the back.

"Jeff, wake up," Elaine said urgently. "Where'd you put the diaper bag?"

"In the hallway," Jeff said, groggily. "Next to your purse."

"Oh no," Elaine said.

Just for once, can't we take a trip off the farm and act like normal people?"

The clouds on the horizon moved closer and turned darker, but still the Hansons were a few minutes ahead of schedule, until about 30 miles from Fort Qu'Appelle, when Dale slowed and made a right turn onto a narrow grid road.

"What are you doing?" Donna asked.

"I'm just going to take a look at a combine header on a farm over here. It's up for auction in a couple of weeks, and I want to see if it's worth making a bid on."

"For crying out loud," Donna said. "Do you have to do that today? Just for once, can't we take a trip off the farm and behave like normal people?"

"Might as well get some value out of this weekend."

"Are you sure this is the right road? I don't want to get stuck out here when it starts raining. Look at those clouds."

"We can stop for diapers in Fort Qu'Appelle," Jeff said.

Dale was about to tell his daughter-in-law they'd be there soon when a noxious wave of smell rolled into the front.

"What have you been feeding that kid?" Dale shouted.

"Sorry everyone," Elaine called.

"Let's get back to the highway," Donna said.

"We're almost there," Dale said. "And after smelling this smell, our lunch stop will be a lot shorter."

The first drops of rain started to hit the window.

"These clouds are so dark, you're not going to be able to see the header," Donna said.

"It's just a shower," Dale said.

The drops got bigger. Thunder boomed, closer than Dale had expected.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 50



REFLECTIONS

BY ROD ANDREWS

RETIRED ANGLICAN BISHOP

"Why is the rain so loud?" Connor asked. "I don't like it." "Summer storms whip up fast, but they pass over right away," Dale said.

They came to a crossroads, and the grid road ahead was even narrower.

The rain beating on the car drowned out Connor's next questions.

The rain turned to hail. Pea-sized, then raspberry-sized, then the size of cherries. Dale pulled over to the side of the road.

"Is this safe?" Elaine yelled.

"Probably," Donna answered. "Nobody's been on this road since 1975."

Dale kept quiet. He couldn't admit he was likely on the wrong road. Then there was a sudden thud and the SUV jerked ahead.

There were lights behind them. A truck had nudged the Hansons' bumper.

"This is like a horror movie," Elaine said.

"It's just another farmer," Dale said, wishing he believed what he was telling her, and also that he hadn't stayed up late to watch "The Shining" last week.

Hail kept pounding the car, and the Hansons waited and worried.

Finally, the hail stopped. It was still raining, but not the way it had been.

"It's not so scary!" Connor said. "But it still smells."

A knock on his window made Dale jump. He prepared for the worst, fingering the phone in his pocket, wondering if he should dial 911. He couldn't get a good look at the man standing outside in the storm, but he looked big.

Dale hoped Donna couldn't see his hand shaking as he lowered the window.

Then a friendly-looking man in a BASF cap stuck his head in, took a whiff of the rank, humid air inside and leaned back out into the rain.

"Sorry. Didn't see you stopped here, and rolled right into your bumper. Don't think there's any damage."

Dale let down his guard.

"Maybe you could help me," the man went on. "I'm not from here. I'm trying to find the Samuels' place to take a look at his combine header before the auction."

The Hansons laughed out loud. Connor and Jenny too, although they weren't sure what was funny. The man outside looked confused.

"I'm headed there too," Dale explained.

"Hope you're not in as much trouble as me," the man said. "We're on our way to a family reunion, and this cattle trail is putting us behind schedule."

Soon they'd finished talking about the machinery up for grabs at the auction sale, and the man went back to his truck. Dale gave Donna a look that said, "See, I was right," and she shot back with her long-used, "What can you do with a farmer?" look. Dale put the SUV in drive and got his family back on the road. **CG**

"Were you ever drafted to fight a forest fire?" Our volunteer museum guides share stories over coffee. One man talked of sitting in a hotel beer parlour when the police blocked the exit. The men were ordered out the back door and onto a bus, conscripted to fight a forest fire.

"How about you Rod?" I recalled the summer following my first year of university. I was 19 and working with a highway survey crew on the Banff Jasper Highway. There were rumours of a large fire in Yoho National Park in British Columbia. We could see the glow over the mountains at night. One morning, the engineer interrupted our work. He told us to return to camp. A bus was waiting for us.

A log building at a sawmill served as a registration place. We entered one at a time. A formidable-looking forest ranger demanded, "What is your name?" followed by, "Who is your next of kin?" The second question took me back. I had hoped to finish college, be ordained and serve the church...

For the next few days I carried a canvas bag on my back and pumped a spray of water putting out spot fires at the mill. The scene was terrifying when the head of the fire passed. Wild animals ran in front. Entire spruce and pine trees exploded into flames instantly. When it finally rained, we were allowed to return to our work camp where steak, baked potatoes and apple pie hit the spot.

I relived the experience when I heard about the huge evacuation from Fort McMurray and the subsequent devastation. A few years ago I volunteered to fly summer bible school leaders in and out of remote communities in northern Alberta. The airplane is based in Fort McMurray so I learned something about the community and the surrounding oil sands. Each morning we set out for the airport at 6 a.m. and ran into a major traffic jam. Those were ordinary work days. I cannot imagine the traffic challenges when the whole city attempted to evacuate on short notice. Apparently the process was orderly for the most part, and people helped one another.

Even before the refugees had found security, some people renewed their attack on "Fort Mac" and the oil sands. It seems like a blame-the-victim scenario. The detractors may have good intentions but their comments come across as "Too bad about their houses, jobs and businesses but they deserve it." That kind of thinking does not fit my religion or my politics.

Jesus dealt with similar issues. He was walking along and saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, causing him to be born blind?" Jesus answered, "You're asking the wrong question. You're looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do." Jesus healed the man's blindness and got himself into trouble. It was the Sabbath and no "work" was allowed. The story takes up an entire chapter in the Gospel of John.

After four grueling, dirty and exhausting days we stopped in Banff on our way back to camp. At an ice-cream stand we expressed our hope for more rain. The owner exclaimed, "We don't want rain. People will not buy ice cream..." Thank God we did not hear that kind of story from this summer of fire. We witnessed enormous generosity and caring. Canadians lived out the wise adage "There is no them. Only us."

Suggested Scripture: Deuteronomy 4:1-14, John 9

Rod Andrews is a retired Anglican bishop. He lives in Saskatoon.

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