

# CountryGuide

Strategic. Business. Thinking.

WESTERN EDITION / COUNTRY-GUIDE.CA / JULY/AUGUST 2016

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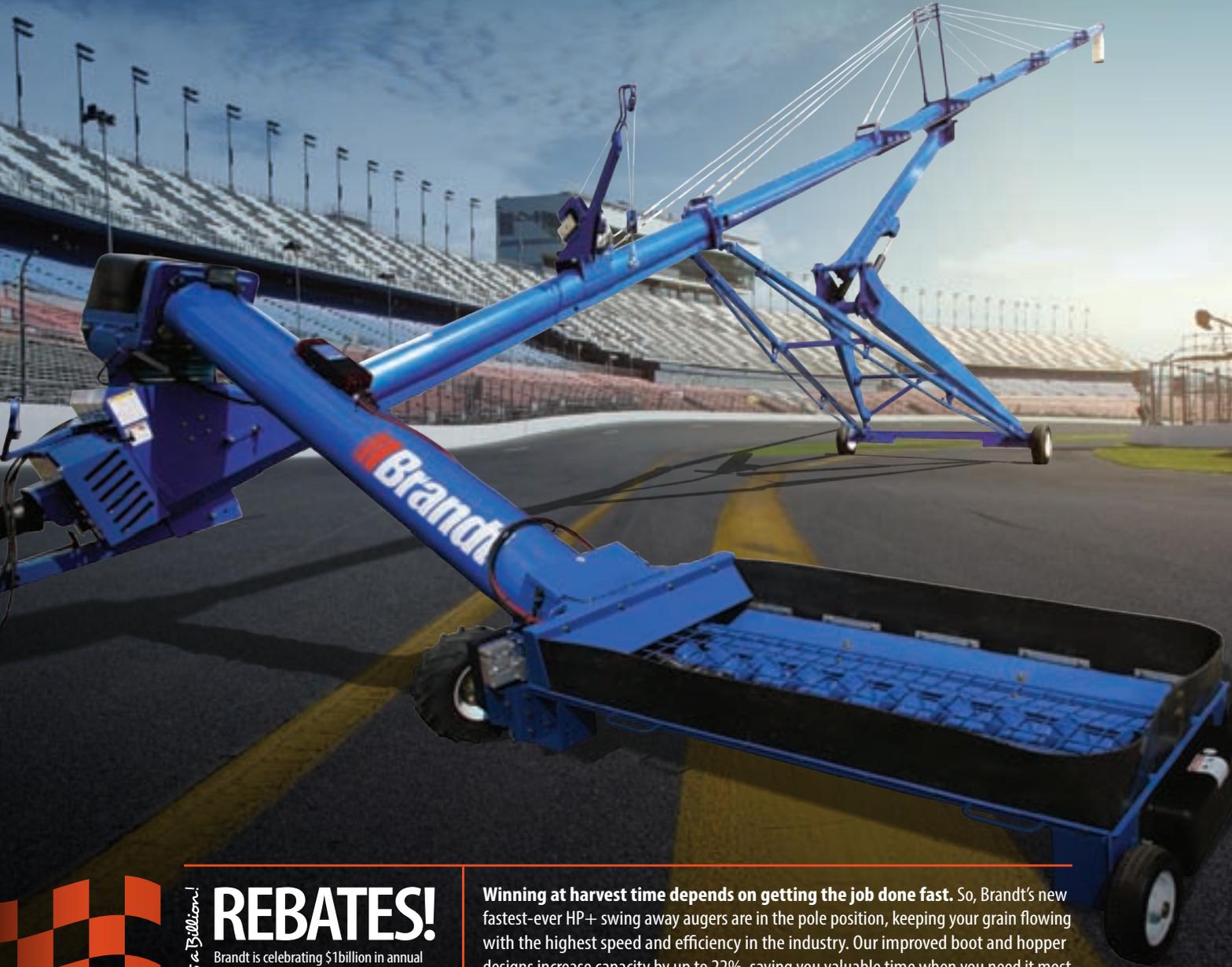


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### A new Tier 3

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# Deciding you want a better future



**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](mailto:tom.button@fbcpublishing.com).

## CountryGuide

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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

**A**ny 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.



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.

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](http://mtzequipment.com). **CG**

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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

**A**bout 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



It isn't just business, the Boyds believe. They're convinced their move to regenerative agriculture is good for families, and for their rural community too.

learned at school about cropping and extended grazing systems.

"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 peo-

**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."**

ple 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

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 10**

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.



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 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

**“ We definitely have taken the sharp edges off the weather extremes,” Ryan says. The farm is more resilient too**

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 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**

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## TOUGH TO BEAT IN THE LONG RUN





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# 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

**F**arming 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. Court-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

ney 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.

"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.



**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**

## 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 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 ag economic 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**



With Colby and Courtney, the Deckers focus on a balance of career and family.

# CONSTRUCTION BOSSES

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

**I**t'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.

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

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

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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

**“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.”**

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 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 home-builders 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 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

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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.

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 Boonstra 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, Boon-

stra 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 keep 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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# 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

BY ANGELA LOVELL

**J**ob 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,

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**“I don’t think it comes naturally to farmers to be flexible with employees, but it’s something we’re working hard at.”**

— Kristi Burns

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 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 sib-

ling, 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

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28

## 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 AgriHRToolKit 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

*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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## 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](http://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.

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, adding, “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 family 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**

# 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

**N**ot 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 30

**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.”**

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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**SPACE & MATERIAL DEADLINE:**  
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**PG. 34** Could grain bags be the money-wise choice for your farms' storage needs?

**PG. 36** With bigger bins and more summer delivery, canola needs extra bin management.

# CROPS GUIDE

## Moisture in or moisture out?

Are you really drying that grain when you turn on the fans?

BY JULIENNE ISAACS

**I**t's the disaster no one wants to admit — a bin of spoiled grain can represent the loss of a producer's entire year of profits.

When grain spoils due to problems with storage, "farmers usually sell it, burn it or hush it up," says Joy Agnew, project manager for Agricultural Research Services at the Prairie Agricultural Machinery Institute (PAMI).

And it does happen. "As recently as last spring we got a call from a terminal that had 100,000 bushels of canola spoil on them," she says. "They had sensors in the grain, but they weren't working."

The reasons for grain spoilage are complex, but they add up to the risk that hot or wet grain will spoil — fast. Until recently, the standard advice had been to keep the grain cool through continuous aeration, but researchers now say that might be inefficient, or even push moisture back into stored grain.

Agnew says most information out there about grain storage was developed during research trials in the 1980s and 1990s, when the average bin size was 2,500 bushels, compared with today's 20,000-bushel-plus bins.

"We really don't know how quantity and mass in the bin affect management," she says. "For example, large bins have multiple ports for inputting grain. That could affect airflow and conditioning of the grain itself. Another issue: you can't fill a bin from a single field — you're pulling grain from different fields with different conditions. They will layer in the bin and affect airflow rate and conditioning."

PAMI's current trial on bin management looks at



**“The drying wasn't taking place when we expected — it was taking place at night.”**

*Ron Palmer, IHARF*

summer storage of canola in co-operation with several partner producers. "We want to monitor different practices — leaving it alone, aerating it and turning it," says Agnew.

Producers generally put grain in bins, aerate it and leave it without monitoring it. But Agnew says continuous aeration can be inefficient. "The air's capacity to dry depends on temperature and relative humidity," she says. "So running the fans continuously means that a lot of the time when the fans are running, you're not achieving anything because the air conditions are not conducive to drying."

### WATER IN, WATER OUT

Ron Palmer, a researcher with Indian Head Agricultural Research Foundation, has been evaluating different methods of bin storage since 2010.

His claims that continuous aeration may not be effective generated some controversy last year at the CropConnect conference in Manitoba. But Palmer

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## BINCast aeration forecasting

Website uses weather data to tell you when to turn the fans on and off

BINCast, the web-based aeration forecasting tool from Weather INnovations Consulting (WIN), is now available for use anywhere in the Prairies, Ontario and Quebec, says WIN president and business manager Ian Nichols.

The tool helps producers calculate when to turn the aeration fans on based on the moisture content in the air. In other words, it tells you whether turning fans on will add or subtract moisture from stored grains. Better yet, its range is five days, meaning producers have lots of time to plan aeration strategies based on projected conditions.

“Every grain has a propensity to exchange moisture with the environment, the atmosphere around it. It’s like osmosis. If the air is wetter than the grain, the grain will gradually take on some additional moisture. BINCast tells you what the equilibrium moisture content (EMC) of grain will be hour by hour if you run the fan right now,” says Nichols.

“BINCast helps you know whether your air quality is going to be good or bad, and good — if you’re trying to dry the grain — is an EMC below what your grain is currently at. You don’t have to measure the relative humidity of your bin and look up charts. This gives you a look into the future and lets you know how to plan for the next few hours.”

BINCast is available at [www.weatherwest.ca/bincast.cfm](http://www.weatherwest.ca/bincast.cfm).

**“ We really don’t know how (grain) quantity and mass in the bin affect management.”**

— Joy Agnew, PAMI

says his advice — to turn fans on at select times when the moisture content of the air is lower than that of the bin — is based on data.

Back in 2010, Palmer’s team found a way to calculate the amount of water in the air going into and out of the bin.

“We plotted these graphs out and I couldn’t believe my eyes: with the fan turned on continuously, it would be drying and drying and then it would be wetting the grain, then drying again. There was a distinct daily cycle of drying and wetting. The drying wasn’t taking place when we expected — it was taking place at night,” he says.

The team also found that whenever the grain was cooling, it was also drying.

“If the grain is cooled by 15 degrees you’re taking out one per cent moisture — that’s a nice rule of thumb,” Palmer says.

More recently, Palmer has been studying the dynamics of what’s going on in the bin when the air outside comes into contact with the grain.

“It turns out that if you take the absolute humidity (the actual amount of water in the air, as opposed to the relative humidity) of the air outside and it’s less than the absolute humidity of the air in the bin and you run your fans, you’ll have drying,” he says.

### KEEP IT COLD

Palmer emphasizes that there’s more than one objective when it comes to storing grain.

“We’ve always thought the only thing to worry about is getting the grain dry, but there’s a more important one than that: keeping it safe, protecting it from spoilage,” he says.

“In actual fact your grain starts to spoil the minute you take it off the combine. Grain has never gotten any better sitting in the bin — the only thing we can do is to



Heating is good for compost, but not grain.

stop that process. We can only do that by keeping it cold.”

He says producers should look out for two factors: moisture content and temperature.

“There isn’t a one-size-fits-all management practice. What is your objective? If it’s keeping the grain safe, you want to keep it cold,” Palmer says. The best management practice is to keep conditions controlled, where the fan only goes on when the outside air is less than the grain temperature.

### THE ‘YARD LIGHT RULE’

“If you want the most drying possible,” Palmer says, “measure the absolute humidity in the bin, measure the absolute humidity of the outside air, and if the bin’s AH is higher than the air’s, turn the fan on. And you get drying.”

As soon as grain comes off the field, producers should turn the aeration fans on immediately to cool the grain down.

When there are conditions for condensation, particularly in the spring and fall, they should leave aeration fans off to protect grain from the outside air.

Producers who lack sophisticated monitoring equipment should follow Palmer’s “yard light rule” — turn fans on at night and off during the day.

Agnew says monitoring is essential when it comes to grain storage — particularly when producers are storing grain in large bins and there’s more to lose.

But monitoring technology has a way to go. PAMI is working with University of Saskatchewan mechanical engineering students to develop more effective sensors for large bins.

“I understand producers don’t have time to continually monitor, but they need to keep an eye on it,” she says. “A bin can go quickly.” **CG**

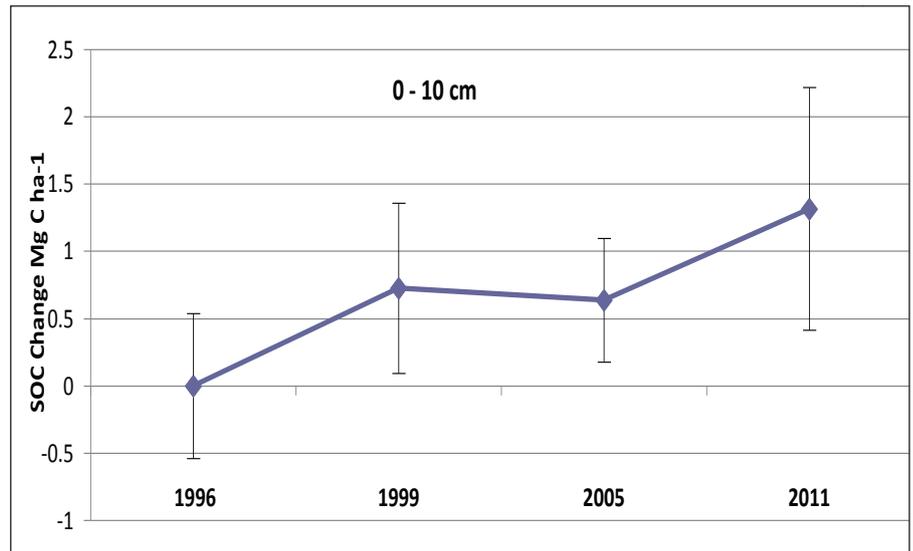


## Greenhouse gas reduction – agriculture's role

Science tells us that efficient, effective and profitable crop production practices that increase soil organic matter can help Canada reduce carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) 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 CO<sub>2</sub>/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.scca.ca](http://www.scca.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.

# Costing out your grain storage options

Grain bags are only economic for larger, 70,000-bushel-plus storage, according to an Alberta Agriculture analysis

BY JULIENNE ISAACS

**T**he cheapest option for grain storage — piling it right on the ground — is a genius idea if it works, but it's a disaster if it fails, says Mitch Smith, a customer account manager at United Farmers of Alberta in Vermilion.

"Lots of guys do it with a straight-up grain pile into the fall and though you lose some of it to deer or snow-mobilers, it's fine as long as you get that off the ground before the spring," he says.

"A guy here put 150,000 bushels down in November right beside the tracks, and the whole idea was that he'd get producer cars and it would all be gone within a month. But the deal fell through and half of it was ruined by the spring."

Storing grain in piles is a last-resort storage option for many producers, but with increasing yields and fluctuating steel prices — Smith reports that bin prices were to jump 10 per cent in July — no storage option is off the table.

Long-term options include bins and storage sheds. Shorter-term options include plastic grain bagging, grain ring and tarp systems, grain bunkers and open piles.

These days, brand-new smooth-walled steel hopped bins with a 5,000-bushel capacity come in at around \$17,000. Larger, corrugated steel bins with 38,000-bushel capacity might cost about \$70,000 including setup and all materials, says Smith.

There are cheaper options, such as the steel ring and

tarp system. Smith says these generally have about a 10,000-bushel capacity, and can cost about \$2,000 total for rings, tarp and hardware.

One of the most touted options recently is the plastic grain bagging system for temporary storage. Though sizes and prices vary, Smith says a 10 x 300-foot bag will cost only \$1,000. But the real costs, he says, come in extraction — an extractor could easily cost \$50,000.

## PLUSES AND MINUSES

Last year, Alberta Agriculture and Forestry released a report on grain storage considerations, written by then market analyst Jennifer Stoby.

The report concludes that grain bins are still the best option for storing smaller volumes, while grain bags should be considered for higher volumes — 70,000 bushels per year, in Stoby's estimate.

According to Neil Blue, provincial crop market analyst with Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, farmers have been buying more bins since the end of the CWB monopoly. With the reduction in elevator capacity across the Prairies and increase in terminals, in combination with increasing yields, "there was an increasing requirement for farmers to store more of the harvest on-farm," he says.

Blue says steel bins are still the most popular storage option, with their long life, stable conditions for storage and ability to be aerated if located near a power source.

"A bit of a negative is the capital cost and lack of flexibility of moving them around. They're more or less stationary," he says.

"There's a movement to larger steel bins from smaller ones, but there's a risk associated with them, in that the larger the bin, the higher the risk of that grain going into a poor condition."

Plastic bagging systems have many advantages in comparison — bagging can be done right on the field, saving time and costs. Grain can be stored wet as the bags are sealed. Farmers can mitigate extraction costs by renting or purchasing extractors with other farmers.

"The flip side there is it's a temporary storage system and the bags are not reusable," says Blue. "They're subject

**“Unfortunately, (the ring and tarp) system can only be used on a temporary basis as there is a high risk for pest, wildlife, and moisture damage and loss.”**

— Jennifer Stoby

to a limited grain storage life in terms of water getting in, and wildlife punching holes in and letting moisture in. And the farmer has to dispose of the plastic.”

The least expensive option for storing grain — the report does not include open grain piles in its final cost comparison — is the ring and tarp system, but neither Blue nor Stoby recommends this option when it comes to mitigating risks.

“Unfortunately, this system can only be used on a temporary basis as there is a high risk for pest, wildlife, and moisture damage and loss. As well, these systems require more maintenance along with assembly and disassembly every year. This increases the workload for the operation,” writes Stoby.

The upshot? Each producer must decide for themselves which storage makes the most economic sense. “Each person should do their own calculations, because each situation is different,” says Blue. **CG**

## Grain bag recycling by province

Plastic grain bag recycling is emerging as a major priority across the Prairies, and while there are no federally regulated programs, recycling options are emerging in each province.

In Alberta, recycling happens municipality by municipality.

“We’re working towards getting an established provincial-wide program in Alberta,” says Tammy Schwass, communications adviser with Alberta Plastics Recycling Association. “There are a handful of municipalities recycling grain bags across Alberta — such as Rockyview County and Mountainview County. We’re working with the province to create a backstop legislation.”

Saskatchewan is currently running a grain bag recycling pilot project, administered by Simply Ag Solutions, that collects grain bags and twine province-wide.

In Manitoba, a pilot project funded by Manitoba Conservation and run by CleanFARMS for the past several years has just been granted funding for 2016. While small scale at the moment — last year, the project had seven collection sites — Shane Hedderson, operations manager for CleanFARMS, hopes to expand to more sites soon.

“During Phase One of the pilot we operated at three collection sites and collected over four metric tonnes of agricultural plastics,” says Hedderson. “Phase Two operated during 2014-15 at seven collection sites, and over 11 metric tonnes of agricultural plastics were collected.”

CleanFARMS also operates a federally regulated, industry-funded fertilizer and pesticide container recycling program. “It’s refreshing that farmers are thinking about stewardship,” says Hedderson.

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This photo was taken the day Ron Krahn was putting up a seventh 24,000-bushel bin. He stores canola in these bins but does not expect the 10-hp fan to do much drying if grain is tough.



# Is stored canola at bigger risk than ever?

Huge bins, straight combining and delivery contracts for June and July have all potentially increased the storage risk for canola. But the basics for safe storage – eight per cent moisture, 15 C or less and regular monitoring – still apply

BY JAY WHETTER / CANOLA COUNCIL OF CANADA

**W**e don't really know whether canola in a 25,000-bushel bin stores differently from canola in a 2,000-bushel bin. We don't know if straight combining reduces or increases canola storage risk. And we don't know the best way to store canola for 11 months through fall, winter, spring and summer weather changes.

Given that many canola growers have added one or more of these variables to their systems, the notion that no canola is truly safe in storage is probably more important than ever. All bins need to be checked regularly.

### THE 25,000-BUSHEL QUESTION

Larger bins present several potential risk factors that smaller bins do not. Canola on top of canola in a big bin increases static pressure and reduces the amount of air between seeds. Pushing air through these big bins to cool the mass and remove moisture takes more horsepower.

Jason Jones, regional sales manager with Ag Growth International, which owns bin brands Westeel, Twister and Grain Guard, says their top-selling bin sizes are the 25,000-bushel flat-bottom Model 3607 and the 4,900-bushel Model 1805 hopper combo. And he says the market is shifting to even larger hopper bins with 21-foot and 24-foot diameters. Since probing to the centre of these bins is just about impossible, he says most customers install temperature or moisture cables or a combination of both.

"As for the fans, a five-hp high-speed fan can provide enough airflow to maintain the grain in 25,000-bushel bins," Jones says, but to remove moisture, "we recommend two 30-hp low-speed fans."

Despite that recommendation, most growers use a 10-hp fan. A complicating factor, he adds, is that most higher-horsepower fans are only available in three-phase, which not every farm site has available.

Ron Krahn has seven 24,000-bushel bins on his farm near Rivers, Man., and he stores canola in them all the time. He has four temperature cables and one 10-hp low-speed fan for each bin. The larger-diameter centrifugal fan is enough to cool canola, Krahn says, but he wouldn't count on it to do much drying.

"Under certain conditions, we will mix a bit of 11 per cent canola with drier canola in the bin and the fans will even out the moisture," he says, "but I wouldn't expect the fans to dry down a bin of canola at 11-12 per cent moisture in time to be safe."

Greater potential for inconsistency throughout the bin adds to the big-bin risk. Big bins filled over multiple days and fields will have more variability in terms of moisture content, dockage and temperature. Add the staggering fact that one 25,000-bushel bin contains \$250,000 worth of canola, and the risk of losing one to heating becomes all the more apparent.

"There hasn't been any large-scale work that represents the size of bins commonly used in Western Canada, so we just don't know whether safe storage guidelines are dependent on size," says Angela Brackenreed, agronomy specialist with the Canola Council of Canada.



Canola Council of Canada agronomy specialist Angela Brackenreed says more research is needed on how bin size affects storage risk.

### MANY MORE MONTHS OF MONITORING

Joy Agnew, a project manager with the Prairie Agricultural Machinery Institute (PAMI) in Humboldt, Sask., completed one season of a summer storage project back in 2014 and will repeat the project again this summer to look at a couple other parameters.

Her year-one results suggested the best way to handle canola stored over the summer months would be to leave it alone. But this was based on canola stored at 6.5 per cent moisture and with the fans turned on during a few very cold winter days. What about canola at 10 per cent moisture and not frozen throughout?

"More information is needed before we know for sure how to reduce summer storage risk in these varying situations," Brackenreed says.

### STRAIGHT TO THE ELEVATOR

Ron Krahn still swaths most of his canola. Any canola he straight combines goes straight to the elevator.

When combining swathed canola, his combine's yield and moisture monitor rarely has more than two percentage points of variability throughout a field. "If the overall moisture is 6.5 per cent, the range might be five per cent to eight per cent," he says.

But in his experience with straight-combined canola, overall moisture levels are higher and the variability is wider. He had one field where harvested canola ranged from five per cent to 17 per cent moisture. "The average might be dry, but that variability is a huge storage risk," he says.

Krahn says waiting an extra week to let the crop cure a little more or using pre-harvest spray might help, but that extra week out in the field adds to harvest stress and the spray adds to harvest cost.

Does Krahn's experience represent the situation for all who straight combine canola? Probably not. Are there situations where straight cut could reduce storage risk? Could be. "We just don't know yet," Brackenreed says. **CG**

Jay Whetter is a communications manager at the Canola Council of Canada. You can find more on safe storage tips at [www.canolawatch.org](http://www.canolawatch.org).

## Check and check again

Angela Brackenreed provides the following five tips to keep all stored canola as safe as possible:

1. Condition grain to eight per cent moisture or less and 15 C or less.
2. Turn the fans on as soon as canola covers the aeration screens and leave them on until canola is conditioned to parameters outlined in Step 1.
3. Consider the conditioning and storage challenges for each load coming off the combine. If canola is tough, can natural aeration realistically dry it down? Will the elevator accept it at "x" moisture content or do you need the ability to dry it? Is there higher-than-normal green seed that may increase storage risk even if canola tests dry? Were there patches of weeds or other dockage that may be higher moisture? Was some canola harvested at a lot higher moisture content, potentially creating a high-risk area in a bin that is dry on average?
4. Ground truth any devices used for measuring the condition of grain. Test the on-farm moisture meter by taking the same sample to the elevator. Compare results. A moisture meter that is off just slightly could be the difference between safe and spoiled canola.
5. Monitor, monitor, monitor. At a minimum, check temperature and moisture a couple times within the first six weeks after harvest, then again at freeze-up and in the spring as conditions warm up. Check more frequently if grain went into the bin hot, at higher moisture or with higher levels of green seed or dockage.

# Turbulent topic

As sprayers go faster, aerodynamics start to come into play. A PAMI project is evaluating if they affect spray deposition

BY CLARE STANFIELD / FOR THE WGRF



**O**n the surface, spraying seems straightforward. But a closer look at the multitude of factors that can influence how best to get product from the spray tank to the plant surface reveals something akin to a massive puzzle with a couple of pieces missing.

One of the people trying to make that picture complete is Hubert Landry, research scientist (engineering) with PAMI in Humboldt, Sask. With funding from the Western Grains Research Foundation (WGRF), and assistance from Tom Wolf of Agrimetrix Research and Training in Saskatoon, Landry is halfway through a study looking at how travel speed and sprayer configuration can affect air turbulence around sprayer nozzles and how, in turn, that turbulence might affect spray deposition.

First step? Quantify airflow and air turbulence.

“Sprayers are getting larger and longer and faster,” says Landry. “So we have to look at the airflow patterns to see how they could affect spray deposition. Does air turbulence matter? We don’t know yet, but it should be quantified so that we can find out.”

## MEASURING THIN AIR

Clearly, any solid body moving through space will cause air turbulence in its wake. But think about a sprayer with its boxy tractor body, spray tank, long skinny boom, bulky little nozzles, big fat tires — every one of those components displaces air differently. Add travel speed to the mix and you get even greater potential for air currents and eddies powerful enough to interfere with spray deposition.

Landry and his research team conducted field trials

Large tires moving at high speeds are the biggest source of air turbulence behind the sprayer. This year, PAMI is conducting further field experiments with a new 120-foot boom John Deere.

in October and December of 2015, using a Spra-Coupe 4640. Three ultrasonic anemometers (wind speed measurement tools) were placed at key positions around the sprayer — one in front and two behind, with the ability to move the rear anemometers to different positions to gather a more complete picture of air turbulence at specific locations along the boom itself, as well as a short distance behind it.

A weather station was set up in the field to measure ambient wind speed and direction.

“As much as possible, we wanted to keep wind out as one of the variables,” says Landry, adding that both test days experienced only mild wind.

Air turbulence was measured as TKE, or turbulence kinetic energy, which indicates the intensity of air movement, and measurements were taken at two travel speeds: two and eight metres per second (7.2 km/h and 28.8 km/h).

A total of 45 trials were carried out and, crunching the data, Landry has already spotted some trends, one of which concerns tires.

“We observed that, fairly consistently, the area behind the rear tire had a higher TKE,” he says. “It was more erratic. And the higher the velocity, the more turbulence there was.”

Indeed, compared to TKE behind other parts of the boom and sprayer, the space behind the tire is a veritable tornado. Computer modelling also suggests that the big-

ger the tire, the bigger the TKE, as well — which has implications for larger machines.

But it wasn't just the tires.

"We think the machine itself, its geometry and size, has an impact on air flow," says Landry, adding that this year, his team will be conducting further field experiments with a new 120-foot boom John Deere. This should give them some good data not only about how air turbulence differs behind components of a larger machine, but how the sheer size of that machine has an impact on air movement all around it.

**BUT DOES IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?**

If you're wondering if you have to add air turbulence to the long list of factors you need to consider when you spray, hold on for now.

Remember, this first year of field experiments have measured and quantified air turbulence at various speeds — that's it. Nozzles were turned on only to see if the presence of spray would affect airflow, but no information on spray deposition was collected.

"At this point in the research, we can see three possible outcomes," says Landry. "First, we may find that air turbulence doesn't matter at all to

**“ At this point in the research, we can see three possible outcomes.”**

*Hubert Landry, PAMI*

spray deposition. Second, farmers may need to watch speed more closely — there may be a combination of ambient conditions and speed that will affect deposition. And third, there may be a need to design sprayers differently in terms of the geometry of the boom.”

Further study will tell the tale. Landry and Wolf have secured funding to take the research to its next logical step. "We will look at how turbulence plus speed will affect deposition," he says. "We will collect data that may or may not confirm the trends we saw in the first year."

It could be one more piece in the complex puzzle of accurate spraying and, says Landry, a very practical one at that. "We all want to use as few inputs as possible, so it would be good to understand what's happening behind the sprayer in terms of airflow." **CG**

WGRF is a farmer-funded and -directed non-profit organization investing in agricultural research that benefits western Canadian producers. For 35 years the WGRF board has given producers a voice in agricultural research funding decisions. WGRF manages an Endowment Fund and the wheat and barley variety development check-off funds, investing over \$19 million annually into variety development and field crop research. WGRF is the largest producer funder of research in Canada.



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# Promoting Canadian wheat in Latin America

Customers in Peru and Chile like the quality of CWRS, and are interested in more CPSR

BY ELLEN GOODMAN / CIGI

**F**or several years Latin American customers of Canadian wheat and durum have met with technical staff from the Canadian International Grains Institute to learn about analytical techniques and processes to evaluate wheat and flour quality. Most recently representatives from Cigi's baking, milling and analytical services areas spent time in Chile and Peru.

While in Chile, Cigi presented a seminar on Canadian wheat for a group of nine mills and visited four mills and a major bakery, representing about 60 per cent of the Chilean market, says Juan Carlos Arriola, head of

Cigi Milling Technology. The customers either use Canadian wheat exclusively or blend it with wheat from Chile and other countries such as Argentina or the U.S. In 2014-15 Chile imported 473,000 tonnes from Canada.

"They basically use Canadian when they require high-quality products and they also blend for lower-quality products using Canadian wheat as a base," Arriola says, noting that in Latin America they use strong, medium- and low-protein wheat for various baked products.

"For the high-protein range (usually pan breads) they prefer Canadian wheat like CWRS. For a blend they try to use CPSR with another type of wheat."

While Arriola focused on the millers' use of Canadian wheat, the other Cigi technical experts worked with baking and laboratory staff. Cigi's baking expertise was considered important on the visit since much of the Canadian flour milled is used for bread making, says Yulia Borsuk, technical specialist in Cigi Baking Technology.

"It is critical for customers in Latin America to understand how to maximize Canadian flour, optimizing processing parameters which ultimately affect baked end quality," she says. "We also acquired knowledge on their flour quality requirements, baking industry trends and challenges the Latin American market faces."

Borsuk says she received good feedback on Canadian flour quality while assisting with other issues related to consistency, adjustments to equipment, and proofing time. In addition, she found it interesting that Chile is fourth in bread consumption in the world and was pleased she had an opportunity to see traditional Chilean breads like halulla and marraqueta.

## PERU A SIGNIFICANT IMPORTER

In Peru Cigi staff met with the Peruvian Millers Association, which represents about 90 per cent of the country's market, and visited some major mills.

"Last December Peru imported 200,100 tonnes of Canadian wheat, more than any country in the world," says Arriola. "It's a huge market."

As in Chile, Peruvian mills use 100 per cent Cana-



Yulia Borsuk, Cigi's technical specialist in baking (l), demonstrates the properties of Canadian wheat at a bakery in Peru.

dian wheat and also blend with other wheat. Canadian Western Amber Durum is used for pasta in addition to common wheat. The Cigi group spent an intensive three days finding out about quality requirements and assisting customers with any concerns.

Kristina Pizzi, head of Cigi Analytical Services, says her focus in Peru was on training staff in milling companies about analytical methods and learning about differences in how they test wheat and flour quality. The training aimed to educate millers and laboratory staff on evaluating results properly to eliminate any misinterpretation of quality issues.

“We discussed the testing we do, how they’re testing, and any differences in their methods,” she says. “We talked about standardized methods and why that’s important. That makes a big difference in your results, especially when comparing over time or with other labs.”

Testing procedures used to evaluate flour quality in Cigi’s baking area were also presented in the Peruvian mills.

Pizzi adds that meeting with customers in Peru revealed how much they love to use CPSR for their end products, although they cannot always obtain a consistent supply.

Arriola says the technical visit helps reinforce the message that Canadian wheat has the quality that Latin American customers need and that Canada is a partner in business. **CG**

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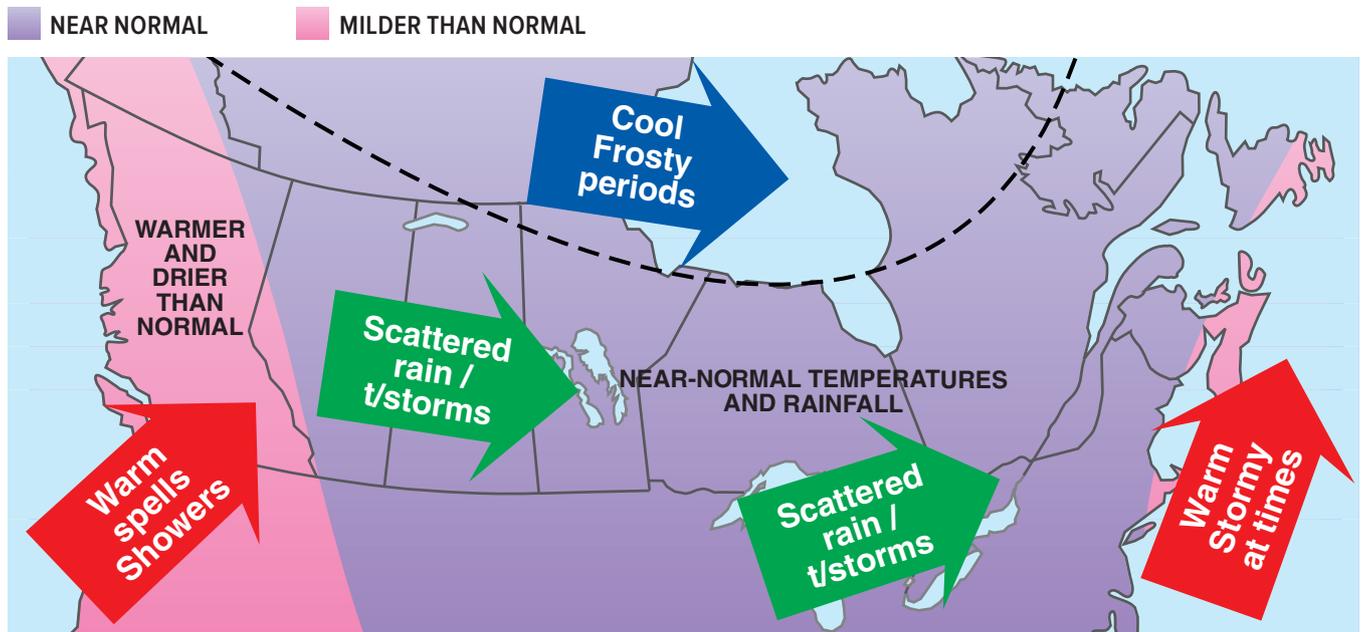


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## British Columbia

- **Aug. 7-13:** Generally sunny and warm throughout aside from scattered shower activity. Hot, dry days in the Interior interrupted by isolated thunderstorms.
- **Aug. 14-20:** Seasonable to warm temperatures prevail. Sunny, but look for showers or thunderstorms on a couple of days, less frequent in the Interior.
- **Aug. 21-27:** A few cooler nights with a frost risk at higher levels. Otherwise highs often in the 20s. Sunny but a couple of passing showers or thunderstorms.
- **Aug. 28-Sept. 3:** Temperatures dip to near zero in the mountains and north, otherwise comfortable temperatures. Scattered rain or thundershowers.
- **Sept. 4-10:** Frost at several inland locations on a couple of nights. Changeable temperatures and weather with some rain.

## Alberta

- **Aug. 7-13:** Generally sunny with seasonable to warm temperatures most of the week but look for a few showers or thunderstorms on one or two occasions.
- **Aug. 14-20:** A few cooler nights but otherwise pleasant temperatures with frost pockets north. Sunny skies apart from passing showers or thunderstorms.
- **Aug. 21-27:** Seasonable to warm in spite of a couple of cooler nights with frost patches central and north. Sunny apart from a few showers or thunderstorms.
- **Aug. 28-Sept. 3:** Frost occurs at several locations on one or two nights, otherwise pleasant temperatures. Sunny with scattered showers or thunderstorms.
- **Sept. 4-10:** Variable weather and fluctuating temperatures as sunshine is interspersed with shower or thundershower activity. Brisk winds at times.

## Saskatchewan

- **Aug. 7-13:** Warm temperatures dominate under sunny skies in spite of a few showers or heavier thunderstorms on one or two cooler days.
- **Aug. 14-20:** Seasonable to warm temperatures and mainly sunny skies but expect scattered thunderstorms at a few localities, some possibly heavy.
- **Aug. 21-27:** Comfortable temperatures with highs frequently in the 20s and a couple of cooler nights. Rain or showers occur on a couple of occasions.
- **Aug. 28-Sept. 3:** Spotty frost, mainly central and north on a couple of nights, otherwise seasonable temperatures. Isolated showers or thunderstorms.
- **Sept. 4-10:** Frost is common in many regions on a couple of nights as temperatures and weather conditions fluctuate. Blustery. Scattered rain or showers.

## Manitoba

- **Aug. 7-13:** Mostly sunny with seasonable to warm temperatures. Scattered showers or heavier thunderstorms occur on a couple of cooler days.
- **Aug. 14-20:** Sunny on most days apart from scattered shower or thunderstorm activity around mid-week. Normal to warm temperatures. Brisk winds at times.
- **Aug. 21-27:** In spite of a few cooler nights temperatures peak in the 20s on many days. Expect some rain or showers on a couple of occasions.
- **Aug. 28-Sept. 3:** Normal to warm temperatures but with cooler nights. Frost risk mostly central and north. Sporadic rain or showers on a couple of days.
- **Sept. 4-10:** Frost occurs at several locations on a couple of nights. Variable weather and temperatures with blustery winds. Sporadic rain or showers.

## 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.

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# 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

**A**t 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 quar-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44

**“Sweat equity is worth exactly what you paid for it,” says BDO’s Jim Snyder. If you didn’t get paid in dollars, you didn’t get paid at all**

## 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.

## 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](http://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](http://www.country-guide.ca) for your use.

ter 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 subtext 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 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

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46

**“ If it's a profitable business, be like every other business,” says farm adviser Cedric MacLeod. “Take out some funds to invest in a nest egg. Don't be afraid to pay income taxes.”**

## 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.

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## Sweaty situations and solutions

### More and more often, 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.

Recently Norris was working with a young couple buying a farm in part with cash and in part with sweat equity. With a “sweat equity” purchase, the buyer is paying off all or a portion of the agreed cost of a property through labour.

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.

These type of transactions are often a combination of purchase agreement and shareholder agreement. “I think it is going to become more and more common for aging farmers to look at this as an option during their lifetime,” 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. Through this arrangement, the next generation could become a full owner over a set amount of years, or inherit the remaining interest when the older generation dies. They could also potentially buy the remaining interest or decide not to continue to farm and cash out the value of their accumulated shares, or use that

accumulated equity to leverage further expansion.

The other side of the coin is addressing the common assumption that you need to own land to farm, whether you are at the end, middle or the beginning of your career.

“Why do you need to own ground to farm?” says MacLeod. “Ownership is entirely pride based.”

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.”

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 Agronomics and farms in New Brunswick.

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

## 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.

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# Out-competed by Ukraine

Massive Ukrainian farms are producing grain and getting it into export position for \$100/t less than in Canada

BY GERALD PILGER

In the last issue of *Country Guide*, I wrote of my travels in China, and of how that trip made me question the true competitiveness of Canadian agriculture. Unfortunately, a new Australian study validates many of my concerns.

“Ukraine: An emerging challenge for Australian wheat exports” is the third study from the Australian Export Grains Innovation Centre (AEGIC), a not-for-profit public company created by the state of Western Australia and the Australian Grains Research and Development Corporation. Its goal is increase the value and competitiveness of Australian grains internationally.

AEGIC started with a study of the Australian grain value chain and is now undertaking similar studies of its competitors.

In 2015 AEGIC released its study of Western Canada’s grain export system. Even despite Western Australia’s lower farm productivity and lower infrastructure efficiency, the study found, farmers there had a competitive advantage over us in delivering grains into the critical Asia market.

On top of that, the report identified strategies Australia could use to actually

increase its competitive advantage over Canada (its major competitor in the world grain markets) by simply copying Canadian systems and processes that are working well.

That’s why AEGIC didn’t see Canada as a major threat. But Ukraine is a different matter altogether.

One troubling paragraph summarizes the AEGIC view: “Ukrainian wheat exports are currently a modest threat to Australia’s wheat export industry in its key markets. BUT... the potential threat is large, albeit uncertain for many reasons.”

By extension, Ukraine could pose an even greater threat to Canada’s farms.

## UKRAINE’S ADVANTAGES

AEGIC identifies a number of factors which give Ukraine a competitive advantage. Probably the biggest is soil quality.

Ukraine has 32 million hectares of arable land, much of it humus-rich chernozem soil. In fact, one-third of the world’s top-quality chernozem soil is in Ukraine. Their inherent productivity has enabled Ukraine to already become the world’s third-largest exporter of corn and barley and sixth-largest exporter of

wheat as of 2014. Ukraine is also the world’s leading producer of sunflower seeds and No. 1 exporter of sunflower oil.

Ukraine has a relatively moderate and favourable climate for grain production. Furthermore, climate change projections suggest future conditions will be conducive to even greater production.

In addition to these natural advantages, there are societal and business factors which also make Ukrainian agriculture more competitive.

Agriculture is an extremely important industry to the Ukrainian economy. Agriculture was responsible for 9.3 per cent of the GDP, 17 per cent of employment and 26 per cent of exports in 2012, which means agriculture is more important socially and economically in Ukraine than in either Australia or Canada. As a result, the Ukrainian government is more responsive to agricultural needs and concerns.

Among the big changes Ukrainian governments have made to increase agricultural production, they now allow private ownership of farmland, something that was not permitted when Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union. Today 74 per cent of farmland has been allocated to private ownership.

However, land ownership reform is still a work in progress. The distribution of land to the rural population resulted in most people owning only one to four hectares of farmland, which they are still restricted from selling. They are not restricted from leasing the land, however, and the government mandates that owners receive a rent of US\$50-US\$70/ha. While low by North American land rental rates, this income is significant for Ukrainians when you consider the per capita GDP in Ukraine is only US\$3,100. Meanwhile, of course, these relatively low lease rates lessen grain production costs for Ukrainian farmers.

The privatization of land ownership coupled with the adoption of free market economics has resulted in a phenomenon called the corporatization of farming. One-third of the farmland in Ukraine is now farmed by large corporate enterprises known as agroholdings — a rate that far exceeds the corporatization of Canada or Australia.

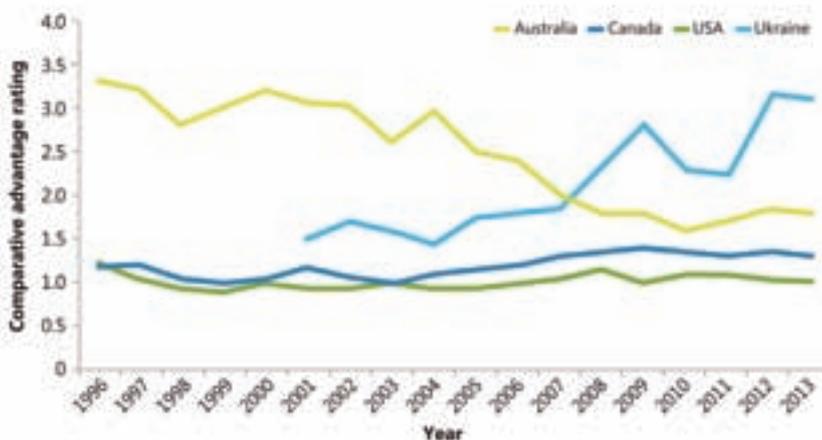
## BIG, BIGGER, BIGGEST

Do its huge corporate farms make Ukraine more competitive?

Much of the AEGIC report details the impressive competitive advantages these massive farming enterprises offer:

“They (agroholdings) enjoy the combination of relatively unconstrained access to

## Revealed agriculture comparative advantage



Source: Based on data from Keogh et al (2015)

modern machinery, economies of scale, a devalued local currency, a low-cost production base and the ability to bide their time selling without the pressure of cash-flow constraints,” the report says.

As well, it says, “Larger entities, such as agroholdings, are better able to tap into foreign sources of credit, acquire USD-priced inputs and obtain political patronage, if needed.”

The report states that agroholdings also have easy access to abundant cheap labour and foreign capital.

Many of the agroholdings not only farm, but now control entire supply chains, including production or importation of crop inputs and the value-adding of the farm production, either through exporting the crops they have grown via their own facilities or by milling them at their own processing facilities.

Most alarming, however, is that while these Goliaths have economy-of-scale advantages in terms of production costs, the real drivers of their success are their access to credit and their ability to add value through vertical integration.

Nor should we overlook the competitive advantage that its farmers get from Ukraine’s devalued currency. While Canadian farmers know the positive impact on grain sales of the fall of our dollar from near par to the low 70s cent mark against the U.S. dollar, the value of the Ukrainian hryvnia has decreased from 14 per cent of the U.S. dollar to three per cent in the last year alone, cutting its value by three-quarters.

### UKRAINE’S DISADVANTAGES

Fortunately for Australian and Canadian farmers, there are some major hurdles preventing Ukraine from capitalizing on these advantages. They include:

- Geopolitical risks. The continuing conflict with Russia and general unrest in eastern Europe continues to impact agriculture.
- Endemic corruption. Bribery is common.
- The comparatively weak rule of law.
- Lack of infrastructure and poor road and rail system. Delivery lineups at terminals at harvest time can stretch 20 kms.
- Arcane landownership rules. Large agroholdings may be leasing from more than 1,000 land owners.
- Economic instability, including high interest rates, high inflation.
- Difficulties repatriating capital.
- Lack of investment in agriculture.
- Low-quality wheat.

A major disadvantage identified in the report was the low share of the world price that Ukrainian farmers receive: “From 2009 to 2012, the average farm gate price for wheat in Ukraine averaged only 68 per cent of the FOB price. By comparison, farmers in the U.S. and Canada received 90 per cent and 79 per cent of their respective FOB prices over the same period, with Australian growers receiving between 80 and 90 per cent of FOB values.” Unfortunately, as the numbers show, while getting a bigger share of the value of grain than Ukrainian farmers, Canadian farmers were receiving a significantly lower share of FOB prices compared to the U.S. and Australia.

### WHAT WE NEED TO DO

While there are real problems in Ukraine, Aegic they are fixable with funding, a supportive government, and time.

In the meantime, the bottom line is that Ukrainian wheat is already very competitive. Growing a tonne of grain and getting it into shipping position costs C\$100 less per tonne in Ukraine than in Australia.

Based on AEGIC’s study of Canada’s grain system, which puts our costs at \$20 higher above Australia’s, Ukraine’s potential advantages over Canada are staggering.

The threat is enhanced by the fact that buyers are increasingly willing to accept Ukrainian grains. Before 2000, buyers required a US\$30 discount before purchasing similar quality Ukrainian wheat. Today that discount has dropped under US\$15.

The report’s key recommendations are in the attached sidebar. A full copy of the report can be downloaded from: <http://newsite.Aegic.org.au>. **CG**

## Verbatim from AEGIC: key recommendations and Ukraine summary:

**1. Collate, monitor and analyse developments in Ukraine (and surrounding nations) and inform the Australian grains industry of the implications.** Forewarned is forearmed.

Accurate and timely information about emerging competitors increases the opportunity for Australia’s grains industry to make strategic decisions based on sound analysis.

**2. Investigate why (or whether) Australian wheat is preferred in our major markets and why Ukrainian wheat is or isn’t preferred in those same markets.** If we know what customers value we can better serve their needs.

**3. Convey market and competitor information to those Australian stakeholders whose responses can increase returns for Australian wheat growers.** Australian grain growers need to benefit from better serving their customers and reacting to competition.

**4. Use our ‘window of opportunity’ carefully.** It’s a tide (not a tidal wave) of Black Sea wheat entering some of our major markets. The Australian grains industry has time to plan and co-ordinate an effective response.

Our aim is to bring much-needed nuance to discussions regarding the impacts of Black Sea grain production on Australian wheat exports. Currently the discussion includes views ranging from those who see the loss of wheat export markets being a fait accompli, to those who feel that ‘business as usual’ will suffice and the supposed threats are grossly overstated. Not unexpectedly, reality lies somewhere between.

### Producer support estimates (subsidies) as a percentage of gross farm receipts (including support)

	2008 (%)	2009 (%)	2010 (%)	2011 (%)	2012 (%)
Ukraine	3.0	7.9	6.7	-4.4	1.3
OECD — total	20.7	21.9	19.2	18.3	18.6
Australia	4.4	3.1	2.8	2.9	2.7
Canada	13.2	17.5	16.7	15.1	14.3
United States	8.8	10.6	7.8	7.7	7.1
EU27	23.5	23.3	19.8	18.0	19.0
Brazil	3.7	6.5	4.5	4.8	4.6
China	2.9	11.5	15.3	12.9	16.8
Kazakhstan	3.9	13.8	9.4	10.8	14.6
Russian Federation	20.5	20.7	21.5	15.1	13.5

Source: Producer and Consumer Support Estimates: Agricultural support estimates 2013, OECD Agriculture Statistics

# The four Ms get down to work

AGCO's Robert Ciecko shares his strategy for winning with lean manufacturing in agriculture

BY SCOTT GARVEY / MACHINERY EDITOR

**W**hile touring the assembly lines at AGCO's huge combine and hay-tool plant at Hesston, Kansas, I admit I stopped counting how many workers were greeted by name by Robert Ciecko as he guided our group. But I didn't stop being impressed by how, at virtually every station, waves came from the workers, or at least a smile and a nod in exchange for his hello.

Those of us on the tour actually looked at each other in amazement a couple of times as the tour neared its end and Ciecko was having yet another brief conversation with a familiar employee.

The guided walk along assembly lines in late March was part of the company's public celebration of the 100,000th swather to be built at the factory since production began in 1955.

Ciecko is AGCO's vice-president of Hesston manufacturing. It's a facility that turns out an average 42 fully completed machines of many types each day, and it's his job to keep it running smoothly.

Eventually, I just had to ask him how it is that he seemed to personally know nearly every worker by name. I've been on lots of factory tours, and I've seen lots of managers be friendly with rank-and-file workers. But this was beyond that ordinary, anonymous sort of interaction.

"If you give people respect, you gain respect back,"

Ciecko replied in a matter-of-fact way. "It's the same with customers, management, or the people you manage or work with. I don't differentiate between operators on the line and people from corporate. I always treat them the same way."

Ciecko grew up on a small farm in Poland, and it seems to have left him with a folksy, unpretentious demeanor. He's easy to talk to, which may help employees relate to him, and he still has a noticeable accent that hints at his European origin.

But no matter his personal style, a manager isn't going to know this many assembly line workers by name if he spends the day tucked away in a suite of executive offices in some remote administration building. Only by actually spending time in the heart of the facility can anyone, no matter what their background, come to know staff so well.

So it's no surprise when I learn Ciecko spends most mornings on the factory floor mingling with the employees who pull wrenches.

"Part of the lean (manufacturing) culture is you spend part of every single day on the floor," Ciecko told me. "Day-to-day operations are first. Then planning meetings later in the day when I put my thinking cap on. That's how I structure my day."

"He's hands-on," agreed Christian Ward, a member of the United Steelworkers Union executive at the Hesston plant. "If someone on the line says they need something, he addresses it."

Ward and another union member were invited by management to join the tour group and chat with visitors.

Like most plant managers, Ciecko is a believer in the "lean manufacturing" concept, which was initially developed by auto manufacturers in Japan a few decades ago. He attributes much of his current management philosophy to learning from previous colleagues and mentors, some of them during his previous tenure at Ford.

Ciecko spent 20 years with Ford, stationed in four different countries and at seven different plants. "There's always a common denominator," he said. "People issues are the same everywhere, although this is always something you can learn from each culture."

"As I grew in the management ranks and had people working for me, I very quickly learned that in order to be successful in a lean manufacturing environment, you



Rank-and-file assembly workers joined executives and customers for a group photo during the 100,000th swather celebration earlier this year.

need to follow a few very simple rules. One of them is 4M: man, machine, material and method.”

In his own words, this is how Cieccko lives and breathes those four Ms.

• **MATERIAL**

“You have to have a basic understanding of the materials that get put together. That makes you a lot more knowledgeable and helps you understand the issues on the line or design issues.”

• **METHOD**

“You have to learn the process, which I call method, no matter what you produce, whether it’s trucks, combines, swathers or balers. In other words, you have to have a basic understanding of the materials and the process you use, and how materials are put together.

• **MACHINE**

“You also need to understand machines, whether it’s simple tools or more complicated electronics or computers to test or aid in the assembly process.”

• **MAN**

“Respect for people — I learned it as a youngster growing up on the farm. You have to know your people. You have to know the man. In other words, you have to know what makes operators successful or not.”

Along with celebrating the production milestone that day with customers, media and senior executives, Cieccko and other management staff brought all levels of staff into the event, clearly making them all feel part of the company’s success.

The farm family that had purchased the 100,000th swather was on hand to see their machine revealed for the first time, and it wasn’t just the executives ready to shake their hands. In a first-ever experience for me, the entire assembly line crew was standing outside the auditorium door where the swather was waiting to be unveiled. They shook hands with customers and visitors as they entered, forming a kind of T-shirt-clad receiving line. Then they posed with the customers for a commemorative photo around the swather a few minutes later.

Cieccko and other managers I spoke to all echoed the thought that since the milestone was the result of the efforts of an entire corporate team working toward a common goal, having the rank and file integrated into the ceremony wasn’t only a nice touch, it was essential.

Cieccko had more to say about that.

“I think it’s very beneficial for two purposes,” he said. “No. 1, it’s (beneficial) for employees to see who pays their paycheque. And that is the customer. We, AGCO, simply transfer those funds from the customer in the form of a weekly or bi-weekly paycheque. So it was important to me, and it’s important to every person at Hesston, to see who pays our paycheques. The other one is they (employees) are always curious. I have the privilege of walking people through (the plant) once or twice a week. And they (employees) are always curious.



In late March, the 100,000th swather to start down this assembly line was the focus of a celebration at AGCO’s Hesston, Kansas factory.



Robert Cieccko, vice-president of Hesston manufacturing, discusses the assembly procedure for these Massey Ferguson swathers while guiding journalists through the hay tool and combine assembly plant.

PHOTOS: SCOTT GARVEY

Where do these people come from, what state or what country?”

In today’s labour environment where so many firms, particularly in agriculture, lament that it’s hard to find quality, skilled workers, the inclusive Hesston approach seems to have helped stabilize the plant workforce.

“People tend to stay with us for quite a long time,” Cieccko said. “This is not a revolving door by any means. A lot really grew up on the line. I forgot to mention them as we walked by.”

That last sentence came almost as an apology.

As employees, customers and senior executives all ate a catered lunch together near the milestone machine that day, I spoke more with Cieccko. He summed up the celebration this way: “Days like today make us reflect on the past year, the past decades and how much we’ve progressed, in terms of design, in terms of technology, in terms of efficiency, in terms of quality. It’s a special day. Everyone enjoys it.” **CG**

# When the fuse is too short

“**M**y 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?

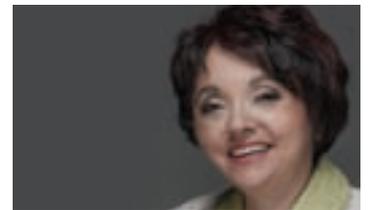
Clients often tell me in coaching sessions: “Sometimes I feel great when I lose my temper, and then after a while I regret it.” This is because losing your temper does relieve tension in your body. In the short term, you might feel a release. However, the negative consequences are severe.

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](mailto:pierrette@pierrettedesrosiers.com). [www.pierrettedesrosiers.com](http://www.pierrettedesrosiers.com)



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# Get the message right

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

**F**or 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](http://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](http://www.amazon.ca/The-Write-Way-Becoming-Successful/dp/189745340X)
- *Content Marketing Made Easy*  
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For grammar help, Crossman recommends:

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

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

- *Oxford Dictionary's* Word of the Day at:  
[www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com)

Free writing resources on the Internet are available at:

- Hub Spot  
[library.hubspot.com/](http://library.hubspot.com/)
- Content Marketing Institute  
[contentmarketinginstitute.com/education/original-cmi-ebooks/](http://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

**T**hanks 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.

**D**ale'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 58



## 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**

“**W**ere 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.

**Leeann Minogue** is the editor of *Grainews*, a playwright and part of a family grain farm in southeastern Saskatchewan.

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