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TIMES TWO
This husband and wife team gave each other a mandate to upgrade their management skills.

BOARDROOM FARMING
Gay Lea designed its training program to make its directors more effective. Now it helps on farm too.

GF2 IN THE CLASSROOM
With these grants, more farmers are signing up for more courses and upgrades this winter.

KEEP THE GOOD TIMES ROLLING
Markets have slumped, but our Errol Anderson says that doesn’t mean the good times have to be over.

MAKING CONNECTIONS
This new electronic service aims to bring farmers and buyers together, with benefits to both.

FARMING THE CLOUD
The cloud is already starting to change the way we farm in Canada. Just remember to protect your data.

LEARNING ABOUT BIOLOGICALS
It’s time to grapple with the new powerhouses in ag fertility and crop protection.

COLLEGES GET PUT TO THE TEST
Enrolment rates are soaring in college ag programs, but what future are the new grads pursuing?

LOOKING FOR NORMAL
Case IH is predicting a slowdown in farm machinery sales. Such a pace, it says, is good news all around.

SELLING OUT FARMING
It’s time for stronger regulations to keep farmland in the hands of farmers, before it’s too late.

GUIDE HR — WHEN THE SPOILED CHILD NEEDS TO GROW UP
Get a job. Sometimes, the best prep for working on the farm is to start by working somewhere else.

GUIDE LIFE — WHEN THE NEW IN-LAW ARRIVES
Things can’t stay the same. A new person always brings change. But you can make it a good thing.

MACHINERY GUIDE
Small is smart with these under 120-hp tractors.

HANSON ACRES
It sounded like such a good idea to invite the family.

GUIDE HEALTH
Diabetes numbers are growing. Should you worry?

PETUNIA VALLEY
This time, the turkeys are doing the cooking.
It’s been talked about, debated, and argued amongst growers across the prairies. When it’s all said and done, according to yield trials, Genuity® Roundup Ready® hybrids yield on par with the competition.* Like all contests this close, the debate rages on... for now.

It’s all tied up.

When it comes to yield supremacy, it’s six of one, half dozen of the other.
It’s all tied up.

When it comes to yield supremacy, it’s six of one, half dozen of the other.

It’s been talked about, debated, and argued amongst growers across the prairies. When it’s all said and done, according to yield trials, Genuity® Roundup Ready® hybrids yield on par with the competition: Like all contests this close, the debate rages on... for now.
There are two axioms here, one that you know and one perhaps you don’t. Both are worth chewing on.

The first is that short crops have long tails. We’ve all heard it many times, but we probably aren’t giving it enough credit.

Yes, a short crop — i.e. the 2012 drought crop in the U.S. — inflates prices all the way through until the chain is brimming full of the next harvest. But that’s not all.

Associate editor Maggie Van Camp uncovered it in her research on land prices for our last issue. When ag economists studied the “Russian” boom in farm incomes in the early ’70s, they discovered that farmland demand didn’t collapse when grain prices collapsed.

Instead, demand continued strong for the next six years, fuelled by farmers who had used the spike in corn and wheat prices to reduce debt and strengthen their equity positions.

I should be leery of making any kind of forecast in today’s agriculture, but I wonder if this “six years” isn’t the most important number I’ve read in 2013.

It’s easy to find farm experts today who say that if there is a strong global grain crop in 2014, farming will get a lot less fun especially for older farmers who are holding on to their land and leasing it on shares. They may be right. More land may come up for sale. But even so, anyone who thinks land will soon be bargain priced may have to recalculate.

From this research, it looks like there will be more than enough demand to keep land prices firm for a good long while.

By the way, that research also show that the more a farm boosted its equity share during the good years, the more it invested in those subsequent six years, so we can also have a pretty good idea who is going to get those extra acres.

Maybe though, there’s another number that will prove even more critical. Liz Robertson of the Canadian Association of Farm Advisors reminded me of it recently. It’s the truism that 70 per cent of wealth tends to get lost within two generations of its creation.

In simple terms, the first generation has both the drive to create wealth and the frugality to manage it. The second generation not only loses the ambition to grow the pie, they also open the purse strings, and by the time you get to the third generation, there’s no family tradition of skillful wealth management, but lots and lots of experience at easy spending.

It doesn’t have to be that way, of course, and our bet is that there are farm families across Canada today that have equity to invest over the next six years, and that are creating a family culture and the business framework to nurture the skills of their next generations. Before long, it may be very obvious who they are.

Are we getting it right? Let me know how you see it. I’m at tom.button@fbcpublishing.com.

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Conventional thinking says bigger is better, but depending on the specific needs of your farm, sometimes smaller is smarter. In fact, every farm seems to have jobs that need agility and manoeuvrability more than brute strength. Besides, today’s small tractors are a new breed, with the designs from these five manufacturers showing a surprising amount of power, efficiency and comfort — to get the job done.

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Launched at the 2013 Farm Progress Show, the MT400D adds extra agility to Challenger’s lineup, whether it’s for loader work, hay production or just getting the job done around the farm. Available in five models — MT 455D, MT 465D, MT 475D, MT 485D and MT 495D — the power range is from 95 to 125 horsepower. Challenger says the MT400D is designed for cost efficiency, featuring the AutoPower I transmission on its 4.9-litre AGCO Power engine.

[www.challenger-ag.us](http://www.challenger-ag.us)

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New Holland says its T5 series with the T5.105 and T5.115 are engineered to run smarter with the Electro Command semi-powershift transmission and state-of-the-art common rail technology. That translates to class-leading Tier-4A compliance plus enhanced vision with the VisionView cab. The Electro Command is actually an optimized version of New Holland’s T6 series tractors, with 16 forward and reverse gears. Plus there’s outstanding manoeuvrability and Comfort Ride cab suspension for superior operator comfort.

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The name stays the same, but what’s inside is new. John Deere 5E series tractors have been updated to meet the demand for peak engine efficiency through adherence to Tier 4 emissions standards. The new 5085E and 5100E also offer the PowerTech diesel engine, with a 12 forward-12 reverse PowrReverser transmission. That means a smoother ride with back-and-forth chores, whether you’re loading or blading. There are also six models from 45 to 100 horsepower for plenty of choice in a range of power levels and options.

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The utility class of tractors is one of the equipment sector’s fastest growing, and Massey Ferguson is heavily involved with its 110- and 120-horsepower models. The MF 5600 takes power and performance, and adds a completely new front axle suspension option. Plus there’s the Massey approach with AGCO’s power engines and a new 2.55-metre wheelbase chassis, built to support the Dyna-4 or Dyna-6 transmissions.

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From preparing the soil to selecting a variety, from precision planting to optimizing inputs, you do everything possible to give each seed its best chance to maximize yield potential. That’s a big investment. And it all has to pay off at harvest time. So Case IH has made a big investment of its own – $60 million to develop and build its new headers. Because beans left in the field are like money left on the table.

Quantifying Bean Harvest Losses

Experts agree that harvesting losses of one to two bushels per acre are typical. Mark Hanna, Iowa State University Extension ag engineer, says average machinery loss of 1.5 bushels of soybeans per acre is normal, and poorly adjusted machines can lose 2.5 bushels or more. Up to 85 or 90 percent of soybean harvest losses tend to occur at the header.

How is an accurate measurement of harvest losses made? Literally, by counting beans. By sampling lost beans from one-foot squares on a harvested field, we can derive accurate estimates of total harvest loss and determine the likely cause of those losses. The rule of thumb is, four beans lost in a square foot add up to a one-bushel-per-acre loss. Typically, there are three principal causes of harvest losses attributed to the header.

First are shatter losses, beans that are lost through impact with the reels or the cutterbar. Number two are pods that remain on the stems as they are cut, but are swept under the machine and left behind. And third are down stalks or low pods that are simply too low for the header to cut.

The keys to improved header performance are gentler gathering and cutting, more efficient gathering action, and the ability to shave the field closer to the ground. A properly adjusted flex-draper can significantly reduce header losses by more effectively lifting and sweeping the crop across the cutterbar onto the draper belts. When combined with a cutterbar that has been adjusted for the crop and field conditions, the operator can reduce his header loss to as low as 0.5 bushels per acre. The key is carefully assessing the header’s performance, and optimizing the settings to achieve the desired results.

A Big Investment in Better Harvests

The new draper headers from Case IH are the result of more than $60 million investment in research & development and manufacturing, including the new Combine Header Center of Excellence in Burlington, Iowa. Built to minimize grain loss and provide the best grain quality while operating at higher speeds, over more acres, these new Case IH heads are backed by intense testing in the lab and on customers’ farms.

An important innovation is at the center of the new Case IH 3152 and 3162 draper headers – literally. The exclusive center-mounted knife drive – called CentraCut™ – improves header balance and efficiency because the head is driven symmetrically, from the center, to minimize vibration and improve performance. Typically, large headers have had heavy, complex drives on one or both sides. This design allows much narrower end dividers, reducing crop rundown and improving grain savings.

The new 3162 flex draper takes grain savings to a new industry benchmark. Following ground contours closely, it shaves the field to harvest more crop than competitive headers and previous Case IH models.

Adding to the Axial-Flow Advantage

New Case IH headers are easier to set up and maintain, so producers can spend more time harvesting. A combination of heavy-duty construction and easy maintenance helps keep them in the field, and out of the shop.

Designed specifically to fit Case IH Axial-Flow® combines, these headers are built simple, robust and reliable. They’ve passed through extensive competitive benchmark testing, and they are engineered with the latest advancements in harvesting technology. They help to bring a new level of innovation and productivity to the Axial-Flow combine family.

To learn more about Case IH Agronomic Design℠ and how our new header designs put more grain in the tank, visit www.CaseIH.com/AgronomicDesign.

References:
1 "Profitable Soybean Harvesting," Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University PM-573
2 "8 Top Soybean Harvest Tips," Corn and Soybean Digest, August 1, 2010.
3 Factory Observed Loss Check in 4-ft. square conducted by Case IH engineering, March, 2013, Goias State, Brazil. Soybeans harvested at 12 to 13% moisture. Yield was 55 to 60 bu. per acre. Single season beans.
With our proven, industry-leading SCR engine technology, Case IH gives you more power while still meeting tough Tier 4 B/Final regulations. In fact, the Steiger® 620 is the highest horsepower tractor to ever come off the assembly line. And all Case IH equipment is agronomically designed to help you maximize your yield potential and your profits, with fully integrated AFS precision farming technology and 24/7/365 support. The world of farming is changing. Be ready with the proven leader in efficient power. To learn more, visit your local Case IH dealer or www.caseih.com/efficientpowerctg1013.
he two desks of Kristin Ego-MacPhail and Gary MacPhail sit beside each other, tidy and yet stacked with business as their hectic farm market season winds down.

This small office is the interface between production and business at Ego’s Nurseries, Garden Centre and Farm Market near Orillia, an hour or so north of Toronto, where the couple has given themselves a business mandate to pursue professional development.

It’s not like they have nothing else to do. Ego’s, started by Kristin’s parents Laury and Lorraine as a roadside stand in 1975, is a busy, thriving place. Some 18,000 sq. ft. of heated greenhouses and 24,000 sq. ft. of outdoor container growing area and cold frames stretch out behind the farm market. Not only do the husband and wife team sell direct, Ego’s Nurseries also contract grows for landscape and gardening operations.

Kristin and Gary purchased the business in 2006. Gary does the bookkeeping and has a degree in economics from Western University.

For her part, with her B.Sc. in agriculture from the University of Guelph, Kristin says, “I’ve always focused on production… on doing a better job at growing.”

Last year, however, Kristin decided it was time to sharpen her business skills, and she signed up for the new Advanced Farm Management Program (AFMP).

Ego-MacPhail was one of 34 farmers in the course. Other options exist in other provinces, but in this particular case, it’s a course offered by the Agri-
cultural Management Institute in partnership with the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association, consisting of a series of one-day programs. Having the days spread out over the winter was more manageable for business and family. However, by the end of the course in April their greenhouse production was in full swing (http://advancedfarmmanagement.ca).

This year the course is six days at three locations and costs $2,400. Half of the tuition can be covered through the Growing Your Farm Profits funding. Farmers who have completed the GYFP program or who have accumulated management experience are encouraged to enrol, says Maureen Hinz, project manager at Synthesis Agri-Food Network.

The AFMP curriculum was designed through consultation with farmers who participated in the Grow Your Farm Profits (GYFP) program. Synthesis from Guelph was contracted by the Agricultural Management Institute and Ontario Soil and Crop to develop and deliver the material. Three or four years of accountant-prepared financial statements on an accrual basis are required in order to get the full benefit of AFMP. “Attendees should be farm business owners or managers with a solid understanding of the farm financial results,” says Rob Hannam, president of Synthesis Agri-Food Network.

Hannam and Mike Bossy, president of Bossy Nagy Geoffrey Group Chartered Accountants, teach how to understand key ratios, build an effective human resources plan, benchmark financial performance, lead change and execute a management plan. How to structure your business, plan for the next generation, leverage innovation and develop productive communications are also on the agenda.

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Participants emerge with a strategic approach to their business, and understand how planning can make them more proactive and less reactive, says Hannam.

Kristin found the course gave her the tools to link her farm’s financial information to ways to improve her business. Not only was she learning ratios and red flags, she used her own farm’s information so it was applicable in minutes. “By constantly tying it back to the big picture, and how to make it better, it finally made sense to me,” says Kristin. “Some areas were challenging, but nothing was overwhelming.”

Through lessons, case studies and discussion, each participant looks at the topics as they apply to their own farm — from analyzing their own accrual statements to what business structures would work for their operation to how they each communicated. Participants learn enterprise analysis. They also gain a solid understanding of financial statements and financial ratios, Hinz says, and they learn how to build a financial scorecard for the last three years that will help set and measure their performance against financial targets for the future.

Unlike the fill-in-the-chart assignments with GYFP, there wasn’t as much homework, says Kristin. However, when she got home, she was eager to share the information with Gary, reviewing and talking about what she had learned about their business. Although he was already good with the numbers, they began to look together at how to make changes. It helped them identify their own farm’s key issues.

By quantifying and comparing their biggest expenses it helped put a better spotlight on costs, says Kristin. For example, with 12 employees, mostly seasonal, she saw how significant the management of their human resources is to the profitability of their farm. Knowing their HR ratio (cost of employees over gross sales) inspired her to track down some benchmarking statistics through Landscape Ontario for other similar-size operations in their industry.

This winter, she’s going to look at their marketing, as well as developing some measurable to find out what’s effective and what provides value.

Back at the office, the McPhails are finding that their professional development commitment is kick-starting more effective planning. By having a forecasted budget for two years based on the past and their action plans, she and Gary can set more specific goals, says Kristin. For example, if they set a target to decrease their human resources budget, they sit down and come up with several ways to get there. Then they select which specific way would be the best to reach this goal.

While taking the course, Kristin adds, instructors were available by email or telephone at designated times to explore detailed questions. This was an invaluable resource, says Kristin.

The next time the group met, the leaders would recap what they learned in the previous session and the group would discuss it. For some of the participants it meant talking about the difficulties they came across trying to make changes, such as succession. Although they all came from a variety of different types of farms, they were all full-time farmers.

“It was very inspirational for me to be among the group,” says Kristin. “It helps for people to talk about it, to identify with others in the group.”

The lesson on how individuals communicate, learn and process was Kristin’s eureka moment. That night, after she did the Kolbe self-awareness assessment, she went home and got Gary to go through it too. It was so profound for them that they stuck a hard copy of their results on their desks as a reminder. “It really explained why we looked at problems so differently,” she says.

Kristin says that with the course, she and Gary are better prepared to go to their lending agent, and their annual planning is more effective too. She has a deeper understanding of how their numbers affect their farm’s profitability as well, so she’s more confident and motivated to delve into them.

The McPhails do a basic weekly report on sales and expenses including labour. It’s a strategy they got from a peer group of similar farmers who share ideas but are at least two hours away from each other so they are not in competition. They meet a couple of times a year in person, or have Skype conference calls.

“Although it’s basic, it gives me a good snapshot and helps us keep a tab on any changes,” says Kristin.

She almost sounds like she should be sitting at a desk in downtown Toronto, but she looks up and smiles at her husband at the other desk in their small office. Then she asks him what he thinks, and listens to his response intently and with understanding. This is powerful. CG
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A massive gleaming table stretches impressively across the boardroom of Gay Lea’s equally gleaming and impressive head office, planted among the rows and rows of head offices in Mississauga on the outskirts of Toronto.

It’s the polar opposite of the pastures and cornfields of Elmwood, a couple hours northwest of the city. Yet Mark Hamel, a semi-retired dairy farmer from that nook of Ontario’s Grey County, confidently sits at the helm of this board table, steering the company and its $500 million in annual sales through the notoriously precarious business of food processing.

Hamel credits the strengths and skills of the directors, delegates and employees for Gay Lea Foods’ ability to thrive. Following its co-operative mandate, their 10 board directors are all farmer members, eight elected from regions and two at-large at annual meeting. All must be active milk producers and have served previously as a delegate.

“‘It’s not just knowledge, but knowledge with perceptions that create decisions.’”

— Mark Hamel

When other farmer co-operatives across Canada imploded in the early 2000s, this company grew, more than doubling its gross output in the last 15 years. Today Gay Lea Foods processes about 30 per cent of the milk in Ontario, and has 640 employees at six sites.

Gay Lea Foods was started in 1958, i.e. before supply management. Co-operatives are often set up to fill market gaps or to counteract market power, says University of Saskatchewan professor, Murray Fulton. Their goal tends to be market access for farmer members in situations where other profit-seeking businesses aren’t jumping in. Typically, too, that market is near the farm gate.

Their growth often isn’t easy, especially since co-operatives may have trouble accessing capital for business operation and growth.

Is that why so many co-ops failed? Was their business concept flawed and unprofitable from the beginning, and their eventual collapse assured by inadequate credit?

Fulton and colleague Brent Hueth in their paper Co-op Conversions, Failures and Restructurings believe the real reason lies elsewhere.

They have determined that the failures weren’t necessarily due to the structure of the co-operatives.

Rather, the combination that proved lethal was poor management coupled with a lack of board oversight.

If there’s poor management, Fulton says, the board isn’t doing its job — hiring the right people, firing underperformers, providing good guidance. It may even be letting the management run the organization without proper reporting, which can also result in a downward spiral for the co-operative, says Fulton. “At the same time, poor management — managers acquiring too much power, failing to properly report, and so on — all contribute to poor oversight.”

For Fulton, the take-away is crystal clear: “Board governance is an issue to which co-operatives need to pay particular attention if they wish to remain financially viable.”

Although board training is important and necessary to good board oversight, training structure by itself is not enough. In fact, the failed co-ops that the researchers looked at were all well established with some form of director education. In addition to training, Fulton says the right culture both on the board, and between the board and senior management, is needed to properly frame the board’s role.

This culture establishes the board as a trustworthy and legitimate source of influence in the organization. Without this shared belief, the board will not be effective, no matter how much training the directors get. More importantly, this belief must be backed up by action. The board must exert authority in situations where it’s appropriate, making decisions
based on what is good for the co-op (and not just one or two members), and it needs to make those decisions efficiently.

“The board needs to operate well as a team,” says Fulton.

Gay Lea Foods seems to have managed these risks by honestly evaluating themselves, putting egos aside and taking action as a team.

To do so, the co-op created a culture of success by embracing personal and board governance training that turned their weaknesses into strengths. Furthermore, everyone understands and supports what the company is doing. In other words, they buy in. “Everyone is committed to the long-term vision,” says board chair Hamel. “Employees and members believe in the co-op concept. That’s empowering.

“It has given us a recognition and understanding of the competition in dairy and processing,” Hamel adds. “In this country we’ve had huge retail consolidation and it’s a retail-driven marketplace. There’s not a lot of processing investment.”

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Board directors can articulate vision and better understand how to have oversight over management based on that vision. The debate and discussion is more in depth.


Although farmer board members often have strong small-business skills from their own farms, they commonly lack detailed knowledge of businesses beyond the farm gate, and they need to know more about how the board structure works. They don’t necessarily come with a big picture of the industry, and some lack the ability to communicate, express, persuade and negotiate with confidence around the table.

“Our board members run multi-million-dollar businesses. They already know their way around a budget sheet,” says Hansen. “But there’s more to it.”

As secretary for the board, Hansen has witnessed the payback. The company has invested more than $500,000 since the inception of the Leadership in Governance training program.

“The greatest attribute of a co-operative is working together as a team,” says Hansen. “Having everyone understand the company’s long-term vision and move forward with commitment and passion goes a long way.”

Offering this free training for delegates has also become an effective board succession tool. Previously, almost all were elected by acclamation, but now delegate and board positions are often contested. During a time of shrinking farm numbers, Gay Lea has 1,200 members.

**THE PROGRAM**

Hamel is impressed with the ability and confidence of new directors. “Current directors hit the ground running,” he says. “Now they come to the table with skills like strategic planning and finance.”

The transformation didn’t happen overnight, nor did it emerge out of thin air. In fact, it’s still evolving. Hansen agrees, explaining, “Gay Lea has been on a board governance development journey for 10 years.”

That journey started when some board members took an educational tour to the U.K. to learn about newly formed co-operatives that had shot up after supply management ended. There they met Quintin Fox, who was working for a foundation helping these farmer boards learn about governance.

Like a bearded Mary Poppins of the co-operative movement, Fox trains farmers in the structure of boards and the skills needed to operate effectively, and he tops it up with spoonful of leadership training. Basically, he shows them what’s expected of board members, describing their roles and responsibilities and giving them the confidence to govern efficiently.

“We teach them how to stay out of the weeds,” says Fox.

Impressed with his approach, the Canadian Co-operative Association and
Gay Lea Foods hired Fox to develop a similar program based on their needs. First, they surveyed delegates and directors asking which skills and competencies they ranked as important for directors, and then asking how directors evaluated themselves against those skills. From those results and the guidance of a Gay Lea training and education committee, the Foundation Program of Leadership in Governance was created.

From 2009 to 2011, Fox delivered this eight-module program of training for directors and delegates on how boards work as well as on leadership, financial, and communication skills. Using outside trainers, role playing and case studies, these one-day modules (usually at the same time as other meetings) teach both hard and softer skills.

The program starts with the roles and responsibilities of delegates, directors, and the board, and by teaching the structure of how the board works with employees and delegates. Communication skills are taught and practised, once again within the context of explaining the rules of communicating on a board and giving the delegates the skills to effectively persuade, negotiate, question and listen.

Two modules focus on financial governance, explaining how the information should be presented, and then teaching literacy and applying strategy. Participants come away with the ability to pick out red flags on a financial statement and to plan financially for strategic changes.

A module is dedicated to strategy development, and to taking vision from planning through to implementation. They’re taught how co-operatives work, and their strengths and weaknesses hearing from both the success and failure sides of the equation. Making a board effective is discussed, including compensation and succession planning, meeting management and evaluations of the board itself and the CEO. The final module touches on leadership training, including self-awareness and vision.

Fox is now an employee of Gay Lea Foods where the co-op continues to offer governance training to its board and delegates internally. He has gone on to develop the Advanced Program for Gay Lea directors and delegates, which has more personalized coaching, advanced training, and personal projects. Participants present to the board a 3,000-word report on strategic planning for specific issues, like a mini MBA thesis. After only one session, they’ve found that not only does this develop the participants, but gives the board a chance to think and learn about potential issues on a deeper level.

"Strong board performance underlies strong business performance.” — Ove Hansen

Continued on page 22
Since the company brought the program in house last year, it continues to offer existing programs, both at foundation and advanced levels, to delegates and directors and on an open basis to other agricultural co-ops and sister agricultural organizations. Also, anyone can pay to attend one of its open training programs. Fox also runs a leadership program for employees and, in conjunction with the Agropur dairy co-op in Quebec, one for co-op members aged 18 to 25.

Also, four new modules are being developed to add to the original eight foundation modules. “The program continues to evolve as we respond to the governance and development needs of our directors and delegates,” says Fox.

Although these skills are customized for farmers in co-operative organizations, they’re very transferable. Training is being taken back to community groups, churches and other boards. Hamel has used his new communication skills on his own family’s farm and as a director for a local insurance board. “It’s not just knowledge, but knowledge and perceptions that create decisions,” he now says.

The training has also been helpful in smoothing out the farm’s succession. Mark’s son Matt is managing the farm with its 130 milking cows and 700 acres. About 120 days a year are required of the chair of the board, so Mark has taken a step back from those responsibilities. “It (board governance training) has helped me to share, not delegate responsibilities,” he says. “I’ve learned through this training that you may not agree 100 per cent with everything but you may not have all the facts and you have to have faith in others in the organization.”

In 2008 and 2012 the company was recognized with two national Governance Awards from the Canadian Co-operative Association. Now, CCA is working with co-ops across Canada to establish a Co-operative Governance Education Portal that will be launched by February 2014.

More information?

Gay Lea is offering open courses this fall and winter in Guelph, Ont. that cost $350 per session, including Financial Governance Level I on Feb. 11 and Financial Governance Level II on Feb. 12.

If you are looking for more how-to information about co-operative board governance, check out the papers and fact sheets at CCA’s website http://www.coopscanada.coop/en/orphan/Tools-for-the-Development-of-Value-Added-Agricultural-Co-ops/Management—Governance-and-Leadership-of-a-Co-operative.

Alternatively, Western University’s Ivey School of Business is offering a new leadership program for agriculture called Cultivate — Strategic Agricultural Leadership. During a week-long course from December 1 to 6, participants create a vision for the industry, develop partnerships that make a difference, analyse and influence policy, create innovation strategies and navigate turbulent times.

Don’t let the price tag scare you at $4,250, there’s some sponsorship through FCC (http://www.ivey.uwo.ca/executive/our-programs/cultivate-strategic-agricultural-leadership).
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Road map to growth

When U.S. farm adviser Family Farms Group came north to help Canadian farmers grow — exponentially — Alberta’s Mike Kalisvaart signed on

By Tom Button, CG Editor

The Kalisvaart family knows first hand about the ups and downs that farming can dole out. When they started into the hog business just north of Edmonton in 1979, though, they thought they had it figured out. By the mid-‘90s, they had doubled their hog operation, they were profitable, and says Mike, who grew up on the farm during those years, “we were feeling pretty good.”

Then came 1998 and 1999. “We were blindsided by the new reality created by Smithfields,” Mike says. “We thought we were where we needed to be, we didn’t see it coming, and a lot of producers exited the industry.”

“We have some growth targets we want to hit,” Mike Kalisvaart says, and then adds, “These are requiring more and more time.”

The Kalisvaarts were lucky enough to be able to switch gears and focus on grain farming, which had been Mike’s passion anyway. But the experience is still fresh in his mind.

“There’s a Wal-Mart effect,” says Mike. “It happened in hogs, it’s happened in chickens, and it’s going to happen to grain farming too. It’s almost an inevitability.

“It has become my vision,” Mike now says. Today, he farms with his father Jack, his brother Dan, and sister Stacey and brother-in-law Greg Bajema, but he still asks: “How do we take control so it won’t happen?”

His answer has meant recognizing the need to break out of old management patterns. It has meant acquiring new skills and new capabilities. But it has also meant asking an even harder question, Mike says. “How do we make it all work together to achieve the goals and objectives we need to achieve?”

Half a continent away in Brighton, Illinois, economist Allen Lash thinks he knows the answer. The key, says Lash, founder of Family Farms Group, is not only to acquire those skills, but to get support in using them to execute on a growth plan.

Nor does Lash — or the diverse farms across the continent that have signed on to the Family Farms program — make any apologies for stressing growth. Lash has a controversial reputation among U.S. ag economists, yet his demeanour is quiet. You instinctively lean close when he speaks, and you concentrate hard to follow his train of thought. And as he reaches to pet Koby, a stray Labrador-mix who showed up at the company’s front door one day and who is now always within a few feet, Lash exudes a reassuring sense of competence and calm.

It isn’t until you understand what he’s said that you begin to appreciate the apocalyptic nature of it.

Because Lash is convinced that the only way to

Continued on page 26
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save North America’s family farms is for farmers to take their management to the next level, and to move the size of their farms up even more than that.

“Write down the numbers,” Lash told a group of farmers the day I went to Brighton to meet him with Kalisvaart and a handful of farm members from across the Corn Belt.

Lash wanted to know how much growth their parents had put their farms through during their generation. While the numbers varied, most had grown six to 10 times. If the farm had started out at 200 acres, for example, the operation was farming 1,200 to perhaps 2,000 owned and rented acres by the time the parents retired.

Then, Lash said, “How are you going to achieve that growth?”

In the corridor afterward, Lash dismissed any hope that agriculture has entered a new demand-led paradigm, where prices will be buoyant enough to save smaller farms. “Our farmers must be leaders,” Lash said. “We’re talking about survival.”

“Planning for growth”

Kalisvaart admits to being a numbers geek. He is this year’s Outstanding Young Farmer for Alberta (the results of the national competition weren’t known at press time). He has already taken the Canadian CTEAM course, as well as programs through AgriSolutions.

Now he believes he needs to keep making shrewd management decisions, harnessing even more skills and capabilities for the family farm, and the farm itself needs to grow vigorously.

“What drives me to grow is a desire to choose my own destiny,” Kalisvaart says. “I want to drive the bus.”

The farm is already about 8,000 acres, but he hopes to grow by up to 25 per cent a year. “I look back to when I was 25 and 2,500 acres was a big farm, and I thought we were in pretty good shape,” Kalisvaart says. “Big farms like 20,000 to 30,000 acres only look as big as what 10,000 acres did 15 years ago.”

Extra acres make sense in another way too, he says. “As CEO of a larger farm, I can pay attention to the bigger picture and have a sizable capital budget so we have room to maintain our current direction, yet have some funds allocated to R and D and innovation.”

Kalisvaart’s brother-in-law Greg is taking the Operations Manager from Family Farms Group, which means the farm will not only be more efficient, it will be faster at adopting new technology and it will be a better employer and partner, Kalisvaart says. Each of those traits will be critical to farm growth, he believes.

It also means that he will be free to focus his own time on growth. “We have growth targets that we want to hit,” he says, “and these are requiring more and more time dedicated to developing relationships with landowners.”

**THE FAMILY FARMS METHOD**

In fact, one of Kalisvaart’s key learning moments with Family Farms came early in the process. The company is built on essentially two platforms. First, it acts as a sort of warehouse of management skills,
Nuffield Canada Agricultural Scholarships expand the horizons of innovative Canadian agriculturalists. It is a leadership program second to none. Nuffield scholars travel internationally to gather information, build relationships and learn best practices that they can apply to their operations in their home countries.

“Challenging; Innovative; Sociable; Educational; Inspiring”. Those were the words used to describe one Nuffielder’s experience. Initially funded by Lord Nuffield of Britain after the second World War, the program has sent nearly 1500 scholars from the UK, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, France and Ireland around the world looking for the best in agricultural technologies, policies and networks.

Within Canada, Nuffield holds a very unique place as it is the only national leadership program available in agriculture. Scholars come from all provinces and are involved in every aspect of our agricultural industry.

Three scholarships of $15,000 each are awarded annually. Scholars have two years to complete their travel and present the findings of their personal research project. Within those two years, they must travel for a minimum of ten weeks, six of which need to be consecutive.

In the recent years, Canadian scholars have studied topics such as:
- Succession planning
- Value chain development
- Agricultural land preservation policies
- Private/Public research partnerships
- The development of an Ontario hops industry
- Opportunities to increase awareness of agricultural careers
- Beef cattle performance by optimizing the intake of plant water soluble carbohydrates.
- Grain marketing and production risk management strategies

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CONFIDENCE
“It really opens doors for you. You’re meeting people who are happy to share what they know. My studies gave me the confidence to propel myself into the next level of business growth. It truly was the experience of a lifetime.”

John Lahr, (1997 Scholar), MLA, Kings North Farmer John’s Herbs, Canning, Nova Scotia

OPPORTUNITIES
“After my two years the world is smaller, my business is more profitable and the farmers who hear my story are inspired. I can’t say enough about the opportunities that continue to generate through this wonderful network of likeminded passionate people.”

Steve Larocque, (2008), Three Hills, Alberta Agronomist, Beyond Agronomy

KNOWLEDGE
“The Nuffield experience is very unique and a fantastic experience. The opportunity to meet farmers and industry leaders from seven other countries is invaluable. My own farm practices will improve as a result of what I’ve learned and I hope to share what I’ve learned with other farmers across the country.”

Shane Eby, (2010), Millgrove, Ontario underground organics

If you’re between 25 and 45, and have the desire, enthusiasm and determination to pursue new goals, think about Nuffield. Applications are due April 30th of each year.
with in-house capability to do training on everything from writing job descriptions to getting access to additional capital.

The company also walks members through a diagnostic system that aims to help the farm articulate its key objectives, and define the management steps for achieving them.

Throughout the process, peer support from other farms on the team helps keep the process focused, and a coach is assigned to monitor and encourage progress toward the farm’s unique set of three to five key management accountabilities.

Early on, the system also walks farm members through a who-does-what reality check. It means creating a set of boxes on paper to put all the farm’s important responsibilities into groups. For Kalisvaart in particular, the learning was immediate. “My name was in each one,” he says. “If you try to do that, not only can you not succeed, it eats into your family time. It’s too much.”

“For me,” says Kalisvaart, “the focus became, how do I get my name out of those boxes?”

Karmen Mehmen of Iowa, whose family farm was one of the earliest Family Farms Group members, found the box concept has paid off throughout her family’s involvement. “We had reached our glass ceiling and didn’t know it,” Mehmen recalls.

The box concept let the family divide responsibilities among different members, so each member could become expert in their area, and not have to worry about being expert in everything. Their total expertise rapidly grew, Mehmen says. Importantly, family relationships got healthier too, she says. “We say to each other all the time, ‘You’re in my box.’”

For the Mehmens, business planning centred on an “influence the acre” strategy. The family had already owned a truck, and did seed corn sales as well. So when the next generation was ready to start farming, they concentrated on growing their umbrella of income opportunities, not just on corn and soybean production.

“It’s professionalism,” Mehmen says. “As a family, we know where we are going, and we know how to make the progress that will help us get there.”

**ACROSS THE BORDER**

After its birth in 2006, Family Farms Group was often accused of being secretive. At best, it was clearly careful about publicity. Today, it is more transparent, even opening its head office to journalists. It is still close mouthed about its fee structure, however, so it’s impossible here to rate how its compares on cost.

Still, Family Farms Group now has about a dozen farmers signed on in the West, and a handful in Ontario. “They recognize the need to become more Canadian in their program if they want to gather the acres they desire,” says Leo Kosokowsky, Saskatchewan farm adviser. “I am sure they will have some success here. Adaptation and implementation that will be the determining factors.”

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“We had reached our glass ceiling and didn’t know it.”

— Karmen Mehmen

Lash is confident. Canada has its own specifics, he says, but when Canadian farmers look out at a world full of potential competitors, they see the same world that American farmers need to prepare for, and they have the same kinds of strengths and weaknesses to work on in order to meet that competition.

Besides, Lash also believes Family Farms Group will deliver more. As more top farmers sign on, he says, the company will help farmers source cheaper, better field inputs while also helping members gain better access to more capital. Members will also share data, and Lash is convinced their internal numbers will rival the value of the USDA’s.

These expectations are crucial to Kalisvaart, who formulated a strategic objective even before finding Family Farms Group of partnering at some level with “something bigger that could achieve some influence in the marketplace on a bigger scale than I could achieve on my own, and that I could have influence with.”

Lash says progress is on track. “As a group, we’re innovating farm business,” he says. “A model is emerging.”

At our meeting at the Family Farms headquarters in Illinois, Kalisvaart sat close to Matt Simms, an Indiana farmer about the same age and facing similar challenges and opportunities. “We joined at a good time,” Simms said of his start in farming. “We could make a few mistakes and still stay in business. But we have got to grow.”

If the farm doesn’t grow, he was saying, that will be the one unsurvivable mistake.

Kalisvaart seemed to nod. “I see a road map,” he tells me.
When federal and provincial governments unveiled their individualized slates of Growing Forward 2 offerings earlier this year, most farmers were busy in their fields. Now, with harvest more or less complete, more and more growers are showing interest in taking advantage of the numerous farm management and marketing courses on tap.

Canadian Federation of Agriculture president Ron Bonnett says farm education has been positioned as one of the federal government’s priorities, although when it comes to the delivery, each province is doing it in a different way.

“Here in Ontario, the Agricultural Management Institute (AMI) and the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association are working to put some of the management courses together. Out west, it’s being delivered at the provincial level,” says Bonnett.

Bonnett had already noted rising interest in farm business management while sitting at the AMI board of directors years ago.

“With all the high capital costs of getting into farming, particularly with a young family wanting to come in, you really have to have a strong business plan in place before you’re going to go ahead,” Bonnett says. “I think there’s quite a bit of interest on the government’s side because they see it as a tool that will help farmers manage some of their risk, and on the farmers’ side, you’re seeing quite a bit more interest, just out of necessity.”

The new five-year GF2 program started in April, and Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food spokeswoman Tanya Marissen says capacity for education programs is likely to build for the winter months.

Uptake has been a bit slow in the first funding year, says Debbie Loiselle, manager at Allied Associates Chartered Accountants. GF2 funding began April 1, 2013, she explains, but the details were not released until June.

Once the information became available, however, farmers showed immediate interest, Loiselle says. Quite a few Allied clients have registered for Growing Your Farm Profits workshops and others have submitted applications for the Capacity Building Funding Assistance grants for business planning and/or skills development.

Workshops are no longer mandatory to access the funding, and there will be some urgency to complete the application work by the required deadline of January 15, 2014 for the first year of funding, Loiselle says.

“For the most part, I think producers are enthusiastic about the opportunity to cost share activities that will allow them to plan for the future success of their operation,” Loiselle says.

Out west, participation levels are more mixed.
In Manitoba, some programs have just started and it’s too early to gauge farmer interest, says Manitoba Agriculture spokeswoman Diane Coble-Kendall.

“The rollout has been slow for GF2 and many programs are being designed after the start date,” adds Doug Chorney, president of Keystone Agricultural Producers. “Since most of us farmers are busy all summer, I doubt anyone has had a chance to even contemplate options for education.”

Saskatchewan producer interest has climbed since the first Growing Forward program was announced, and it’s expected to keep growing, according to a government official. The official says GF2 is too new to provide numbers, but for the original program, with $14 million in funding to producers, there were more than 4,100 applicants and almost 5,000 Farm Development Plans were completed.

Now, the province’s GF2 farm management offerings are under eight different concepts, including marketing.

“With the changes to the Canadian Wheat Board and the environment farmers are in now from a grain-marketing perspective, there’s a lot of interest and need for people to learn about what grain marketing is really going to entail on their farm,” says Saskatchewan business management specialist Ron Monette. Included in course material is how to create a marketing plan, and using futures markets.

Succession planning is another area farmers are keen on and that may attract even more interest. Monette says it’s an area containing numerous issues that need understanding.

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what shares? It’s so much more complicated than that,” Monette says. “You need to deal with family dynamics, meetings, fairness issues, and then all the legal aspects and risk management processes.”

Monette has found a lot of farmers will take a course in generally understanding farm succession first, which then spurs them on into proceeding through the formal process of developing an actual succession plan.

Alberta Agriculture has unveiled a number of education and training initiatives that include the Business Management Skills Development Program, for which there’s been good interest to date but funding remains for this fiscal year; the Traceability Training Program, which Alberta Ag expects will be fully subscribed; the Biosecurity Delivery Agent Program, which is almost fully subscribed for this year; the Food Safety Systems Delivery Agent Program, which opened at the end of July and has received five applications, all from non-profit organizations, and whose five proposed projects would deliver courses and workshops to approximately 350 producers, 90 processors and 40 meat inspectors; and the Livestock Welfare Delivery Agent Program, whose budget has been already two-thirds allocated.

“I would expect we’re going to see these programs fully utilized and I would encourage producers to have a look and see what they can make work,” says Humphrey Banack, first vice-president of the Alberta Federation of Agriculture. “Now is the time to look at how we can build for next year. And some of these programs will help us do that.”

Banack says with farm businesses expanding, it has become essential for farmers to have some kind of background in business education in particular.

“We’re a $1.8 million a year in annual sales business,” he says of the 5,000-acre farm he works with his wife, son and brother. “To manage that with little outside education and learning by the seat of your pants is a risky business. (It’s important) being able to recognize the risks and being able to use a process to manage those risks. Agriculture has turned into a real big business, and it’s very important to have that business acumen about you.”

But accessing these programs will involve some Internet savvy, filling forms and some heavy reading. With cutbacks to Alberta Agriculture support staff, farmers will have to take the initiative, Banack says.

Says Banack: “They’re not coming to you to say, ‘Here’s programs for you.’ You have to be willing to go out and look for them.”

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Keep this issue and set it out for your city cousins to see when they visit for the holidays, or better yet, leave a copy open in the dentist’s waiting room.

Turn it to associate editor Maggie Van Camp’s article “Innovate, Don’t Settle” on page four. If there’s an image of agriculture that should be carved in every Canadian’s mind, it’s the one in her perfect first paragraphs, which I’ll quote here at risk of stealing her thunder.

“As Maggie says, “Solving problems with practical intelligence is what farm folks do.”

Too many of agriculture’s sporadic efforts to build bridges to consumers start with a flannel-shirted photo of farmers.

They should start instead with the image that anyone would absorb in an afternoon at Canada’s Outdoor Farm Show.

Professionalism is agriculture’s hallmark. Ask yourself, how many other industries can meet agriculture’s standard, where as a consumer, the closer you look, the more confident you get?

Next, have your non-farming friends thumb their way through the innovations throughout this admittedly too-brief issue.

From its birth, Canada’s Outdoor Farm Show knew that it would be not only a demonstration of farm technology, and not only a place for farmers to meet, although it is both of those things too. It would also be a celebration.

We know there are challenges ahead. Can the pace of change that Canada’s farms experienced over the last few decades actually continue?

Can our farms really triple in size in the next 20 years?

On its face, it seems impossible. The land simply isn’t available, we tell ourselves, and there’s no way anyone could manage that many acres or that many barns and still maintain the kinds of productivity that are essential for survival in today’s ag economy.

Yet that isn’t what you learn at the farm show.

Although it’s true that demand exceeds land availability in most areas of Ontario, and most parts of the country overall, and although it’s true that this is stifling farm growth to some degree, it’s also true that today’s farmers are aggressively investing in their own efficiency.

It isn’t all farms that are spending, but neither is it only mid-career farmers. Farms across the spectrum are adding new technology, they’re investing in higher-capacity machinery, and they’re researching production systems that return more output per hour of input.

In almost all these cases, they’re transitioning their operations into farms that could easily expand, and that will want to do just that at the first opportunity.

It’s why the farm show and the role it plays in introducing innovation actually gets more important, not less, as our agriculture continues to evolve.

Let me know what you think. I’m at tom.button@fbcpublishing.com.
The road that I was recently driving along near our place is like most in rural Canada, with crops, barns, trees, and occasionally houses. The dust was swirling behind my truck, and everything through the windshield looked pretty much as it always has. But then I slowed down to take a closer look.

In one field, a cover crop of oilseed radish was bursting out of the ground. Then I saw our young neighbour’s sheep barn, and I wondered how his custom-made feed delivery system was working out. I could also really tell where the foliar calcium was applied on the front half of that field, and hey, they were using vertical tillage to work in broadcasted wheat seed over there. And in the next field over, the crop looked pretty even where they had used a variable-rate fertilizer spreader.

This wasn’t an Ag Canada research farm. Nor are my neighbours all engineers. Instead, it’s a regular old dirt road in southern Ontario.

Solving problems with practical intelligence is what farm folks do, and always have done.

But today we put a ribbon on it, and call it innovation.

Maybe, though, giving it a $64 word isn’t such a bad idea.

Innovation is the process of translating an idea or invention into a good or service that creates value for which customers will pay, according to www.businessdictionary.com.

As director of research and innovation for Ontario’s ministry of agriculture, Mike Toombs is always astounded by the raw desire of farmers to improve, driving them to seek out, collaborate, create and invent.

“It comes down to attitude,” says Toombs. “You can be a very good manager, with great profit margins but not be an innovator.”

There’s an inherent risk to innovation. If there isn’t any risk, then probably it’s not innovative. So, maybe it’s no surprise then that on some farms, the attitude is if you’re doing well, why change?

To recognize and encourage producers, food processors and organizations to keep innovating, the Ontario government created the Premier’s Award for Agri-Food Excellence. Other provinces have created their own innovation contests too, spurring innovation all across the country.

In Ontario, it’s a contest for farmers and food processors, with a top award of $75,000 for the best innovation. Toombs was involved in the creation of this contest in 2006 and says it has helped foster a culture of change, innovation and adoption in the province.

“The best thing about this contest is that it shares the innovations, it makes these ideas public,” Toombs says. “It opens the eyes of the whole community.”

Applications continue to have a strong farm focus, and in the last two...
program years, the number of agri-food processing applications has increased. In 2013 applications included 58 per cent primary producers, 18 per cent agri-food processors and 24 per cent agri-food organizations.

Typically, the winners tend to reinvest the prize money in their operations and turn it right back into new ideas. The award has helped increase consumer confidence and created new opportunities for the businesses. Some applicants repeatedly enter the contest. "We’ve got serial innovators," says Toombs.

The entries are judged for uniqueness and originality, and to what extent the idea or concept has been thought through to completion. The innovation must have been developed or be in development and currently be in use or have a future use in the agri-food sector. Judges also consider the degree of success (or potential for success) of adoption by other agri-food businesses or the commercialization and marketing of the innovation. Moreover, the innovation must have potential for use on a broader basis and potentially have a positive effect on the agricultural industry, both economically and socially.

It’s not all about equipment inventions and improved production. Improved business practices, response to consumer demands, environmental stewardship, energy and bioeconomy, health and safety, food safety and traceability, education and marketing of the agriculture and food industry to society are also areas that are recognized in these awards.

THE MONFORTE STORY

This year, an artisan cheese company, Monforte Dairy from Stratford, Ont., won the $75,000 as the top innovation. In 2008, when rent at their location skyrocketed, owner Ruth Klahsen sold shares in denominations of $200, $500 and $1,000, all redeemable in cheese. Monforte customers purchased nearly 900 shares totaling more than $400,000. The money helped pay for a new, environmentally sustainable cheese-making plant.

Since reopening, Monforte Dairy has doubled its staff to 20, purchasing milk from 20 local farmers and achieving $2 million in sales.

Now Klahsen is using the $75,000 award to support the development of a cheese-making school, but the award is also proof of the diversity of today’s farming, even if that diversity might raise the eyebrows of many conventional farmers. "In a world gone mad for innovation and change, it’s the small pleasures that keep us sane," the Monforte website says. "And in the constellation of small pleasures that salve the mind and nourish the body, what trumps the sheer sensual deliciousness of a well-crafted cheese? At Monforte, we’re convinced the small things do indeed make a difference, that agriculture is best practised on a human scale, and that our cheeses, each in its own way, reflect something a little deeper than the technology behind mass manufactured food — a little of the poetry and passion of life itself."

When farmers win these innovation contests, they pump the money right back into more innovating

RESOURCESFUL

Although many farmers are natural-born tinkerers, it’s often a pressure from outside that pushes them toward new ideas and technologies. "Farmers focus on what they can do with their resources and what they can get out of them," says Toombs.

In Ontario, high land and labour costs have forced farmers to produce as efficiently as possible, as well as to expand into higher-value crops, moving up the value chain and differentiating their products. Many operate on 100-acre parcels of expensive land pushed by urban pressure, intensive livestock operations and pockets of vegetable and fruit farms. Growing conditions and higher heat units mean farmers are able to grow many different crops.

With several long-established agricultural education and research facilities in the province, farmers have been able to leverage new information and the knowledge of specialists. "It helps that we have the biggest agricultural university in Canada, and that farmers here have a can-do attitude," says Toombs.

The reality is that Canadian farmers are not going to compete with countries with low labour and land costs, and we’re not going to outgrow the Midwest Corn Belt, says Toombs. However, we do have the people, the education, and the ability to be collaborative and innovate to do something even better.

An example of this type of collaboration won the award in 2009. A group of 13 Ontario tomato farmers from near Leamington designed and constructed a new communal drip irrigation system. The 36-km pipeline, pump house and filter system precisely monitors the amount of water being delivered from Lake Erie to 2,500 acres of tomatoes in the Leamington area. The fixed structure eliminated much of the annual setup associated with traditional drip irrigation and reduced water costs in the growing season by two-thirds.

Toombs says Ontario has benefited greatly from farmers immigrating to Canada and bringing new ideas with them. One of his all-time favourite projects from the Premier’s Awards came from Swiss brothers Fritz and Paul Klasei who had immigrated to eastern Ontario. They built one of the first anaerobic digester system plants in the province and adopted some very practical, interesting tweaks to make it work here.

Another project that really sticks in Toombs’ mind for resourcefulness was developed by a female hog farmer from near Stratford. She invented a movable pig gate that anyone could handle easily. "The sheer ingenuity of this woman was inspiring," says Toombs.

BACK IN THE TRUCK

Not too far south from where I’ve slowed down to check out what my neighbours are up to, Gord and Garry Geissberger have won a subcategory of the Premier’s competition this year called the Leaders in Innovation award.

They created a mobile cider mill, the first of its kind in Ontario. This cider press on wheels travels to the apples, rather than the other way round. With top-of-the-line technology and computerized pressing equipment, the customized trailer can process 500 litres of cider an hour. The Geissbergers also sell cider in bag-in-box packaging that keeps the cider fresh for a full year, sort of like wine in a box.

The dust is not settling.
Over the past several years, precision agriculture has rapidly evolved in multiple directions. First there were yield monitors, followed by variable-rate technology for spray and nutrient applications. More recently, there’s been the evolution of planter units with on-the-go adjustable down-pressure as a means of adapting to different soil types or conditions across a field.

Now comes the first of its kind in a variable-rate planter, one which provides the grower with the capability of planting more than one hybrid.

Anticipation had been building, and when Raven Industries unveiled its latest enhancement to its existing OmniRow control system in the U.S. last June, the fanfare spilled across the border. The unit had been in development and was tested extensively at South Dakota State University, with considerable success. Then at the 20th anniversary of Canada’s Outdoor Farm Show in 2013, Raven offered Canadian growers a glimpse of the future as well, on display at the Monosem exhibit.

It’s so recent a development that there aren’t any growers who have had experience with it. However, this latest configuration on the OmniRow unit will be commercially available for purchase in time for the 2014 planting season.

Visually, there haven’t been any changes to the unit itself, only the manner in which it’s used. The units are configured into front and back rows, with each row planting a specific hybrid. The effect is to have two planters working in concert, but with each row working independently to plant a different hybrid according to sensors on the planter’s computer.

Of course, the unit can also adjust the planting rates, according to conditions.

“IT’s a new function of OmniRow,” says Ryan Molitor, marketing supervisor of applied technology for Raven Industries. Initially, OmniRow enabled farmers to go for variable-rate (i.e. prescription) planting, where they could manually or electronically switch their population rates, either four rows at a time or right down to each individual unit. The system was built around a hydraulic motor and clutch system designed to give the grower as much control as they might need.

New for 2014, Molitor says, is that when the grower is using a twin-row or interplant design, the planter will allow switching hybrids on the fly.

For now, it’s a breakthrough that OmniRow can provide the power to plant two hybrids. But that isn’t where the technology will stop.

Molitor says that when the system was launched during the company’s
innovation summit last June, a four-member producer panel was asked, “What’s the next technology you need for your farm?” And the answer from most growers on the panel was quick and consistent. They need the ability to switch between multiple hybrids, and to do it “on the fly.”

When asked how many hybrids, the answer was also consistent. “They said, ‘Two for now would be great,’” Molitor says. “We were pretty pleased to hear that.”

Included in the kit that Raven provides its customers are software and a cab display that provides that capability for multi-hybrid planting.

The row units themselves are fixed on the toolbar. When the computer senses the need to switch from one hybrid to the next, the software actually shifts the tractor to steer to the right or the left to keep the rows as straight as possible.

Depending on the field, the two different hybrids may be switched to match different soil types, or a drought-tolerant hybrid may be chosen for a dry knoll. A resistant variety could also get inserted where there’s risk of insect damage.

“It does require a Raven field computer in the cab,” says Molitor. “And it’s our Envizio Pro or Envizio ProXL that’s the field computer that we have. That handles the planter functions, and it also does the steering, application controls — even yield monitoring and other tasks.”

On the original OmniRow system, the power to drive the motors on the row units came from a pair of “black boxes” on the planter. Although this latest enhancement also relies on these modules, now there are additional output cables channelling power to the new multi-hybrid units.

For now, the OmniRow units have the capacity to enable multi-hybrid functions on planter units with as many as 36 rows. Molitor also says that despite the extra functions, there is no need to increase a tractor’s power output or to move up to a higher horsepower class.

“One of the things with our hydraulic unit that worked and really surprised us was how little hydraulics it actually uses,” says Molitor. “When we get into some of the larger planters, including the most popular models on the market, we’re able to control those motors without getting a lot of hydraulic power drop.”

Although the system was configured to a North American-made Monosem planter when it was on display at the Outdoor Farm Show, Molitor says the kits from Raven make it adaptable to any other twin-row or interplant planter, including Great Plains and others. The key is the use of the kits, which the company recommends that growers get installed by a certified dealer.

In conventional soil sampling and analysis, growers have access to a fairly wide array of parameters and values. There are the standard N-P-K values from a soil test, plus organic matter, soil pH — and for an added price — nitrates, sulphur, copper and manganese. Some labs will also throw in a physical analysis, with percentages of clay or sand in the soil — again, for an added price.

But what would it be worth to your operation to know the risk for compaction in your soils? What if you could learn more about your soil's bulk density, or its water retention capability? What if there were 15 base parameters that were available from one in-depth soil analysis?

Welcome to the future, thanks to the SoilOptix unit. Another worthwhile addition to the lineup of innovations seen at the 20th anniversary of Canada's Outdoor Farm Show, the SoilOptix system has undergone an extensive learning and adaptation curve.

The product of more than 10 years of research in Europe, SoilOptix actually made landfall in Canada around 2009, when Paul and Barry Raymer, then of The Farm Office, based in Tavistock, Ont., began studying the unit and its many applications.

The Raymers were at the Grain Farmers of Ontario's annual meeting in London last March under their new moniker, Practical Precision, and had a video presentation for the SoilOptix system, including a brief exploration of the breadth of its potential.

Now, more than six months later, Paul Raymer has had the chance to work with the system on about 750 acres here in Ontario.

Predictably, there's been some skepticism on the part of growers, who wonder at the practicality of garnering that much information. As mentioned, there are 15 basic parameters or soil properties that can be generated from the SoilOptix sampling procedure and subsequent analysis. Another seven, including nitrates, sulphur, iron, copper, manganese, zinc and boron (the micronutrients) are obtainable at an added cost.

Raymer acknowledges there's a lot to be learned about exactly how SoilOptix can best be used, but that preliminary results from the 2013 growing season are already winning converts.

Growers lined up to check out the system at the Outdoor Farm Show, and Raymer suggests that either type of reaction — positive or reluctant — is likely a reflection of the type of farmer that's out there. Those who are most positive about its use and potential tend to be the intensive managers.

"For those managers and the ones we have done the work for, they really like it," says Raymer, adding that it's not so complex that it's making growers reluctant to adopt the technology.

"It starts with their mindset and where they are today when they grab a hold of this," Raymer says. "It's a matter of going to chase 'the more' rather than what you already have. I haven't heard anybody say that land is a bargain or that inputs or seed costs are a bargain, so it's investing more to hopefully gain more."

THE SOILOPTIX DESIGN

Visually, the SoilOptix unit appears to be a simple metal tube mounted to the front of an ATV. But according to Raymer, this European technology measures naturally emitting radiation released through the decomposition of the top foot of the soil.

It is a passive sensor — not penetrating — and it measures four nuclides or isotopes that are present in the soil, namely uranium, potassium-40, thorium and cesium.

Data is collected in swaths of up to 40 feet wide (although they're narrower in smaller fields). Using this sensing technology, in combination with soil sam-

With SoilOptix, soil analysis goes far beyond conventional soil sampling. The goal, its developers say, is to make crop management more scientific than ever.

By Ralph Pearce, CG Production Editor
pled “ground-truthing,” is roughly equivalent to 250 to 300 core sample locations per acre.

“What this researcher in Europe has found is that there’s a strong correlation to these varying nuclides to what we naturally go and chase, and what we chase is based on mathematics,” explains Raymer. “But we still go and collect calibration physical soil samples to be able to correlate to what the mathematical models tell us.”

The recommended frequency for the SoilOptix process is based on a nine-year cycle. Raymer uses the initial survey to benchmark the values present in the soil, confirming their values by pulling core samples, and then repeating the procedure every three years following a standard corn-wheat-soybean rotation. In that setting, he’d return to take follow-up readings and core samples at three and six years to complete the cycle.

“With the field survey, we’re measuring the decomposition of the soil, and that decomposition isn’t that fast,” says Raymer.

At the Outdoor Farm Show, Raymer and his father Barry were showing growers how the rates for their service (less than $10 per acre per year during a nine-year cycle) will work out to be less expensive than the 1.0-acre grid sampling regimen (listed in Practical Precision’s brochure as $9 to $11 per acre per year). The cost for a 2.5-acre grid sampling was listed at $4 per acre per year.

Again, soil sampling still takes place, providing a confirmation — and in some cases a contrast — to what the SoilOptix system is reading. In the past few years, there has been considerable debate around the accuracy of soil sampling. Some crop advisers and dealers have questioned the relevance of a sampling protocol they say is more than 30 or even 40 years out of date. Add to that, shifts in management practices and refined plant genetics that have changed the standards to which soil nutrient levels can or should be measured, and the overall value of soil sampling has become questionable in the eyes of many.

Far from second-guessing or questioning those values, Raymer is nevertheless curious to get at exactly what the farmer is trying to do with the information from standard soil test results.

“The only thing guys have been getting

Continued on page 10
back is the nutrients,” Raymer says. “Not to say those aren’t important, but are they a big generator to help boost yields?”

Says Raymer about SoilOptix: “I’m not saying this is a silver bullet, but we believe it’s taking us farther than we’ve ever been.”

Once the survey is complete, Raymer looks at the variation in radiation levels, then pulls the core samples based on those variations. He can use the isotopes and derive an average for nutrient content, with an accuracy of 60 to 85 per cent, based on different properties. For soil texture — and that, says Raymer, is the real strength of this tool — the accuracy jumps to 70 to 95 per cent. Thorium, for instance, correlates very well with clay content.

**INTEREST BUILDING**

Shortly after the Woodstock show, Raymer met with representatives from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food to discuss the use of the SoilOptix system. He’s pleased to know that there’s interest from the ministry, although he believes it was more as a tool for environmental applications. Yet he’s still confident that such interest will have a positive impact going forward.

Raymer notes that there’s been considerable skepticism in the past from ministry staff regarding the use of GreenSeeker technology, which Raymer also markets. Yet provincial corn specialist Greg Stewart has reversed his previous stance, advocating the use of GreenSeeker technology at a specific point in the growing season. And Raymer sees that as a signal that times — and some time-honoured perceptions — are changing.

“The ministry is applying for some OFID (Ontario Farm Income Database) funding for a two-year project for variable-rate nitrogen utilizing optical sensing, and yet we’re going to the next level of utilizing those zones,” says Raymer. He notes that he can now use the SoilOptix system to enhance the prescriptions created by the GreenSeeker unit and either override its recommendations or tweak them based on the more-detailed results from the SoilOptix unit. “We can take something like nitrogen-use efficiency to the next level.”

**LOOKING AHEAD**

Raymer says he’s been very fortunate in that Practical Precision is the exclusive North American distributor and he feels it puts him at a tremendous advantage. And depending on the uptake of the technology, there may come a time when he can sell the SoilOptix units direct to growers.

Again, the key is determining what the farmer is looking to address on their particular farm.

The learning continues for Raymer as well. He notes that one Swedish researcher is studying spatial variability in cadmium as a means of improving production in wheat, which has a sensitivity to cadmium. There’s also room for expansion beyond the 15 standard properties and seven micronutrients.

“It’s the power of numbers, and the biggest thing is that growers can utilize this system, and a lot of them have the appetite for this type of information,” says Raymer. “They already have the variable-rate equipment in their shed, but it’s been underutilized.”

So the learning continues.

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**SOIL SAMPLING ANALYSIS — GRID SAMPLING VS SOILOPTIX**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2.5 Acre grid sampling</th>
<th>1 Acre grid sampling</th>
<th>SoilOptix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cost</strong></td>
<td>$12</td>
<td>$35 - $45 (where offered)</td>
<td>$40 Initial – Retest $20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recommended frequency</strong></td>
<td>Every crop cycle (3 - 4 years).</td>
<td>Every crop cycle (3 - 4 years).</td>
<td>Every 9 - 10 years (every third crop cycle). Retest calibration sites every crop cycle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cost per acre per year</strong></td>
<td>$4 per acre per year.</td>
<td>$9 - $11 per acre per year.</td>
<td>Approximately $8 per acre per year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collection</strong></td>
<td>Random core samples (minimum of 12 recommended) from 2.5 acres.</td>
<td>Random core samples (minimum of 12 recommended) from every acre.</td>
<td>Data is collected from up to 40 ft. Physical calibration core samples collected.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analysis:**

- **Soil pH**
- **Magnesium**
- **Phosphorus**
- **Potassium**
- **Organic matter**
- **Calcium**
- **% Base saturation**
- **Cation exchange capacity**
- **Water retention**
- **% Bulk density**
- **Risk for compaction**
- **Bulk density**
- **Altitude**
- **MWD**
- **Leakability**
- **Hydraulic saturation capacity**
- **% Sand**
- **% Clay**
- **Nitrate**
- **Sulphur**
- **Iron**
- **Copper**
- **Manganese**
- **Zinc**
- **Boron**

**Uses**

- Lime application, fertility maps
- Lime application, fertility maps
- High resolution maps offer ease of ability to create VRA prescriptions (lime, seeding, fertilizer, etc.)

**Other optional information gathered**

- Trimble WM drain
- Topography data for field drainage
- GreenSeeker NDVI data
- Crop NDVI for vineyard, turf, cover crops

“**It’s taking us farther than we’ve ever been.”**

— Paul Raymer
INNOVATION ROUNDCUP

They were everywhere. The 2013 Canada’s Outdoor Farm Show will go into the books for squeezing more innovations into each acre than any other show we’ve seen. From amazing high-capacity field equipment to some very brainy, roboticized marvels for the dairy barn, and from new corn and soybean genetic traits to new electronics for picking the best of those genetics, innovations were all around. COUNTRY GUIDE asked ag journalists Maggie Van Camp, Ralph Pearce and Amy Petherick to report on the most impressive innovations they unearthed. Said Pearce, “I could have kept on writing.”

A sprayer for tighter places

For farmers growing specialty crops or working with small fields, bigger isn’t better. Now, Case IH has responded to this issue with the launch of their latest Patriot self-propelled sprayers.

The Patriot 2240 offers farmers all the features of the larger sprayers in the model series, but this time mounted on a smaller chassis. Although the body of the machine may be smaller, the company made sure not to compromise height, with a 62-inch clearance that still allows for later-season application. The fact that the machine stands a little taller also means the service centre could be oriented at a comfortable height for loading product. The width of the machine is adjustable, offering a track that starts at a narrow 90 inches for specialty crops but can be mechanically or hydraulically increased to 120 inches for compatibility with 30-inch row crops.

Other unique features include a redesigned, 660-gallon holding tank whose scalloped sides improve rear visibility and maximize the number of nozzles that can be seen by the operator. Boom options include a 60/80-foot boom or a 60/90-foot boom on a parallel linkage design that offers a 63-inch range of motion for pre-plant spraying and beyond.

In other words, for operators with specific needs, maybe good things really can come in smaller packages.

Really, it’s called CoCoRaHS

Here’s an innovative chance for farmers to track precipitation on their farms, and also be part of a network.

It looks like a variation on the simple graduated cylinders we all used for those high school science lab experiments. But in this case, the gauge provides accurate on-farm measurements as well as the opportunity to be part of something more complex and more informative.

The Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow (CoCoRaHS) network is an innovative non-profit, volunteer collective that grew out of the floods that hit Fort Collins, Colorado in 1997. And now, the network is being championed by the staff at Weather INnovations (WIN) of Chatham, Ont.

The company’s staff was at the 2013 edition of Canada’s Outdoor Farm Show, showcasing the gauge and handing out cards with the CoCoRaHS website, plus an invitation to join a growing North American network.

The gauges are said to provide greater accuracy in measuring all forms of precipitation in specific locations — such as your farm — instead of relying on the nearest weather station (which seldom accounts for microclimates). Then it allows participants to add those totals to a growing database that can provide more accurate compilations of precipitation statistics both near and far.

All that’s required is an enthusiasm (and commitment) for recording the precipitation data and sharing your numbers with the network.

For more information, check out www.cocorahs.org/Canada.aspx.
Feed them by rail
Automated feeding technology gets ready for the barn

Even tiny inconsistencies and cumulative small human errors can cost a farm a big amount of money. It’s part of why automation is increasingly appealing to dairy farmers.

With robotic milking now an established technology, companies like DeLaval have set their sights on automated feeding systems. This year at the farm show, DeLaval demonstrated its new Optimat II automated feeding system. It features a feed cart suspended on an overhead rail, fed by conveyors travelling from a stationary mixer.

The standard system requires the mixer to be loaded manually but DeLaval also offers a master option, which can load the mixer automatically using a system of augers and conveyors coming direct from storage.

Either system can be programmed to deliver feed to cows in multiple batches each day, increasing dry matter intake, feed efficiency, overall cow health, and milk yields while reducing waste and labour.

DeLaval also demonstrated the Feed Pusher FP200, which is essentially comprised of a curb-mounted rail that suspends an automated plow along the length of the feed bunk. Like the feed delivery system, the feed pusher can also be programmed to operate several times a day, at set intervals, helping to keep a constant feed supply in front of the herd without the use of any extra labour.

Though not yet commercially available to farmers, DeLaval plans to have both the feed pusher and Optimat systems available for purchase in 2014.

DuPont FIRE
Putting more power in the hands of our unsung heroes

When times are good in agriculture, there are opportunities to spread time and wealth and to invest in our rural communities, which is exactly what DuPont knows that farmers are doing.

What’s innovative now is the company’s Funding Initiative for Rural Emergencies (FIRE), a corporate giving program launched on July 13 this year that pledges $100,000 to rural emergency services in Canada. Not only does the company hope the initiative will put a spotlight on our unsung rural heroes, usually volunteers, but DuPont also believes the program will increase awareness of safe practices on the farm.

The campaign kicked off in Howick, Ont. with a simulated grain bin rescue and the first donation of $8,500 to the Howick Fire Department for an agricultural-based fire rescue program. The program will include training to deal with confined spaces, rope rescues, silo fires and other agricultural emergencies.

FIRE has also extended a $5,000 grant to the Petrolia and North Enniskillen Firefighters’ Association to help build an addition on its fire hall. The Dundalk Fire Department also received a $7,274 check to help with the purchase of an oxygen tank refill station.

Applications can be submitted to fireinvestment@pioneer.com and successful applications will be publicized through Pioneer’s Facebook page.
New for herbicide tolerance
Enlist Duo may reach the Canadian market in time for 2014

Featured in the Dow AgroSciences plots this year was their new weed control platform with Enlist Duo and its corresponding trait-resistant corn and soybean genetics.

New Enlist herbicide offers farmers another option, particularly against hard-to-control and resistant weeds, by combining glyphosate with 2,4-D choline, an ammonium salt developed by Dow that is different from previous 2,4-D amine or ester formulations.

The new formulation remains as effective on weeds as previous versions, but doesn’t sacrifice any of the favourable environmental degradation characteristics of 2,4-D amine or ester.

Also important, the 2,4-D in Enlist appears to be less volatile. In laboratory and small-scale field trials to test for drift to neighbouring tomatoes, grapes, and cotton plants, the company says very little crop injury was caused by the new formation, even in simulated scenarios that are linked to high volatility.

That could prove good news because of the way farm practices have been changing in the wake of other herbicide technologies. With the wide application windows and crop safety of Roundup Ready, for instance, more spray operators have been taking advantage of the opportunity to apply herbicides in less-than-favourable conditions because in many cases, nearby crops have also been glyphosate tolerant.

It could also be good news because the addition of 2,4-D to the spray program can broaden the farm’s herbicide protection, reducing the odds that herbicide resistance will develop.

Spraying Enlist next to a neighbour still growing RR-only crops won’t be as forgiving as spraying Roundup alone, however, and a major component of Dow’s product release campaign is its renewed emphasis on drift reduction at the operator level. The company has committed to providing nozzle type and droplet size recommendations for Enlist, following drift studies conducted by the University of Nebraska and the University of Queensland, Australia, that demonstrated physical drift can be reduced by 90 per cent using a low-drift AIXR nozzle.

Though Enlist was approved for use in Canada last year, U.S. regulatory approval has not kept pace and has put a full product launch on hold. However, Mycogen and Hyland Seeds hope to make their new line of corn hybrids available in time for the 2014 growing season.
Farming with apps
Pioneer’s 360 series of field apps can connect individual fields to more cropping experts

The modern farmer is constantly bombarded with so much information, it’s a wonder anyone can keep it all straight. Now, Pioneer Hi-Bred has a solution some farmers are really going to like for keeping track of all that insight.

The product is called “Field360” and it is comprised of a collection of iPad- and iPhone-compatible apps which help farmers map their fields, then link the satellite image to notes and photos. These notes and photos can then be shared with Pioneer agronomists to indicate areas of concern, or they can be converted into emails requesting recommendations from other sources.

Some of the apps in the suite, such as Field360 Notes, are free but other components, like Field 360 Select, require an annual subscription. This gives the user access to mobile live data such as precipitation and growing degree day calculations which estimate plant growth stages. When connected to the Internet, the program can automatically assign notes to the correct field based on the user’s GPS co-ordinates.

The complete integration of information and instantaneous communication feed is perhaps a futuristic preview of farming, where problem solving is a team sport that a farmer participates in from a mission control centre with just a few swipes of a finger.

Switching to switchgrass
Suddenly, biomass crops are back in the news

There were more than a few farmers at Woodstock this year considering the switch to switchgrass at the biomass demonstration site.

Hosted by the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association and the Ontario Biomass Producers Coop, the demo gave farmers a chance to discuss emerging opportunities in the biomass market. For one, mushroom producers have become dissatisfied with the straw available as modern harvesting equipment literally makes shorter work of stemmy grains. Often today’s straw breaks up far too quickly for their composting needs.

Then there are the fruit and vegetable growers who have discovered switchgrass as a mulch, popular among berry, carrot, and ginseng producers.

Finally, there seems to be serious potential in marketing to livestock producers who admire the consistency of weed-free switchgrass. Although it hasn’t caught on here, some U.S. dairy farms have been using this low-quality feed source to boost the fibre in their dry cow rations. In both cases, switchgrass appeals to conventional and organic producers alike.

Switchgrass is a competitively priced product in any of these markets mostly because it has such a low cost of production. It is well suited to sandy, less productive soils and requires no phosphorus, no potassium, and very little nitrogen to be successful. With so little risk and growing reward opportunities, it’s no wonder farmers are considering the switch.

Next-gen seed guide
Dekalb’s tablet seed guide puts even more information in your hands

Farmers are demanding access to information in all sorts of new ways, particularly through digital apps. Now, Dekalb has responded by offering their seed guide through an innovative, industry-leading new tablet application.

The Dekalb Seed Guide App gives farmers access to all the traditional canola, corn, and soybean information traditionally provided in a seed guide. But then it goes further, also linking to other related resources such as real-time harvest plot data, seed treatment information, and plant population and yield estimating calculators.

The app also links to the company’s YouTube channel, offering agronomic advice on a variety of topics. Dekalb’s new app is available in English and French for Apple products and an Android version is in development.

Earlier this year, Ontario’s Agriculture Ministry found that farmers are embracing technology even faster than Canadians in general, with 69 per cent of farmers owning smartphones compared to 56 per cent of the general public.

Dekalb marketing manager Denise Hockaday says the digital approach to their seed guide offers farmers a resource they can carry everywhere with them, and keep clean. It also keeps information organized, and it makes the information easily comparable during the many fall seed sales calls, as well as remaining handy in the spring when it comes to making game-time decisions out in the field.
**Planting through cornstalks**

*Chopper technology may not be new, but it’s definitely improved*

Some readers will argue that cornstalk chopper heads aren’t really innovative. After all, choppers pre-date Canada’s Outdoor Farm Show by more than 20 years.

What has changed, though, is the steely toughness of today’s hybrids, as well as preferences in tillage practices. The big difference between 1993 and today is the standability of cornstalks, along with higher rates of nitrogen application, higher plant populations and the sheer amounts of stover produced (estimated at 25 to 45 per cent more per acre than 10 years ago).

For growers, of course, one key issue remains the same. How do you plant soybeans through that residue?

That was the rationale behind the stalk chopper head demonstration at the 2013 Outdoor Farm Show, featuring six different manufacturers showcasing their latest models. Case IH, East Can (featuring Capello) Machineries Agricole (Geringhoff), Kearney Planters (with Drago) Grecav Canada and John Deere ran their models through a cornfield, offering growers a glimpse of each unit’s capabilities. The chopper heads today, compared to those from the 1960s and ’70s, provide better ease of operation — you can turn each row unit on and off, the power requirements have been improved and they last longer with easier maintenance.

**New TMRs revealed**

*Easier TMR handling promised by new products*

As part of its international dealer conference, held this year at Canada’s Outdoor Farm Show, Jaylor launched not one, but two new product lines for dairy, beef, sheep, and goat feed management.

The new 5000 Series TMR vertical mixer and its three new forage-handling loader attachments were revealed to the world on September 10 during the company’s three-day innovation conference. More than 80 dealers from 42 countries attended, including some from as far as Europe and the Pacific Rim.

Five years following the release of the 4000 series mixers, the 5000 series includes an upgraded frame design, stronger cast metal parts, heavier loading capabilities, new conveyor discharge options, a new low-profile twin auger model and a new patented square-cut auger. The lower-profile auger model is ideal for using with smaller skid-steer loaders, with the square-cut auger designed to reduce friction within the tub while mixing, resulting in more power savings.

Tractor attachments at Woodstock included a bale shear, silage shear and a new bale grabber. The bale shear has a large cutting arm which slices bales in half while they are being loaded into the TMR mixer, reducing mixing time and making the removal of netting or plastic wrap more convenient. The silage shear cuts and loads directly from the bunk face to the TMR mixer, without disturbing the rest of the bunk or changing buckets, improving precision when measuring silage and reducing spoilage. The new bale grabber handles wrapped silage bales without damaging the sealed plastic layer and can move a 6x6 dry bale. All attachments come with a universal connector plate, making them compatible with any loader.
"Seeing is believing" seemed to be the theme at Mycogen Seeds, one of the most talked-about displays at this year’s Canada’s Outdoor Farm Show. Although the company didn’t launch major new technologies at the show, it was innovative in communicating some old messages in creative new ways.

The first things to catch the eye were glass tanks that could almost have been dismissed as decorative planters if it weren’t for the corn and soybean plants coming out the top. These four-foot-tall “root boxes” were made with Plexiglas on some sides and offered the unusual opportunity to check out the visible differences for example between soybean roots that had been inoculated compared to those which hadn’t.

The site also featured a “Big Dig” that allowed visitors to walk right into a three-foot trench, supported with Plexiglas walls in order to see the root structure of surrounding corn plants. The demonstration clearly illustrated not only the importance of seeding depth, but also offered Mycogen agronomists the opportunity to talk with farmers about deep compaction, showing them just how deep the roots of their crops are reaching.

Walking away from the site, the big comment was, this is the kind of hands-on opportunity that is ideally suited to the Outdoor Farm Show.

Seeing is believing Seems to be the theme at Mycogen Seeds, one of the most talked-about displays at this year’s Canada’s Outdoor Farm Show. Although the company didn’t launch major new technologies at the show, it was innovative in communicating some old messages in creative new ways.

The first things to catch the eye were glass tanks that could almost have been dismissed as decorative planters if it weren’t for the corn and soybean plants coming out the top. These four-foot-tall “root boxes” were made with Plexiglas on some sides and offered the unusual opportunity to check out the visible differences for example between soybean roots that had been inoculated compared to those which hadn’t.

The site also featured a “Big Dig” that allowed visitors to walk right into a three-foot trench, supported with Plexiglas walls in order to see the root structure of surrounding corn plants. The demonstration clearly illustrated not only the importance of seeding depth, but also offered Mycogen agronomists the opportunity to talk with farmers about deep compaction, showing them just how deep the roots of their crops are reaching.

Walking away from the site, the big comment was, this is the kind of hands-on opportunity that is ideally suited to the Outdoor Farm Show.

Mucking out was never this cool
Nuhn’s Lagoon Crawler not only gets the job done, it’s a gas to use

It might be described as an amphibious agitation vehicle, but watch a farmer take the controls and you’d swear you were witnessing Christmas-early for schoolboys.

The Nuhn Lagoon Crawler looks like an oversized, remote-controlled dune buggy that is as functional as it is fun looking. Operated entirely wirelessly, the machine is able to drive into a liquid manure pit and float across the slurry surface, all the while stirring the layers below with seven agitator nozzles.

Four hydraulic motors propel a lightweight frame mounted on commercial pontoons in such liquid environments. On dry land, the same motors also control four-wheel steering. The design is especially critical for manoeuvring the machine across the mucky bottom of a drained pit or off of sand islands that may form in a pit that has been agitated for years from the lagoon’s shores.

Should the machine get stuck on one of these islands, a hydraulic lift can raise the vehicle up to five feet above its hovering height and save the operator the messy trip of going in to dig the crawler free.

Topping off the stellar design is Nuhn’s award-winning, three-port header pump. Capable of being extended into the pit until fully submerged, it never requires priming and has been known to throw manure 100 metres when mounted on a tractor.

The crawler sips from the same power source that the rest of the vehicle relies on, a 160-horsepower Cummins diesel engine, moving more than 375,000 litres of liquid manure with every litre of diesel fuel burned.

With that much power and an eight-inch pump, Nuhn says they can cut slurry mixing time in half.

Although Nuhn is an Ontario based company, the crawlers are well suited to the five- or 10-acre dugout lagoons common in Western Canada and the U.S.

Farmers there may soon be attending demos of this toy for big boys too, especially with a piloting system which would enable the machine to traverse a prescribed route on auto-steer.
Feeding younger calves
The new Forster system can feed calves while they’re still in individual pens

When Forster Technik’s automated calf feeders first came on the market, farmers taxed by the chore of feeding calves were overjoyed at the idea of never having to pail milk again. Unfortunately, the systems couldn’t serve calves before they were grouped... until now.

Making its North American debut, the Forster Technik Calf Rail System is an extension of the original group feeder unit and consists of a heated hose extension which ends at a robotic feeder arm to service calves housed individually.

The idea behind the Calf Rail is to feed calves up to two weeks old, before they’re moved into group pens. The system works by allowing the feeder arm to move along an overhead rail to each pen, offering a bottle-like nipple for suckling at each stop on the line.

The demonstration unit assembled at the Outdoor Farm Show serviced five adjacent pens before swivelling around and feeding the five calves on the other side of the face-to-face setup, feeding a total of 10 calves in roughly a one-hour period.

In future, Forster hopes to be able to run up to four arms from one feeder unit, with each arm capable of feeding up to 32 calves.

Like the group feeding unit, the calf rail operates unmanned. But unlike the group feeder (where calves have free access) the arm operates on a schedule programmed by the owner. Because the company still has some final programming to do, the unit hasn’t yet been made commercially available. Three farms have volunteered to install and experiment with the calf rail system through to next spring to help the company finalize the model with hopes that it can be made commercially available later next year.

More science in the barn
Analyzing milk chemistry puts real-time control in farmers’ hands

Although many dairy farmers track different milk parameters to help them manage their cows, few of these parameters can actually be measured on the go on the farm, which is what makes Herd Navigator so unique.

This advanced analysis system released in Canada late last year has the ability to sample milk automatically in a parlour or robotic operation, straight from the pipeline.

Herd Navigator is the first product to be collaboratively produced by FOSS, an analytical solutions company, and DeLaval International with the faculty of agricultural sciences at Aarhus University and the Danish Cattle Federation. During milking, the system collects samples from different milking points and sends them, one by one, to the analyser instrument. The system automatically selects which cows to sample, at which milking session, and for which parameters.

There are four different components in the milk which are analyzed. Progesterone is measured for heat detection, identifying pregnancies, abortions, cysts, and anoestrus. Lactate dehydrogenase (LDH) indicates clinical and subclinical mastitis. Urea levels are used to evaluate nutrition (specifically protein consumption) and can offer recommendations for real-time feed ration adjustments. Beta hydroxybutyrate (BHB) works as an indicator of ketosis and secondary metabolic disorders.

Together, the information collected from the four focus areas can offer whole-herd heat detection, and an increase in pregnancy rates. Plus, it can eliminate physical pregnancy checks, as well as reduce treatment costs thanks to early disease detection. The system also aims to prevent milk losses caused by mastitis, improve feed efficiency and reduce feed costs.
Simply innovative
MF says that sometimes the best innovations make things simpler, not more complex

With the potential to build so much complexity into today’s farm equipment, innovations with a keep-it-simple engineering philosophy still win favour with farmers. At least, that’s a strategy that Massey Ferguson seems to be banking on.

As the Massey Ferguson 9500 Series combines moved into full production this year, the focus is largely on features that are designed to be both simple and effective. By changing the engine configuration so that it’s now in line with the rotor, for instance, the new series achieves a more efficient transfer of power. The company says this one innovation leads to as much as a 20 per cent increase in capacity and an equal increase in fuel efficiency when compared to older models.

The series is also equipped with the simplified and more efficient cooling system featured last year, where airflow is drawn through an unrestricted V-shape directly to the engine air intake, air conditioning, and hydraulic system units.

Now, 2013 models also come guidance ready for all auto-steer systems, not just the company’s favoured Topcon System 150. In an industry where high-tech solutions sometimes leave farmers in a field of confusion, attention to simplicity does indeed stand out.

One of the few things people working in all sectors of the agriculture industry tend to agree on is that the average Canadian doesn’t know nearly enough about where their food comes from.

Innovative progress is being made, however. For instance, although most exhibitors and attendees may not have noticed, the Outdoor Farm Show was providing high school students with a real education in modern agriculture, thanks to Ontario Agri-Food Education Inc (OAFE).

Over 300 teenagers from Woodstock, Ridgetown, Petrolia, Caledonia and Guelph were led by OAFE teacher ambassadors through the show as part of a curriculum-based program which highlighted technology and innovation in the industry as well as the possibility of great career opportunities.

In its third year at the show, the OAFE program specifically focused on water use, local food and horticulture, and it honoured the show’s anniversary with a review of industry advances from the last 20 years.

The teacher ambassadors working with the students are part of another program initiated by OAFE in early 2012 which offers recent graduates from teaching colleges the opportunity to gain classroom experience by teaching an ag based curriculum. The program has attracted energetic and enthusiastic young people, many with little to no personal experience with agriculture, and it uses them to encourage their more experienced peers to make better use of the subject matter in their own classrooms.

By travelling around to Grade 4 to Grade 12 classrooms and teaching curriculum-linked, one-hour lessons to students, free of charge (since OAFE pays for the program’s expenses), these ambassadors offer students fresh new material on little known agricultural topics.
Farmers at Canada’s Outdoor Farm Show (COFS) often get the chance to see new technology in action before investing in it, which plays an important role in choosing the equipment that best meets their needs.

In particular, at the sprayer clinic during the 2013 COFS, they got a chance to see six different twin-fan nozzles from three different manufacturers being put through their paces in a coverage trial on soybeans.

Leading spray tips from TeeJet Industries, Greenleaf Technologies and HyPro-EU Ltd. were compared in the West Demo Field during the clinic led by Saskatchewan-based Tom Wolf, a scientist specializing in spray application technology.

“Twin-fan nozzles are a good option for fungicides and insecticides in soybeans because they can direct sprays at parts of the canopy that are difficult for conventional nozzles to reach,” says Wolf.

Applications from a twin-fan nozzle are able to coat more of the plant because the spray is delivered from different directions. Compared to a conventional nozzle, the twin-fan setup is better at reaching stems and leaves obscured by higher levels of the canopy.

Some disadvantages to using twin-fan tips include greater complexity, smaller openings that can become blocked more easily, and in some cases more drift potential. Different models address these issues differently. There are a good number of choices available for farmers who want to match their own needs with what the nozzle offers.

Wolf says no formal comparison of the tips was made during the COFS clinic, but attendees were able to observe and compare the nozzles for themselves. Water-sensitive paper was used to show how well different nozzles covered crops.

“The twin-fan nozzles all performed well, and their deposits were somewhat greater than the single fan,” says Wolf. “It was a bit breezy during the demos, and sprays tended to deposit with wind direction regardless of the tip design. The nozzles that produced the coarsest spray deposited on both sides of the target regardless of wind direction, but only large droplets deposited against the wind. Lowering boom heights helped the nozzles work better.”

Twin-fan nozzles are commonly used to treat fusarium head blight in wheat and have been around for years, but new asymmetric versions are just being introduced. Both symmetrical and asymmetric nozzles were compared at COFS, and the John Deere 4830 Sprayer that was used in the demonstration was supplied by Can-East Equipment Ltd.

The sprayer clinics are learning opportunities and valuable “shop and compare” experiences for interested buyers.

“The show has always brought new technology to farmers to help with purchase decisions.”

Wolf says no formal comparison of the tips was made during the COFS clinic, but attendees were able to observe and compare the nozzles for themselves. Water-sensitive paper was used to show how well different nozzles covered crops.

“The show has always brought new technology to farmers to help with purchase decisions,” says Paul Roper, COFS exhibitor sales and demo co-ordinator. “Both the sprayer clinic and the new bale-wrapping demo let attendees see differences and benefits for each before investing.”

Canada’s Outdoor Farm Show was held on September 10, 11, 12, 2013 and hosted over 750 exhibitors and 42,900 attendees. Next year, the show will be held on September 9, 10 and 11. The popular Sprayer Clinic will return with a fresh topic for next year’s audience.
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Keep the good times rolling
Bull markets always have a shorter life than bear markets

By Errol Anderson

One thing is sure. Keeping the good times going in grain markets isn’t as simple as just producing the product. Bull markets have a nasty habit of eventually getting the rug pulled out from under them. Last year was an excellent example. Drought in the U.S. drove grain revenues sharply higher, but the good times didn’t keep rolling price-wise. Powerful price gains met their match in the form of greater supplies. And the sell-off was on.

Bull markets are exciting. Prices shoot higher, and no one knows where the price top is. Speculative buying often pushes prices well above their true economic value. And during the heat of the moment, markets look bulletproof. How can prices drop when there isn’t enough supply?

This is the risk to bull markets. Too many farmers let their guards down. Amazing profits especially for new-crop grain get passed up, waiting for something even better.

After the U.S. drought of 2012, growers hesitated to forward price new-crop production. In fact, much of the bumper western Canadian crop that has been harvested this fall was left unpriced.

Thankfully big bushels have in part tempered the cool-down of grain values, especially in the West. But the difficulty with bull markets is that they are never the start to a new era of sharply higher sustained prices.

Quite frankly, bull markets always have a shorter shelf life than bear markets.

A case in point is that $8-per-bushel corn has turned into $4 corn in just a matter of months, just as $600/MT cash canola bids broke below $450/MT this fall.

According to some experts, we were supposed to be in a new era of prolonged high grain prices. Instead, prices flopped.

The important thing to build on now is the realization that risk management can enhance profit-seeking on the farm. Profit-seeking and risk management can be a solid marriage for marketers. There are opportunities to lock in profits. But the window opens, then it closes. That is how supply and demand works, and this will never change.

Making this marketing marriage work requires the ability to separate your pricing decision from your delivery decision, which in turns takes some added tools from your marketing tool box.

Here are some thoughts on how markets typically react. Remember, it is your marketing tool box that can enhance profits while protecting your business from downside price risk.

Markets based on speculative buying are not long-lasting bull markets. Intense commodity and index fund buying can turbocharge commodity prices including grains. But the final blow-off stage of a futures bull run far exceeds the true value of the actual cash market. These explosive futures bull runs offer tremendous opportunities for grain producers to lock in prices well above the average.

1. Consider put options in your farm market strategy. During volatile times, one of the mightiest tools for protecting big prices and profits can simply be purchasing the lowly put option. There is nothing special about this protective market tool. Put options provide the right to sell without forcing unwanted margin calls on farm operations or obligating delivery. 2013 was a year when put options excelled. They are pure old price insurance that can guard royal returns.

2. Set pricing targets. By setting price targets, growers will often price into a rising market, not a falling one. The ability to price into a rising market is a marketing strength. Selling into falling markets often enhances marketing failure. Plain old greed can dictate that prices are never good enough. When the sell-off begins, unpriced growers may panic, selling production lower than the average return.

3. Market volatility can either be a friend or a foe for farm marketers. “Shoulda coulda” missed pricing opportunities and weak basis levels are all part and parcel of the Canadian grain marketplace. Again, look at options. While volatility increases the cost of using options, it also increases their power to protect prices. In volatile times, trading futures outright as a hedge can be a greater risk.

4. Know your marketing tool box. Maximizing price gains through powerful bull markets takes a combination of cash and futures/option contracts. There are a variety of cash contracts available, but growers are committed to delivery. When your volume of delivery obligations tests your comfort level, it’s time to talk to your broker for strategies that don’t commit you to delivery, but do guard a handsome price.

5. Shop your buyers. On any given day, some buyers may be squeezed for product while others have their sales covered. Basis levels sometimes widen quickly, a surefire indicator that a grain sale position was covered.

Having a variety of buyers in a volatile market just offers better pricing opportunity to the grower.

6. Enjoy your profits. 2013 has seen excellent profits. Watching the basis, scaling in deferred cash contracts, including futures and options price protection, shopping your buyers and harnessing market volatility for your pricing benefit just add up to one word: ‘profit.’ But harnessing solid profits also takes the combination of profit-seeking and risk management working as a team.

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rennan Turner became an entrepreneur at the age of eight. “I started my own snow-shovelling business and employed my sisters,” says Turner. Today, he still credits his Saskatchewan farm background for his budgeting skills and for instilling in him the importance of a good work ethic, traits that he says led to his current business, FarmLead.com, an online resource that matches farmers with grain buyers.

Turner launched FarmLead.com in October 2012 as the first Canadian user-based, online cash grain marketplace. The concept is straightforward. Once they register on the site, farmers can offer to sell their commodities in what is called the FarmLead Marketplace.

Buyers then go through the reverse process, registering and posting what they want to purchase. FarmLead’s job is to match up a seller with a compatible buyer through a negotiation process.

It’s a sort of matchmaker site, with the same rationale as eHarmony and match.com, namely that the Internet should help us connect with people we don’t have time to search for on our own.

FarmLead has 1,600 registered users, with about a fifth of them joining in a two-week period after the launch of a free mobile app for Android and iOS devices, which was recently named an Ag Innovations winner at the Agri-Trade Equipment Expo in Red Deer, Alta.

Turner wanted the FarmLead Mobile app to make the service more accessible to farmers who are spending less and less time in front of desktop computers. Instead, they want to use their cellphones and tablets to participate in real-time monitoring of prices, offering their grain for sale and negotiating deals with buyers.

“In our first week of FarmLead Mobile being available to the public, 500 tonnes of grain were bought and sold and over 125 new users registered,” says Turner. “The app is the only one of its kind that allows grain buyers and sellers to list, track, negotiate, and ultimately, complete new deals from any location, at any time, day or night.”

The app connects users to the recently added MyWatch List feature, which allows them to set specific parameters and be notified only about deals that interest them. “For example a producer can say I am located in crop zone 5B in Saskatchewan and I want to get notified of any offers to buy canola between the price of $10 and $13 a bushel in crop zone 5B, 5A or 6A,” says Turner. “They can set the parameters and will be notified if any deals come on that would directly apply to their farm operation.”

Turner took a circuitous route to FarmLead. He attended Grades 11 and 12 at the elite Athol Murray College of Notre Dame hockey academy in Wilcox, Sask., playing Junior A hockey both years. Following his second year, he was drafted by the Chicago Blackhawks and earned a scholarship to Yale University. Besides hockey, Turner had always been interested in crunching numbers and analysing markets. After completing his degree in economics at Yale, he had a number of opportunities to consider. He could have continued playing hockey professionally, which he did for a while, or he could have accepted an offer to work with an investment company on Wall Street, but his family’s agricultural roots, together with his financial training, were beginning to coalesce into an idea.

As Turner researched traditional grain marketing he felt there was a significant disconnect between buyers and sellers. “This lack of communication came directly from them not knowing each other and not knowing who was trying to buy what,” says Turner, whose system is designed to bridge that gap.
The concept for FarmLead began to develop in 2011 while Turner was wrapping up his professional hockey career in Dundee, Scotland and closely following the discussions at home around the deregulation of the Canadian Wheat Board.

With a new, open market for western Canadian grain growers, Turner saw opportunities to help them explore new markets and connect with buyers across North America that they hadn’t previously been able to reach.

As part of its due diligence, FarmLead performs credit checks on buyers. It also suggests farmers provide test results for commodities they’re selling, which gives buyers confidence the product offered for sale is what the farmer claims it to be. The program even rates buyers and sellers based on the satisfaction both parties have with transactions made.

There is no subscription cost or sign-up fee to register and post on the FarmLead Marketplace. A flat-rate connection fee is charged only once a connection between the buyer and seller is made, which will be different depending on the commodity, but all are under $100, with an average being around $50. Once the fee is paid, contact information is provided to both parties so they can directly negotiate their own deal. The fee is recalculated quarterly or twice yearly based on an algorithm that includes factors such as prices, supply and market demand.

“There is a need for brokers and line companies, absolutely,” Turner says, “but there are scenarios where a farmer can and should be selling directly to an end-user, and our system allows them to do that and to pay one flat fee for the service.”

The ease, convenience and anonymity of the FarmLead Marketplace are key selling features, says Turner. “The feedback I got when I started laying out the idea for FarmLead was that farmers would feel more comfortable using a system where they could see what the buyers were bidding and what their fellow farmers were trying to get for their crops — in an anonymous system so they weren’t necessarily damaging the relationships that they already had.”

Transparency is also important to Turner and it is something he says he learned, ironically enough, while working on Wall Street. As part of his degree, Turner interned with Hedgeye Risk Management, an investment company run by a group of former Yale hockey alumni. “The 15 weeks I was there were hugely influential,” says Turner. “These guys believe inherently in transparency and taught me that the more up front and transparent you are going to be, the more people are going to respect you.”

FarmLead has been endorsed by the Alberta Wheat Commission and is also working with the Canadian Farm Business Management Council to develop a series of marketing webinars.
t Maxime Cardinal’s potato farm, there are more than 120 fields, some of them with more than one variety. From the first pass working the soil in the spring through to harvest, machinery will enter any given field up to 15 times. That’s a lot of information to keep track of!

Cardinal, his father, Yvon and his uncle Claude rely entirely on clouds to water their 1,000 acres of potatoes. Since last spring, they also rely on another type of cloud to help them manage the immense quantity of farming information their operation generates.

At Patates Cardinal, located in Sainte-Brigitte-des-Saults, halfway between Montreal and Quebec City, cloud farming is no longer just a concept. When the sun rises every morning, each worker receives their unique to-do list on their iPhone. Field number, what to spray and what to watch for are all clearly indicated. When a job is done, the worker checks it off, perhaps adding a few extra observations. Then, after pressing “synchronize,” off they go to the next field.

There’s no notepad whose pages are crumpled or smudged by the rain, and there are no unreadable handwritten notes.

“The information lands in the cloud,” Cardinal says. “In my office, I just have to synchronize the data to obtain an instant update on what has been accomplished out in the field. It’s really easy.”

In this case, the cloud is a server at Farm Credit Canada (FCC). Farm data is safely stored in real time, creating a computer backup that is always up to date. But the cloud has a much deeper purpose, allowing instant information sharing between farmers, employees, consultants and anybody else involved in the farm’s success.

“I can take a photo of a problem in a field and share it instantly with a crop input supplier,” Cardinal says. The picture will be automatically georeferenced. Should a rep want to come and see for themselves, Cardinal won’t have to bother showing them where to go.

“I had been waiting for this technology.”

— Maxime Cardinal

By André Dumont
Cloud of the future

The buzz about cloud farming isn’t new, but the truth is that in Canada and in the rest of the world, cloud farming is still in its infancy.

Julien Deslauriers, a sales representative at seed and fertilizer dealer William-Houde, sees a lot of possibilities on the horizon. “If Cardinal asked me to check his cornfields, I could simply access his

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A BIG QUESTION

Is your data secure on cloud sites?

By Ralph Pearce

The potential of cloud technology is phenomenal. Unlike the typical situation in agriculture, when you must wait years for a new herbicide or a new genetic trait to hit the farm, it’s virtually ready to use.

What isn’t quite so clear is whether your data will be safe.

“When I think of cloud computing, it’s just using external servers,” says Karon Tracey-Cowan, president of AgTech GIS in Embro, Ont. “Instead of me having to have a $10,000 server sitting in the corner of this office, I can now leverage a lot more power by using web services or software that is delivered to me via the Internet to do some of the same stuff that I used to have to do in house.”

But can those external servers be hacked? The simple answer, says Tracey-Cowan, is yes. If the U.S. government can be hacked, it’s safest to assume that almost any server can be hacked.

There is also a longer answer, however, because your own on-farm computer equipment could be hacked too, or could suffer a meltdown that jeopardizes your data, and the security at most cloud sites will be much more robust than what you could have on your own.

Where Tracey-Cowan has more concerns is over what the owner of those servers might do with your data.

GIVING YOUR CONSENT

Now, there are smartphone apps that can tell you which crop varieties can be expected to perform best on your particular farm. There are remote-sensing technologies too that can tell farmer-subscribers when their tractor needs a new air filter.

They can make those recommendations, but you give them consent to use your data.

“We have to be very mindful of who else has access to it (our data),” says Tracey-Cowan. “Whenever we download some of these free apps, we’re opening the door.”

Tracey-Cowan is concerned that too few people actually read their end-user licence agreements, and find out too late — or sometimes not at all — that what they agreed to is not what they really wanted. An example she cites is the legalese buried on a back page in one particular company’s end-user agreement, as follows:

“To the extent that you have any ownership or other interest in the data, you hereby grant ‘the company,’ its dealers, its affiliates and their dealers, a non-exclusive, worldwide, paid-up, irrevocable licence to use, process, manipulate, modify, copy, perform, compile and treat derivative works from the data, including using the data for any business purpose, including for the analysis and improvement of devices and other products. You consent the company can disclose the data, or aggregate the data, provided you are not identifiable from the data. All of the results of data, derivative works and reports are the exclusive property of the company, and you assign all rights, title and interest without fees and without rights to future royalties.”

“That’s what you’re saying yes to, by using this neat, free app, that you’re going to log all of your agricultural records with,” says Tracey-Cowan. “And there are similar types — some with more, some less, all sorts of different shades of what the company providing you with this cool app might be asking for, in return for free.”

One other thing that could be gone for good is a copy of the data being shared. Tracey-Cowan has had several clients set up their own cloud software, only to find their original service provider didn’t maintain copies of the original data. Now, more of her clients keep a copy and then share a copy.

Tracey-Cowan recommends farmers read and understand their end-use agreements. If they do, and agree to the conditions laid out, then that’s fine. On the plus side, she says there’s a new world of improved farming that could result from this type of data sharing, where information provided by one farmer is blended with that of others, and the company gathering that information is interested in enhancing its product lines accordingly.

The problem is, many farmers don’t realize the depth of information or the ability for it to be manipulated. And once a farmer has given away that access, it’s gone.

“Nothing is free,” says Tracey-Cowan.
farm plan on my tablet to know where every cornfield is located. If he’s too busy to accompany me, I could add my observations directly in his electronic field notes.”

Cloud farming will go much further. In fact, it is about to revolutionize the relationship between farmers and those who provide them with professional service and advice.

At Logiag, the firm that developed the mobile app and the geomatics for FCC’s Field Manager PRO 360 software, co-owner Gilles Clément is now talking about “tele-agronomy.”

“An agronomist could be examining a photo or a geo-referenced note of an observation made in the field and decide to give a recommendation without leaving their desk,” Clément says. He believes having complete and instant access to a field’s history on a tablet or desktop computer could actually be more useful than standing in a field looking at a poor crop.

Clément’s partner at Logiag, agronomist Jacques Nault, foresees a closer relationship between the farmer and the farm’s consultants.

“Communication will be more fluid, more interactive and more efficient, because the consultant will always know exactly what has been going on in a field,” Nault says. Because cloud farming translates into better record-keeping, therefore, consultants will be able to base their recommendations on better-quality information.

“It will always be useful to go out to the field,” Nault says. “But it’s not by walking a field that you obtain the best data for troubleshooting. The analysis will be better by using a computer screen to look at precise data about soil type, microtopography, fertility and the complete history of operations conducted in that field.”

**Paperless management**

Cardinal remembers his farm’s first attempt at mobile data management using pocket PCs. “We had to bring them back to the office to synchronize the data,”
he says. “Often, employees would forget them in the tractor, the battery would die and the data would get lost.”

Handwritten notes were always useful, but sometimes they were hard to read and understand, and at the end of each day, someone had to enter the data in a computer. Often, the information would remain incomplete.

With smartphones, everything is easier. At Patates Cardinal, everyone already had an iPhone. Because employees also rely on them for personal use, the phones are always charged. Checkmarking a completed task is easy, especially in tractors with automated steering. Information from field operations is complete, precise and almost instantly accessible on the farm’s main computer or through a faraway server.

As a crop input sales rep, Deslauriers must collect information from each of his clients in order for staff agronomists at William-Houde to complete their fertility planning. Busy clients may not remember very accurately where, when and exactly how much manure they have spread, he says. “If everything was noted systematically during the season, there would be a lot fewer mistakes and oversights. The producer would simply have to authorize me to access the information relevant to their fertility plan.”

The data managed with the Field Manager PRO 360 software can encompass a wide range of aspects of farm management, including field records, grain marketing, production costs, financial analysis and more.

“The data always belongs to the farmer. They’re the ones who grant access rights, with user names and passwords,” says FCC’s management software specialist Matthew Van Dijk. For example, a seed supplier could only have access to the data regarding the fields where their products were used.

Soon, farm equipment will take part in collecting data and sending it off to the cloud. “I believe this will be the next step. Yield monitors and other devices (on planters and sprayers) will also instantly share the data they collect,” Van Dijk says. For now, the information generated by most of these devices must be transferred to farm management software using a USB key or an SD memory card.

Manufacturers like John Deere and Case have already embraced cloud farming. The technology is ready, but has yet to be fully deployed and promoted. With JDLink, for example, a tractor uses cellphone or satellite signal to communicate engine performance data (mechanical problems, fuel consumption, location) to a server. Alerts can be sent should the tractor be started in the middle of the night or driven outside of a set perimeter.

“All precision farming monitors will soon transfer their data through wireless signal. The farmer will be able to access and share the data using the MyJohnDeere.com website,” says John Deere spokesperson Rémi Bourgault. The website is already up and running and selected farmers all across North America are testing it.

To those worrying about poor wireless signal in their fields, Bourgault

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explains that transmitters installed on tractors and other equip-
ment are more powerful than those inside our cellphones. 
Because the signal contains raw data rather than voice, the trans-
fer may be interrupted for a few seconds and resumed without 
loss of data.

At Patates Cardinal, the next step will be to start using Field 
Manager PRO 360’s geomatics module. Specific colours can be 
assigned to a seed variety, a pesticide dose, or a yield level in 
order to create instant maps of what is happening in each field. 

Cardinal would also like to match data from his own weather 
station and from regional weather stations to each field opera-
tion. Sooner or later, cloud farming will make this possible, Clé-
ment says.

Even on small farms, the quantity of information exceeds 
the limits of human memory. Spending around $1,200 for the 
software and mobile application may look like a lot. But better, 
more complete records that don’t require hours of data entry at 
the farm’s desktop computer may actually translate into time and 
money savings.

Some older farmers may never embrace cloud farming, 
Deslauriers says. “But for the younger generation, these tools are 
very easy to use. Everyone is now using a smartphone.”

“I had been waiting for this technology,” Cardinal says. “I 
started using it as soon as it came along.”

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THE TRADE-OFF
If you don’t share your data, 
you may not get research results

Chris Batdorf sees both sides of the 
cloud, and he’s very optimistic about 
the future of what this technology 
provides. At the same time, Batdorf, sales 
and brand manager for John Deere, agrees 
farmers should insist on transparency and 
accountability.

This past summer, Deere launched its 
wireless data transfer, a technology plat-
form with extraordinary power to inform 
and enhance. The new platform can go way 
beyond letting you know when to change air 
filters, yet it also comes with some very power-
ful provisos that must be clearly understood.

“Some people look at Deere and ask, ‘Why has it taken so long?’” says Batdorf, 
adding that the perception is that it’s easy 
to set up back-and-forth data transmission. 
“Why took so long was the security. It’s really easy to wirelessly send data — we do it 
numerous times a day from our phones, be it 
e-mail or text. The big deal is how do we do it 
in an environment where we can ensure that 
that data is secure and that we’re giving the 
customer the ability to make the choices that 
he or she wants to do with their data.”

That choice is clearly spelled out at www. 
Deere.com/trust, with the company’s core 
principles, developed around the various 
forms of data that can be collected. It’s a 
three-pronged approach, aimed at providing 
users with a clear indication of the benefits 
and consequences of using each service. 

With user consent, Deere will collect data 
on machinery and on production — with 
each linked directly to the user’s farm — and 
anonymous data, either production based or 
machinery based. Batdorf makes no apolo-
gies for spelling out Deere’s stance for par-
ticipants: if they don’t agree to allow Deere’s 
use of the data, then the farmer can’t access 
the shared information that results.

It’s a calculation, Batdorf agrees. If you 
don’t participate in the information sharing, 
you don’t get access to the benchmarking 
that comes out of it.

Plus, there may be a whole lot more 
coming.

Karon Tracey-Cowan’s perspective at 
AgTech GIS in Embro, Ont., is that farming 
the cloud will get past sharing data on a single 
proprietary platform. She understands the 
need for convenience and time saving and 
maximizing yields, but from her point of view, 
she’d like to see more farmers embracing a 
collaborative approach to sharing information.

“Being able to solve the problems of better 
production, better management of fields and 
resources is a great idea,” Tracey-Cowan says.

That raises other questions, Tracey-
Cowan acknowledges. “If we’re going to col-
laborate, we need to think about whether 
it’s better to collaborate on some kind of an 
open platform so that anyone who pitches in 
their five cents can get a dollar back, instead 
of giving a company my five cents and then 
getting charged for the answers.”

Bdorf is optimistic such questions will 
get worked out, and that it won’t stop the 
sharing of data. Using machinery and pro-
duction data to fine tune combines or trac-
tors is just a first step, he says. The next step 
will be to refine and share that information 
to make better agronomic use of it, right 
down to enhancing the yield potential of 
every single seed.

“We understand there’s huge value in 
that for us, but also for the grower, and we 
want to be able to deliver just as much value 
to the grower as we’re getting ourselves,” says Batdorf. “We also want to be very, very 
transparent about what we will not do with it. 
We don’t want to lose that trust, we want to 
be transparent.”
Learning about biologicals

They aren’t just inoculants, so it’s time to start exploring where they’ll fit

By Ralph Pearce, CG Production Editor

In farm circles, the term “biologicals” lacks the panache of “precision agriculture.” Nor does it grab headlines like “genetically modified.” Yet farm usage of biologicals is set to grow by leaps and bounds in the next few years.

In fact, the market is already bigger than most farmers might think, with a current value for biological sales in the U.S. at around $1.5 billion.

Industry is predicting big growth ahead. BASF acquired BeckerUnderwood earlier in 2013, and Bayer CropScience purchased AgraQuest in 2012, which means that now, each of the “Big Six” (i.e. BASF, Bayer CropScience, Dow AgroSciences, DuPont, Monsanto and Syngenta) has its own biologicals division, not to mention Novozymes, FMC and Valent BioSciences Corporation (VBC), the three other major players in the emerging market segment.

What does this mean for growers?

The easiest examples of biologicals are inoculants, which are well known across Canada for their long-term use starting in soybeans, with a reliance on two primary bacterial strains — Bradyrhizobium japonicum and Bacillus subtilis. Then there’s Bayer’s release of Votivo in late 2011, a nematicide which marked a first of sorts in the role and the potential of biologicals.

In the case of biofungicides and bioinsecticides, the benefits of biologicals are undeniable and easy to see. The introduction of biologically active fungicides and insecticides provides one, and sometimes two vehicles for success. On their own, they obviously provide protection from diseases and insect pests. But in the right formulations, they can provide a degree of supplementary protection to the plant, acting in concert with more traditional products. Either way — on their own or in combination — they break down the selection process that leads to resistance.

Different perspectives

“We’re looking at biologicals that can help in disease suppression, and that can help manage resistance to fungal pathogens for synthetic chemistries,” says Bill Greuel, market manager of Functional Crop Care for BASF. “And we’re looking at biologicals that can help enhance the seed in any number of ways. That might be nutrient management, or it might be what we call plant growth-promoting effects of biologicals, and we’re just scratching the surface in terms of what we think these biologicals can do.”

If biofungicides and bioinsecticides are in the development pipeline, are bioherbicides far behind? Maybe not, says Greuel, and their arrival would certainly help the fight against glyphosate resistance.

Meanwhile, Novozyme’s Ontario sales rep Dustin Steckle is looking toward even bigger opportunities. “We can look at the plant and ask, ‘What does it need to maximize its yield potential?’” Steckle says. “Understanding how the plant works and what the plant really needs to function and maximize its potential is going to be huge.”

The focus so far has mainly been on the plant, making it resistant to herbicides, enhancing its standability and now protecting it from pests and diseases. But Steckle says biologicals can also target the environment that plants grow in.

“It’s the soil structure, too,” Steckle says, noting that higher prices a few years ago drove many growers to turn marginal or even below-marginal ground into farmland. “Biologicals will turn some of that less-productive ground into higher-productive ground for growers, with very little cost involved. If you’re not going in there and having to spread higher amounts of synthetic fertilizers, it makes a big difference in the bottom line.”

Some of these products are already available, particularly in the West, and Steckle believes some of them will migrate to the East.

For Greuel, one of the other key advantages in working with biologicals is the diverse nature of bacteria, whether it’s as bioenhancers, fungicides or insecticides.

“There’s infinitely more diversity in biologicals versus synthetic chemistry,” says Greuel.

The challenge becomes one of packaging the most appropriate biologicals together in order to give the grower a broad base of protection of growth enhancement.

Any complaints?

The knock against biologicals is their efficacy compared to existing chemistries. Often it seems a biofungicide or bioinsecticide might give up five to 10 per cent control compared to chemical option that growers have available to them now.

Greuel says there are two schools of thought on that. One is that biologicals and chemicals might be used together. The second is that biologicals may open market-access doors to countries where GMOs aren’t permitted.

“The most immediate return for the grower is agronomic and the return on their investment,” says Greuel. “If it also helps with market access, I would say that’s going to prove a very important secondary benefit.”

NOVEMBER 2013
With the message out there that agriculture has never been a better career option, enrolments are rocketing to record heights in agricultural diploma programs at colleges and universities across Canada, and program administrators can barely contain their glee.

“Everyone has seen positive growth in enrolment,” says Derrick Turner, president of the Canadian Association of Diploma in Agriculture Programs (CADAP) and dean of the School of Business, Agriculture & Environment at Assiniboine Community College (ACC) in Brandon, Man.

Turner’s own college at ACC is seeing its largest-ever intake of students for its Agri-Business and Environmental Technologies Diploma programs.

Stronger commodity prices are getting some of the credit, but so are the abundance of employment opportunities in virtually all sectors of the industry, plus the big marketing campaigns by educational institutions and the agricultural industry that have driven those points home with the kids and their high school guidance counsellors.

The message is simple. Once again, there is a bright future in agriculture.

“CADAP did a national marketing campaign, and agricultural companies across Canada over the last few years have been doing a really good job of selling agriculture and the career opportunities out there,” says Turner. “There’s so many different ways to be involved in the agricultural sector.”

“The message is clear that agriculture is wide open,” says Michele Rogalsky, director of the School of Agriculture at University of Manitoba (U of M).

“There has been a lot of effort by the industry to get that message out, from producer groups and organizations like Farm Credit Canada with its Ag More Than Ever campaign. Young people are looking at a positive future in agriculture, and I think that’s a big factor in the increased enrolment in our degree and diploma programs.”

For farmers and for agriculture generally, the good news isn’t only in the fact that enrolment is up. It’s also the quality of the students.

Despite toughening its admission standards this year, U of M has a record intake of first-year students for its two-year diploma program. And it has a waiting list.

Students who complete the U of M ag diploma program can also receive a two-year credit towards the university’s agriculture degree, to which the U of M consistently draws high-quality applicants, says Rogalsky. “We attract enthusiastic individuals who are highly motivated,” she says. “They’re coming in with strong leadership skills from being involved in things like 4-H. They have a sense of responsibility for their communities, and an understanding about the positive opportunities in our industry.”

PROVIDING OPTIONS

Canada has 14 educational institutions offering ag diploma programs, each with slightly different emphasis and content, but all are providing students with more options and the security of knowing they’ll have a skill set they can take anywhere for a good career on the farm, off the farm, and in some cases, both.

“Career paths certainly change for many students, and having that diploma or degree under their belt gives them more options,” says Jack Payne, co-coordinator for the Agricultural Management Diploma at Alberta’s Olds College, which has a waiting list for its Agriculture Management diploma program, offering majors in production, finance and marketing. “It makes them highly employable and that gives them an advantage.”

Whatever their intentions going into an ag diploma program, when students graduate they are in high demand. Liz Meidlinger of the University of Guelph’s Ridgetown Campus says that school has had its highest enrolment this fall in 30 years.

At Ridgetown, 60 to 70 per cent of ag diploma graduates go back to a commercial farm, and the rest go straight into agribusiness. “We have probably two to three jobs for every student who graduates,” Meidlinger says. “I would say that agribusiness is disappointed that we don’t have more students.”

A CHANGED INDUSTRY

College and university programs constantly go through an evolution process and curriculum renewal. Diploma programs may in fact be under even greater pressure to evolve, given the pace of change in agriculture and shorter length of their programs, say Turner. “College diploma programs tend to be training for specific occupations and as such respond to industry labour market demands.”

Similar to other colleges, ACC has a board of
industry representatives to advise it about changing labour market demands and other trends in the agricultural sector. There’s another trend too, with today’s students getting a broader scope, typically including everything from business management to hands-on production.

At the same time, the line between diploma and degree course material is blurring. “Our diploma program used to be completely different from the degree program,” says Murray Drew, associate dean and professor at the College of Agriculture & Bioresources at the University of Saskatchewan (U of S). “Our diploma and BA programs now use largely the same courses. In some respects our diploma programs are tougher than our degree programs because they’re compressed. These students are graduating with the same kind of training as the degree program gives; they just don’t have quite the same breadth as the degree.”

The U of S has two ag diploma programs, and their enrolment has been climbing about 10 per cent a year over the past five years. This fall enrolment is 900 students for these programs, already exceeding the university’s target of hitting 828 students by 2015.

Payne says there is also greater interest in soil science and agronomy, reflecting the complexity of some of the issues students are likely to face, whether on the farm or as a consulting agronomist. “As things change we have to adapt some of our courses to reflect the changes that are occurring,” Payne says. “We used to have just a weeds course, but now you have things like clubroot and herbicide resistance, so there are some complex issues out there in pest management and as a result I’ll be offering a new course in Integrated Pest Management because we have to understand the whole relationship in pest management.”

More urban kids are interested in farming these days too. “The students in our diploma programs tend to be mostly rural, farm kids,” says Drew at the U of M. “But in our BA agriculture programs, 30 per cent are now urban kids, which has been a real culture change for the college.”

“I’m seeing more students who have what I’ll call a city or town upbringing, but they have perhaps spent a summer or a work placement on a farm,” says Meidlinger of the University of Guelph’s Ridgetown Campus. “That would only be around five to 10 per cent of our
enrolment but I think there is a growing group of people who have no farm background but are looking at agriculture as a good career possibility. With the skill sets that agricultural programs provide students these days, they don’t necessarily need a farm background. I think most agriculture colleges would like to see more students come with an interest in agriculture or agribusiness that don’t have a farm background. There are just so many opportunities for them out there and I think we’d be serving the industry even better than we are now.”

THE SOFT SKILLS

Although the U of M’s ag diploma still emphasizes primary production, Rogalsky says it also has a much stronger focus on the fundamental business and management skills that are essential to agriculture today. “Our diploma students are taught sound principles over the two-year program on the production side of agriculture, but they also go through a comprehensive planning project where they look at production and financial records and prepare a projected business plan. When they come out of this program they’ve got really strong skills to manage a farm but it also prepares them for a career in agribusiness… it could be short term as a transition to allow them to go back to the farm, or it could be a permanent career.”

Another essential part of many diploma programs is their training in communications and leadership. “Students today know it’s important to communicate the positive things about our industry,” says Rogalsky.

Equipped with new business and financial skills, the next generation is becoming more involved in the transition of the family farm, which means succession planning is no longer the sole responsibility of their parents.

U of M offers a course in succession planning and as a pilot project it is offer-
ing a unique intergenerational workshop which brings students and their parents together for a full day’s discussion about their succession goals and objectives.

“The students right now have got critical thinking and assessment skills, and they’ve got their own personal goals and objectives,” says Rogalsky. “They’re going to do an assessment about if and when they should go back to the farm, and I think we provide them with very good tools to do that. They’re making informed decisions and determining when is the right point for that succession, for the management transfer and the financial transfer as well.”

One of the fastest-growing trends in agriculture has been the interest by consumers in wanting to be more connected with their food supply, knowing where it’s coming from and who’s growing it. In response, ACC has developed a unique one-year program in horticulture production, which teaches safe and sustainable food production in its new, solar-powered greenhouse. “The interesting thing is that ACC also has a Culinary Institute, so our program is growing food for it and we’re actually trying to demonstrate in a very practical way the ‘field-to-fork’ connection,” says Turner. “We have people who are interested in potentially starting greenhouses or growing food for servicing local markets, but we also have students on the culinary side who are interested in taking this course as part of their culinary training because there is growing interest in chefs who not only cook the food, but also know how to grow it. More and more chefs now have their own mini-gardens or greenhouses.”

Technology has had a huge influence on farming over the past 10 to 15 years, and not surprisingly it is also affecting ag diploma content, which has to be constantly updated with each new advance in technology. But technology is also changing how programs are delivered to students.

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As of this year, it’s a requirement that students enrolled in any program at Olds College must have an iPad. “We are seeing the integration of iPads into the agricultural industry, and the college has responded so all of our students have iPads and we’re using them as a learning tool,” says Payne. “Technology is a big part of what has changed young people’s perception of farming and agriculture, and I think it forms part of the appeal because farming is technology based.”

Course delivery is also evolving. Colleges are delivering more courses by distance all the time, and it’s a trend that’s being driven in many cases by the need to provide educational opportunities for students who are balancing other commitments and education at the same time. “We are definitely seeing growth every year in our distance intake,” says Turner. “Not everybody is a high school graduate and can come and commit to one or two years of a program. There are lots of people who want training but they have other work and life commitments that they have to deal with at the same time, and that’s forcing us to look at delivery models other than traditional ones.”

MEANWHILE, BACK ON THE FARM...

More young people are simply seeing farming as a good lifestyle choice, especially those who have grown up or worked on a family farm, and these young people are returning in larger numbers, attracted by better prospects in the industry. “We’ve seen some nice commodity prices, so that makes farming more attractive,” says Meidlinger. “The majority of our two-year ag diploma students have grown up on a farm and they’re keen to go back to the farm, and we’re excited about that because that’s great news for agriculture.”

Whether young people are going back to the family farm, choosing to farm for themselves, or looking at an off-farm career they are expecting to hit the ground running. “Students are asking for more of a hands-on experience and that can mean pulling calves or pulling wrenches or using the iPad in the tractor cab to market the crop that they are using auto-steer to put in the ground,” says Payne. “They are definitely telling us that they want whatever skills they need to prepare them to manage their farm or to enter the workforce.”

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NADINE HILDEBRAND

It isn’t just the career objectives of today’s students that are changing, it’s the students themselves. Although the large majority of students enrolling in ag diploma programs are still from farm backgrounds, an increasing number are coming in with no farm experience, attracted by the many opportunities in the agricultural industry.

Nadine Hildebrand is a good example. She grew up in Manitou, a small town in the heart of rural Manitoba and went straight to the city of Winnipeg after graduating high school to begin a career in retail. Some 15 years later, Nadine decided she wanted a career change and chose agriculture, despite having no farming background at all.

“I wanted to move back to the country, and finding employment and opportunities just seemed better in agriculture and agribusiness than in other industries,” says Hildebrand, who graduated from the University of Manitoba with an ag diploma this spring. “If I was going to spend my time and money going back to school, the agriculture diploma fitted all the bills for me.”

Today, Hildebrand is working for a canola breeder north of Morden, Man., where she now lives, and she says her college education was an important bridge back to the country. “My initial vision was that obviously I would need some kind of day-to-day job, but I wanted to get my own acreage and have some animals and perhaps a small-scale market garden,” says Hildebrand. “I have more of an awareness of where our food is produced now than when I was growing up in a rural town, and I want to be a part of that. That dream is still there but now I have a job that will help that to eventually happen.”

Hildebrand had taken some university courses in geography and soil science but says it was the diploma program that equipped her for her current agribusiness career, because it opened her eyes to the realities of farming. “It made me see things from a producer’s perspective and now I feel I can have a really intelligent conversation with farmers and ask more intelligent questions of them,” she says. “I feel I’m learning more now because of the knowledge base that I got from the program. Even from the financial and the business plan perspective of the farm, I have a better understanding of the issues.”

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CHANGING FACES

IF TODAY’S COLLEGE STUDENTS ARE TOMORROW’S AGRICULTURE, THEN HERE’S YOUR FUTURE

The flexibility and increased scope of the many agricultural diploma programs that are available across Canada are giving students skill sets that provide them with myriad options, which means they don’t necessarily need to make a clear-cut choice when they enrol in college about what they intend to do.

Some have a definite path in mind — whether it’s back to the farm or to the door of an agribusiness company, while others will combine both options either as a temporary means to get them to the point where they can farm full time, or as a long-term off-farm career that will help support the farm operation.

Increasingly the ag diploma is also a safety net. It’s an insurance policy that students know they can always fall back on if things don’t quite work out on the farm.

“I think students sometimes come in with the intent to farm and then for whatever reason they realize that maybe they need a longer-term plan,” says Murray Drew, associate dean and professor of the College of Agriculture & Bioresources at the University of Saskatchewan. “I’ve got a number of graduates I follow on Twitter. They’ve gone back to their home communities and I see them working for agricultural retailers or whatever, and they are also farming on the side. There are a lot of jobs out there in agriculture right now, the opportunity is there and so if they’ve got training, and they’ve got a diploma, they can apply for a job and go back to their home communities and have the best of both worlds.”
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Gary Mroz knew when he entered the ag diploma program at the U of M that he wanted to come back and farm with his father and uncles, but he also knew a diploma would give him a stepping stone to gather some resources and make the transition to full-time farming a little easier. “I’m just helping out on the farm right now and waiting until I can find a full-time job and start making some cash to put towards farming,” says Mroz, who graduated last spring.

Mroz also knew when he started the program that although he had lots of hands-on experience in farming, he’d need more in-depth knowledge and some new skills to help him understand the bigger picture. “The courses I took were a lot more in depth, for example the agronomy courses taught me a lot about different crops and diseases,” he says. “But I think it was the management planning project that was the most valuable to me. We had to learn how a farm runs and calculate the numbers with all the loans and what capital was needed and how much we need to make to be profitable. For me that was the steepest learning curve because I didn’t have any background in the numbers, I wasn’t involved in that on the farm. It was a big wake-up call because when I got to understand the financial side, I understood what resources I will need in order to farm. It really gave me the full picture about what it takes to run a farm.”

Blythe Mackie had grown up in the small community of New Hamburg, Ont. and she had never set foot on a farm until her father, who had taken on some part-time work on a friend’s dairy farm more as a hobby than anything, suggested she consider working at the farm. “I’d been working at Sobeys and was looking for something different, and working on the dairy farm was active and paid fairly well, so I gave it a try,” says Blythe. She hadn’t worked at the Hogendoom’s Dairy farm near Baden, Ont. for very long before she realized that she wanted to be involved with livestock as a career. “I loved every minute of it,” says Mackie, who also opted to do her co-op education class there in Grade 12. “I learned all about the pregnant cows, calving, surgeries; I got to do everything. So when I figured out that was what I wanted to pursue, I started talking to people about educational options.”

Mackie’s cousin had graduated from the Ridgetown Campus several years earlier and had highly recommended the agricultural programs there, where Mackie, who is 18, is now enrolled and completing her first year of the agricultural diploma. Her intent is to continue her education and either obtain the livestock health certificate at Ridgetown or pursue an animal science degree at the University of Guelph to enable her to work in the livestock industry in the area of animal nutrition, which interests her the most.

Mackie says the training she is getting at Ridgetown is helping her better understand how all aspects of farming fit together. “All of the courses mesh together really well and help me see how everything works. For example, on the livestock end of things I am learning a lot about the plants and soils too, which all contribute to animal nutrition,” she says. “Because I was not brought up on a farm, it’s really important to learn about all the different aspects of the industry.”

Brett Teetaert grew up near Melita, Man. on the family’s mixed farm. Like a lot of other kids of his generation, when his dad decided to get out of farming and sold all the farm equipment and rented the land in 2009, Brett wasn’t sure that farming was going to be an option for him, so he went into the trades right out of high school.

Teetaert quickly realized that the trades weren’t what he wanted to do, and he decided to spend the next few months in Australia doing some custom harvesting while he evaluated what he wanted to do with his life.

When he came back to Canada, he realized that agriculture was beckoning him, so he enrolled at the U of M. “I decided I wanted to get back into agriculture in some shape or fashion, and I thought the ag diploma was a more practical solution for me than a three- or four-year degree program,” says Teetaert, who graduated this past spring.

Teetaert is working as a sales agronomist for Paterson Grain, and hasn’t given up on the idea of going back to farming, although his educational training has taught him that he’ll need to have a plan and a measured approach. “Farming definitely is an option and something I am weighing,” he says. “One of the things that was valuable about my program was that it really focused on budgets, and that’s something I really enjoyed.

“For me to get back into farming, I would have to work the budget quite intensively and make sure that, in any scenario, I know what I am getting into. I am thinking that maybe I could begin with a joint farming option for a few years or form a longer-term partnership.”

Non-farm students like Blythe Mackie are still a minority, but their numbers are growing fast.
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"You can see the tide changing," says Jim Walker, vice-president of Case IH North America. The “traumatic growth” in the ag equipment industry in the last three to five years has started to ebb.

Walker made his predictions as he spoke to a group of farm journalists in Denver, Colorado during Case IH’s 2014 model-year equipment launch. The view from the company’s corner offices is that the hyperactivity in ag equipment sales that fuelled unprecedented industry growth since 2008 is about to throttle back pretty significantly. And as odd as it seems to say, that may actually be a good thing for the industry.

“We’ve been saying producers have more money than God right now,” Walker says. “They can buy exactly what they want, and you’ve seen the result. You’ve seen 140-plus horsepower tractors in an industry five years ago go from 12,000 to probably this year 25,000 or 26,000 units. You’ve seen combines go from 8,500 to probably end up this year around 13,500 or so.”

“In reality,” Walker continues, “what you’ve seen is a tremendous stress on manufacturing. And it doesn’t matter what colour the product is. It doesn’t matter who you are. When you have the type of just-in-time delivery from suppliers we’re all using today, when you’ve ramped up production to the extreme levels of today, we all have problems.

“We look at the future, at Case IH, as more of a welcome relief, really coming into more of a manageable marketplace,” Walker says. “It will let our dealer organization rest a bit too. It will let them take the time to put more investment into their businesses and serve their customers more efficiently. We’re all going to be able to take a breather, which is really what we need at this point in time.”

Jim Wood, vice-president at Case IH’s largest Canadian dealer network chain, Rocky Mountain Dealerships Inc., agrees dealers too have felt the pressure in recent years. Perhaps the biggest challenge for them has been to manage used equipment inventories.

“The problem is it’s so easy to buy new compared to buying used,” Wood says. “They can buy exactly what they want, and you’ve seen the result. You’ve seen 140-plus horsepower tractors in an industry five years ago go from 12,000 to probably this year 25,000 or 26,000 units. You’ve seen combines go from 8,500 to probably end up this year around 13,500 or so.”

“we’ve been saying producers have more money...
Back at the manufacturers, assembly plants face problems too. Most have been stretching their capacity for several years. “Getting the industry back to a normality, allowing our plants to breathe a little bit, with fewer parts coming in right at the time of production will allow us to focus on the quality of the build, focus on the quality of the improvements we make,” says Russell.

Adds Russell, “The industry getting back to normality will be good for all the manufacturers, allowing them to focus on the efficiencies in their company. Right now, we’re expediting parts, which costs money. It will allow the ag companies to get back into a more profitable zone of production. It’s the efficiencies and the margins that will increase, just because we can be more efficient. Allowing things to come in truck freight versus air freight, those kinds of efficiencies.”

“In my career of 35 years in agriculture we’ve never strung back to back this kind of run,” says Walker. “We’ve never seen producers enjoy this type of net farm income, seeing records each and every year.”

But Walker sees the three main factors that drove that phenomenon now starting to weaken. The first of those is the growing strength of the previously weak U.S. dollar.

“Back in January we said our opportunity was a weak U.S. dollar,” Walker explains. “Six months later we see the U.S. dollar getting stronger. A weak U.S. dollar allows us to produce commodities that are best in class, but we’re able to sell them around the world and export them at Wal-Mart prices. So no wonder we’ve had such high (farm) commodity prices and our farmers are able to sell everything they produce at high prices.

“Second is high demand,” says Walker. But although it has weakened, that one hasn’t entirely waned. “High demand is not going to go away,” he says. “The Chinas, the Indias are still going to require more and more every day.”

Growth in those developing economies is continuing, albeit at a much slower pace than during the heyday they experienced a few years ago. So while demand there is still strong, it is moderating a little.

“The third is (grain) stocks,” Walker goes on. “You’ve seen the reports I have, that stocks are projected to return to normal levels. That means it’s going to depress, somewhat, commodity prices.” Weakening grain prices over the late summer and fall certainly added strength to his prediction on that front.

All three factors will have an influence on farmers’ purchase decisions. “We see that with higher input costs and net farm income subsiding next year, (new machinery) is going to be a more thought-out purchase than it was this year,” says Walker.

“So we actually are looking forward to a stable farm economy,” Walker says. “We’re actually looking forward to a stable manufacturing footprint. We really believe with the rising U.S. dollar, with commodity prices probably subsiding somewhat that maybe we’ll go from 13,500 combines to 10,000 or 11,000, but that is still a hell of a bigger number than it was four years ago when it was 8,500. The pie is still going to be a great one to deal in, in agriculture. It will be better than it was four or five years ago. But we don’t foresee in the next few years that it’s going to be as strong. It will probably peak out this year.”

In short, the six-year sprint manufacturers have been engaged in to keep pace with demand will soon revert to a marathon, one where there is time to occasionally stop and catch your breath. Demand for farm equipment will stabilize at a strong but normal level.

The only question now is, what is normal?
Selling out farming

Here’s a crowdsourcing website to get all of us fighting to keep farmland ownership in the hands of farmers

By Gerald Pilger

Owning farmland is no longer a passion restricted to farmers. Today it is just as likely that farmland offered for sale will be bought by an individual investor, a developer, an investment fund, or even a sovereign wealth fund.

While this demand is a boon to land values and those farmers seeking to sell land, it has also driven prices well beyond the land’s agricultural productive value, frustrating both those trying to get into farming as well as farmers seeking to expand.

But high land prices aren’t the only reason farmers are concerned about selling farmland to non-farmers.

INVESTMENT FUND PURCHASES

The leading competitors for land in rural Canada are investment funds. Some like One Earth Farms are actually ventures seeking to profit by farming the land they purchase or lease. However, most funds are more interested in owning land than in farming it.

After purchase, they will rent out the land to a third party, usually on a cash basis, and they are not solely relying on returns from farm operations.

A number of funds openly describe their fund exit strategy as liquidation of the land holdings held in the funds in as little as five years in order to capture increases in the land value for investors.

Some funds focus on finding farmers willing to sell their land to the fund, and then rent the land back to the same farmer. Theoretically, the cash infusion from the land sale enables such farmers to expand their equipment line and therefore increases the amount of land they are able to farm. The question is whether there is additional land in the area to rent and if over the long term the farmer can do as well by renting as by continuing to own land.

Even more troubling is that at least one Canadian agricultural investment fund is RRSP and TFSA eligible. Investors can invest tax-free dollars (in the case of an RRSP) and/or receive tax-free returns from farming and land appreciation (in the case of a TFSA).

Yet farmers must use after-tax dollars to buy land, and pay taxes on farm and land returns.

FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Farmers’ biggest concern may be foreign purchase and ownership of Canadian farmland. Globally we are witnessing a massive buy-up of farmland by government agencies and investment funds working on their government’s behalf.

In September, the China news agency Star Online reported that China had signed an agreement with KSG Agro for the purchase of 250,000 acres of Ukrainian farmland. The SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST further reported that this was the first stage of a 50-year plan that would see China owning 7.5 million acres of farmland in Ukraine, roughly 10 per cent of the farmland in the region.

Unfortunately, there is very little tracking of the transnational purchase of farmland. Landmatrix.org is an independent global initiative that relies on crowdsourcing to identify deals because land deals are inherently non-transparent. (Because it focuses on land purchases made in low- and middle-income countries, foreign land purchases in Canada aren’t usually in the Landmatrix data set.)

China isn’t the only country seeking farmland abroad. Other Asian nations including South Korea and India that have large populations and too little land to meet their food needs domestically are actively seeking to purchase land overseas. Rich Middle Eastern nations are also trading oil dollars for land globally. Landmatrix.org currently lists information from 851 international land deals totalling some 75 million acres.
Even if we could track all transnational land transactions, it would be difficult for Canada to be critical of such deals because Canadians and Canadian companies have purchased farmland around the globe.

In 2011, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation (AIMCo), a Crown corporation which invests on behalf of numerous Alberta pension, endowment and government funds, purchased 2,500 square km (about 960,000 acres) of Australia timber and agriculture land.

Sprott Resources, best known in the Canadian agricultural community as the ownership behind One Earth Farms, has also invested $28.7 million to buy seven per cent ownership of the Union Agriculture Group, which in terms of landholdings is the largest agricultural business in Uruguay, farming more than a quarter-million acres.

Brookfield Asset Management is a publicly traded Canadian company that manages over $175 billion of assets on behalf of its clients. Brookfield has invested over $5 billion of that amount in agricultural and timber assets, primarily in Brazil.

**PERMANENT LOSSES**

Permanent loss of farmland is possibly the greatest fear for farmers. Urban encroachment continues to take some of the most productive lands out of agriculture. StatsCan data show the amount of farmland in Canada plunged by five million acres between 2006 and 2011.

While this loss of farmland is centred primarily around major urban centres, it affects the price of all farmland as the farmers flush with cash from their sale to land developers compete with farmers in other areas to purchase replacement land.

But even rural areas are attracting developers interested in transforming farmland into acreages and recreational areas.

The phenomenon has become so severe in the crowded northeastern U.S. that even the conservation land trusts established to prevent the loss of agriculture land are failing. Fully one-quarter of the land trusts that oversee these conservation easements are now said to have collapsed because non-farmers bought the land.

According to Lindsay Lusher Shute, a founder of the National Young Farmers Coalition who farms in upstate New York, the problem is so big that the state of Vermont has jumped in forcefully.

That state now requires prospective purchasers of protected farmland to derive at least half of their income from farming, or have a business plan that demonstrates an ability to run a viable farm business.

If Vermont’s state trust doesn’t think the purchaser has the farm creds to keep the land in agriculture, it can step in and find its own buyer, pricing the land according to its agricultural value.

Shute feels farmland must be kept for farmers, and she believes it is important something be done now because, she calculates, “In the next 20 years, 70 per cent of the nation’s farmland will change hands.”

**WHAT FARMERS NEED TO DO**

In 2002, Compas Inc. polled Canadian CEOs and business leaders for their opinions of foreign ownership restrictions in Canada. Those polled favoured loosening restrictions of foreign ownership in most industries. According to the Compas report: “The one notable exception is farmland, where as many business leaders favour a tightening as loosening of restrictions.”

Nothing defines a country more than the land it controls. Nothing is more important to a government than ensuring that the food needs of its citizens are met. Yet there are few restrictions on ownership and use of farmland in Canada, and the restrictions that are in place can be easily appealed by any buyer. Worse yet, it appears for the most part, government and the public in general do not know and don’t care who is purchasing our farmland, even though the future of our country and food supply depend on it.

Farmland ownership is a very complex issue and we need a national discussion immediately to decide if farmland is an asset that should be protected for farmers and agricultural production or if farmland is simply a commodity to be traded to the highest bidder.

We need to decide who should grow our food in the future, and who will own and control the land where that food is produced. Regardless of the answers, we need a much better system of tracking farmland sales, both domestically and internationally, to ensure farmland owners are dedicated to agricultural production.
**BRITISH COLUMBIA**

Dec. 8-14: Fair and seasonal overall but snow on a couple of days inland. Periodic coastal rain with some lows near zero.

Dec. 15-21: Seasonal to colder. Windy and unsettled at times with scattered, heavier rain west and snow east.

Dec. 22-28: Intermittent snow, mixed with rain west on a few days this week. Blustery with fluctuating temperatures.

Dec. 29-Jan. 4: Colder and at times windy. Fair skies interchange with rain to snow southwest and heavy snow elsewhere.

Jan. 5-11: Seasonal to cold. Often fair but snow falls on two or three days changing to rain with snow on the coasts. Clear, cold northeast.


**ALBERTA**

Dec. 8-14: Higher wind chills but with a chance of chinooks southwest. Fair overall but snow on two or three days, heavy in places.

Dec. 15-21: Fair, cold most days with periodic snow but a couple of milder days southwest bring heavier snow and drifting.

Dec. 22-28: Unsettled on a few days in the south with some snow and drifting. Fluctuating temperatures. Fair, cold, flurries north.

Dec. 29-Jan. 4: Often fair and colder with higher wind chills on most days. Scattered snow in many areas. Very cold north.

Jan. 5-11: Cold, clear on many days with flurries but slight warming in the southwest brings snow and drifting.

Jan. 12-18: Fair and cold weather dominates except for a few days of milder temperatures and some snow south.

**SASKATCHEWAN**

Dec. 8-14: Fair and seasonal on most days but heavier snow and drifting on a couple of colder, windy days. Cold, flurries north.

Dec. 15-21: Blustery most of the week with higher wind chills, drifting and occasional snow, possibly heavy in places.

Dec. 22-28: Fair, seasonal weather interchanges with colder, snowy days. Windy at times with blowing snow south. Clear, cold north.

Dec. 29-Jan. 4: Several clear, cold days with high wind chills. Some snow falls on a couple of occasions giving blowing snow south.

Jan. 5-11: Often settled and cold apart from scattered light snow on one or two days this week. Some drifting or blowing south.

Jan. 12-18: Cold, clear conditions dominate but minor warming in the south brings light snow and blowing snow at times.

**MANITOBA**

Dec. 8-14: Temperatures vary but end up near normal. Fair except blustery on a couple of days with heavier snow and blowing.

Dec. 15-21: Unsettled on a few days this week with periodic snow, chance heavy in a few areas. Higher wind chills and blowing at times.

Dec. 22-28: Fair skies and seasonal temperatures alternate with colder, windy days and occasional snow. Clear, cold north.

Dec. 29-Jan. 4: Settled, clear and cold on most days but light snow in the south on a couple of days with drifting and high wind chills.

Jan. 5-11: Fair and cold on most days in the south this week apart from light snow and drifting on one or two days. Clear, very cold north.

Jan. 12-18: Cold, fair with high wind chills but slight warming in the south results in scattered snow and drifting on a couple of days.

**NATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS**

Snow, high winds and cold temperatures are among the harsh realities of winter in Canada. This year is expected to be no exception, thanks to occasional disturbances racing across the country. From British Columbia eastward through to Quebec temperatures are likely to run close to normal values in most areas. Snowfall also should average near normal in spite of a few heavy snowfall events in December. Atlantic Canada is expected to be spared the severity of winter somewhat due to a milder temperature regime. However, even there, snow and rain totals will average near or a little above normal.

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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When the spoiled child needs to grow up

Maybe the solution is for them to work off farm for a real boss

By Pierrette Desrosiers, work psychologist, business coach, and author

"I have to wake him up four or five times before he gets to work," says a discouraged father about his 21-year-old son, who is supposed to be the future owner of the farm. "Sometimes I fear that he will create a crisis."

In recent years, we have been faced with the growing demands of a new generation. It is not uncommon to hear them say, "I certainly will not be working seven days a week. I will not work as hard as my parents have. After all, we only have one life to live!"

One might think that their attitudes reflect great confidence, and that these farmers-to-be are determined and entrepreneurial. However, one can also see that the rising generation is the generation of "ME."

In French, we call them "les enfants-rois," which means "the little emperors."

According to Jean Twenge of the University of San Diego, society in North America today is experiencing a dramatic increase in narcissism, comparable to the U.S. obesity epidemic.

In a 1950 Gallup survey, 12 per cent of participants responded affirmatively to the statement, "I am a very important person." By 2005, it was 80 per cent.

What distinguishes narcissists? Narcissistic traits are marked by a great love of self, lack of empathy, inability to take criticism, overconfidence, search for immediate gratification, low tolerance for frustrations in life, and unrealistic expectations. Above all, perceptions of being unique, and having earned special treatment are signs of narcissism.

The "Me generation" wants it all and they want it now. In the last few years, I have had an increasing number of consultations about this issue.

What are the consequences for the farm of this new generation of managers and entrepreneurs? An unrealistic confidence in their ability, great optimism, and a belief that they deserve the best now, make a very bad cocktail during difficult periods of life.

There are many reasons why parents give everything to their children. Between guilt for not being present enough, fear of not being loved or of being rejected, and strategies for avoiding their hysterics, giving seems like a winning strategy.

Of course, too, we want what is best for our children. However, some parents have forgotten that their primary mission is to be a parent, and that limits and authority are essential to a child’s development and balance.

In a coaching session, when I asked the father if he would accept an employee who behaved like his son, he immediately replied, "Never, he would be fired. But I can’t afford to get my son to go to work elsewhere."

However, in many cases, working for a while in another enterprise where one has a "real boss" who will not accept everything is one of the best life lessons.

Let’s be honest. Being the employer of your child is far from simple. Emotion often overrules rationality. Of course, if we choose to let them go, there is the risk that the family business won’t pass on to the next generation. If this is the case, however, it may be better for them to leave it now rather than five years down the road.

To succeed as an entrepreneur takes discipline. Discipline is the ability to do what we need to do to achieve what we want, even when we do not feel like it. To succeed in all spheres of our lives, we need to tolerate frustration, delay gratification, and renounce doing or possessing many things.

The best way to teach people this kind of emotional competence is to teach them at a young age, by repeating a word that is increasingly rare in parents’ mouths: “NO.”

Saying “no” to children is teaching them at least two fundamental lessons in life. First, we often have to wait for what we want, and second, we can’t have everything. It is the job of the parent to set boundaries. This helps the child to become a mature and responsible adult, more prepared to face the many challenges that life will bring.

Remember: A spoiled child will become a spoiled entrepreneur or a spoiled employee. In both cases, this is a major handicap for everyone.

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. (www.pierrette.desrosiers.com) Contact her at pierrette@pierrette.desrosiers.com.
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The Hanson family was gathered around Jeff and Elaine’s kitchen table for hot coffee on a cold morning. Elaine had just rocked the new baby to sleep and was setting a plate of banana loaf on the table when her mother-in-law, Donna, brought up the subject.

“Christmas will be here before we know it,” Donna said. “Do you think we should stay around the farm this year? Invite some relatives for the holidays?”

The room fell silent. Elaine drew in a breath and shuddered. Jeff shook his head. Donna’s husband, Dale, didn’t speak, but his eyes filled with terror. It was the look of a man who has gazed into the pits of hell.

Most years, the Hansons left the farm for Thanksgiving. Dale and Donna usually spent that weekend with Donna’s mother in Melville. Since Jeff had married Elaine, they’d spent Thanksgiving with Elaine’s family in Saskatoon. Dale’s father, Ed, had a standing invitation to spend the holiday with his sister and her husband in Weyburn.

But this year had been different.

After early hail damage, the crop matured late. Then badly timed rain delayed harvest even further. By the Wednesday before Thanksgiving they were still combining, with 800 acres of canola left out in the field.

“I’ll invite Mom to come down on the bus and spend a couple of days down here,” Donna told her husband.

“Sure,” Dale said. “She can have the spare room.”

Across the yard, Jeff and Elaine were having a similar conversation. Elaine invited her mother, her sister, and her sister’s twin five-year-old boys, Blaine and Blake, out to the farm for the weekend. “It will be nice for the boys to see what happens on a farm,” Elaine said.

“Why not?” Jeff answered.

Meanwhile, at his condo in town, Grandpa Ed was on the phone with his daughter, Margaret. “Seat sale from Ottawa, eh?” he said. “Good. You haven’t been out here in years. You can see how Dale’s built up the farm. And bring that new husband… Right. ‘Partner.’ I know.”

By Friday, including Grandpa Ed’s sister and her

Family, family... everywhere!

Getting the family together on the farm had sounded like such a good idea.
“Next time we get overnight guests,” Jeff said, “we’re sending them to a hotel.”

“He’s very excited to see what you’re using on the farm. I just hope there’s not too much dust. He’s allergic.”

Dale and Donna’s daughter, Trina, drove in from Winnipeg, eyes red from crying. “He said he doesn’t want to see me anymore,” she told her mother, and then, sobbing, shut herself into her old childhood bedroom.

Elaine’s family arrived in time for supper. Elaine opened the door to find her sister shouting at the twins. “Blake! Blaine! You can’t ride a dog like a horse.”

Bedrooms were found for everyone. “You shouldn’t try to call this air mattress a bed,” Dale complained to his wife at 3:15 a.m. while using the manual air pump to refill the leaky mattress for the third time. “Next time we get overnight guests we’re sending them to a hotel.”

Jeff and Elaine and their two small kids were sleeping in the basement, on an old fold-out couch that had once belonged to Jeff’s grandfather. That was about as comfortable as Jeff had expected it to be, but it wasn’t the bed that woke them up. It was Elaine’s sister, shouting upstairs. “Blake! Blaine! No! You can’t use the stove at night!”

Ed was sleeping soundly at his condo in town, until about 4:30 when Margaret and her partner packed up their suitcases, borrowed Donna’s car and drove to Weyburn to knock on Ed’s door. “All that dust in the air is killing Richard,” Margaret said. “Just killing him. He can barely breathe. You’ll have to sleep on the couch, Dad.”

Jeff spent Sunday afternoon hauling water to the farm’s cistern. Elaine had explained to her mother and sister that there was no water pipe out to the Hansons’ farmyard, and that although the Hansons had tried repeatedly to drill a well in the yard, they kept coming up dry. “You’re putting me out!” her sister had said. “This is 2013!” After shouting at the twins to keep the scissors away from the new baby, Elaine’s sister had disappeared into the bathroom for a relaxing 30-minute shower. Which wouldn’t have been such a problem, if pie into another plastic container. “It’s too much for one person.”

It was too tough to combine. Ed had driven the combine back to the yard, and soon Ed, Dale, Donna, Jeff and Elaine were huddled together in the shed to keep warm, eating pie out of Tupperware.

They heard shouting from the house. “Blake! Blaine! No! Get out of that truck! And put those keys back.”

The Hansons survived Thanksgiving with no homicides. But Donna’s suggestion that they do something like that again — ever, let alone so soon — left them speechless.

Then Elaine noticed the gleam in her mother-in-law’s eye, and saw that Donna was struggling not to grin. The whole family burst into laughter so loud they woke the sleeping baby.

“Just kidding, of course,” Donna said, wiping a tear from her eye. “But I did find a sale on some Mexican Christmas vacation packages.”

"Next time we get overnight guests,” Jeff said, “we’re sending them to a hotel.”
When the new in-law arrives

An ‘it’s my way or the highway’ attitude isn’t going to solve anything, advises Beverly Beuermann-King. ‘Don’t go into attack mode. This isn’t about winning.’

By Helen Lammers-Helps

The family farm may be the place where the lines between business and family are the most blurred. So, yes, we know that the standard advice in every other sector of the economy is to leave your work problems at work, and not to take them home with you. But what if your home and workplace are one and the same?

What’s worse, what if your family just got larger, because your son or daughter has just got married to someone who is also going to be sharing your life from here on?

Expect some bumps, says Reg Shandro, a farm adviser in Lacombe, Alta.

Each of us has our own perspective of the right way to do things based on how we were raised, Shandro says. “It’s only natural to expect some form of challenge when it comes to dealing with individuals who have different backgrounds.”

Then, the story gets even more complicated, because this new person somehow has to fit into a succession plan that had already seemed problematic enough.

It’s no wonder then that some family farm businesses go off the rails during the transition from one generation to the next. While lawyers and accountants are important for handling the legal and financial aspects of succession, if the day-to-day aspects of running the farm haven’t been hammered out and there isn’t good communication in place, both the farm and the family may be at risk.

Divorce, grandparents being estranged from grandchildren, expensive buyouts… these happen all too often, says Jim Soldan, a farm business adviser in Chilliwack, B.C. However, with a foundation built on trust, respect, shared vision and communication, the risk of such painful and costly outcomes can be minimized, he says.

Families should develop guidelines and procedures up front for how they will interact with one another, Soldan recommends. “You need to develop a maintenance manual just like you have for your tractor. You wouldn’t leave your tractor out in the rain and not look after it and then expect it to run,” he says. “You need to be proactive.”

Beverly Beuermann-King, a stress and wellness expert in Little Britain, Ont., agrees. When a new son- or daughter-in-law joins the family farm, it’s essential to talk about needs, wants and expectations, she says. How will decisions be made? How will income be spent? What are the expectations for leisure and vacation time? What role will children have on the farm?

Shandro says the challenge is to use a four-letter word that’s often forbidden by many farm families. “They need to T-A-L-K,” he says. “Avoiding the conversation is the worst conflict management styles.”

Different perspectives aren’t necessarily a bad thing. The new person brings wisdom and life experiences that can be tapped, says Soldan. “They have a fresh perspective that is not clouded by age, culture or habits. They are a massive resource if we are open minded.”

Shandro agrees. A non-family or non-farming participant may identify some of the idiosyncrasies that are sometimes accepted as normal farming practice that may not be good for the farmer or the farm, such as not taking time off.

By discussing their goals and dreams, family mem-
bers can identify the commonalities within these goals, says Shandro. “Look for policies or mechanisms that suit the needs of all parties involved.”

Families should establish a formal communication policy with guidelines for how and when family members will communicate in a safe-space environment. “Otherwise conversations will digress and people will resort to faulty communication styles,” Shandro cautions.

Beuermann-King recommends regular meetings, at least quarterly, to discuss what’s working and what’s not. “These meetings should be separate from meetings about the day-to-day operations of the business,” she says.

Sometimes it helps to record problems in a notebook and then later, when everyone has cooled down, the issues can be addressed, she adds.

Pam Paquet, a psychologist and business coach in Port Coquitlam, B.C., warns that without effective communication, false assumptions are made and resentments can build. Many farm businesses lack job descriptions or vacation policies — which can cause problems. “If smaller conflicts don’t get addressed, they escalate,” Paquet says.

Conflicts can get out of control, Paquet adds. “People can get really stressed, they’ll have trouble sleeping, get depressed, and be prone to angry outbursts.”

When this happens she recommends the family seek outside help from a trained farm adviser or counsellor. Paquet says it’s common for one person to seek professional help because they just can’t take it anymore, but then the counsellor will realize that it’s not just one person’s problem, it’s a family problem. “If the family is open to getting help, then good work can be done,” she stresses. “The biggest hump is that everyone needs to realize that they have a part to play in the problem and the solution.”

Soldan agrees. “Sometimes one person is viewed as a troublemaker but it’s important for the family to realize it’s not just one person who’s the problem, it’s how the family is interacting.”

It’s true there can be roadblocks. Sometimes people seek help in the wrong places, says Soldan. “Make sure you choose someone who has a track record of working with people,” he says. It could be a business adviser, counsellor, minister or other experienced neutral third party.

Some situations can seem completely overwhelming. Try breaking it down into smaller steps so it doesn’t feel hopeless, says Soldan. Using business language to talk about issues can sometimes help by taking the emotion out of it, adds Paquet.

Everyone involved has to have the right attitude. Being stubborn or laying blame won’t work, says Soldan.

An “it’s my way or the highway” attitude isn’t going to solve anything. “Don’t go into attack mode, it’s not about winning,” advises Beuermann-King. “Be open minded and accept that it’s OK for others to have different values... let go of ‘I’m right.’”

Sometimes people get stuck using old communication patterns that don’t work. “You have to be willing to learn the ‘how-to’ of effective communication and effective interpersonal relationships,” says Soldan.

If the same issues keep bubbling up, then you need to resolve them so you can move forward without these things getting in the way, adds Soldan.

During a meeting, people really need to focus, advises Shandro. That means no texting, cooking or child care. Also pay attention not only to what’s being said, but to how it’s being said. Only seven per cent of communication is in the words, says Shandro. More than 90 per cent of the message is relayed by tone and body language.

And everyone needs to focus on the facts, Shandro continues. “What are the facts as each party in the conversation perceives them? Do all parties understand the facts? Once the facts are shared, talked about and fully understood, usually a more rational outcome is likely.”

Differences in the backgrounds of members of the farm family can either strengthen or harm the family farm. It all depends how you handle it. When family members are committed to the success of the family and the farm operation, and when they are open minded and make communication a priority, they can create a harmonious vision of how they will live and work together.

“They need to T-A-L-K,” Soldan says. “Avoiding the conversation is the worst conflict management style.”
More than just diabetes

By Marie Berry

If you are one of the more than three million Canadians who have diabetes (a number that seems sure to increase in the years to come), you will likely have had the disease for five years before you are actually diagnosed. During that time you would have felt fine and not have realized that you had anything wrong with your metabolism. But during that time too, the disease would have been taking its toll.

Diabetes complications start the moment that your glucose metabolism is impaired, with such complications including diminished eyesight, reduced kidney function, impaired circulation and nerve functioning, and cardiovascular problems.

Diabetes symptoms can be dismissed as the result of aging, overwork, or just not feeling well

The symptoms of diabetes include dry mouth, increased thirst, frequent trips to the bathroom, unexplained weight change, lack of energy, an increase in skin infections, and sometimes blurred vision and tingling in your hands and feet.

As you can imagine, these symptoms could easily be dismissed as aging, overwork, or just not feeling well! It’s easy to see why you may have diabetes along with its complications without even knowing it.

Diabetes leaves excess glucose or sugar in your circulation, and it is this extra glucose that causes damage throughout your body. Retinopathy or eye damage occurs when the capillaries that supply oxygen to the retina in your eye become “plugged,” “leaky,” and damaged. Without a good supply of oxygen, retina cells die, producing eventual changes in your eyesight. This eye damage is the leading cause of blindness in people 20 to 74 years of age.

With extra glucose circulating in your blood vessels, your kidneys need to work harder to filter waste products. The kidneys can become “leaky” and nephropathy or kidney disease results. Eventually, the kidneys fail, which is why diabetes is the No. 1 cause of all kidney failure.

Also with extra circulating glucose, your nervous system suffers damage. Neuropathy or damaged nerves in your hands and feet result, accompanied with pain, heat, cold, itching, and burning sensations. With less sensation, your risk for damage also increases, especially to the feet.

It is estimated that two-thirds of people with diabetes also have heart attacks, stroke, or complications related to poor circulation. The leading disability for these people is heart attack and stroke, and 65 per cent of the people with diabetes will die because of cardiovascular conditions. High blood pressure, being overweight, smoking, and elevated cholesterol levels are risk factors for both diabetes and cardiovascular disease. In fact, diabetes is a risk factor to cardiovascular disease, and vice versa.

Obviously, if you are at risk for developing diabetes, or if you have diabetes, you want to minimize your risk for complications. You need to know what your risk for diabetes is and you want to have the lab work done on a regular basis that checks for good glucose metabolism. The Canadian Diabetes Association at www.diabetes.ca has a wealth of information about diagnosing diabetes.

There are strategies that you can use to reduce your risk. If you are overweight, especially around the waist, lose weight. An active lifestyle and a low-fat, high-fibre diet will help you shed the pounds. If you smoke, now is the time to quit. It may be easier said than done, but persevere. Keep your blood pressure and cholesterol within range. And, of course follow your health-care providers’ recommendations. You know what you should do, you just need to do it!

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“Would you like to take it around once by yourself?” As the little airplane slows down after a successful landing, I decide to send my student pilot on her first solo flight. She has been practising takeoffs and landings for a few weeks. I am satisfied she can fly on her own.

She pauses and looks straight ahead. I wonder what anxieties are welling up inside her, but she turns with huge anticipation. “Yes, I would.” I say, “Enjoy your self,” step out onto the tarmac, close the airplane door and walk to the hangar. I recall my first solo flight in High River, Alta. The moment a fledgling pilot becomes airborne alone is ingrained forever.

I might have said “good luck” to my student, about to fly solo. Do I believe flight is a matter of luck? Not really. Luck is having your 50/50 ticket drawn from a barrel of thousands at a rodeo or hockey game.

When an airplane crashes there is usually an explanation. If the incident was due to pilot error, someone made a poor decision, forgot their training or diverted their attention at a critical moment. In the rare instance where an airplane engine stops due to mechanical failure, the airplane becomes a glider. If the pilot manoeuvres to a safe landing, is it luck, fate, chance or skill that got him there?

Gordon Jones, a Flying Farmer from High River, Alta., died in September at the age of 90. As a flight instructor in the Second World War, Gordon flew Tiger Moths. After the war he continued teaching people how to fly while building a successful farming operation. Gordon was one of my first flight instructors.

Gordon’s memorial service was held at an aviation museum in Nanton, Alta. The minister, David Robertson, mused how pilots, enjoying the freedom of flight, see the world in a special and unique way. “Like an eagle, Gordon loved the experience of being held aloft by the air, flying, soaring and enjoying the world from above.” Gordon owned a Tiger Moth similar to the airplanes he flew as an instructor in the 1940s. He flew it until a few months before his death. After the service, the tiny yellow biplane with a wooden propeller flew by the museum in tribute to a man who shared his love of flying with many people.

Ernest K. Gann accumulated 10,000 flying hours as a pioneer pilot in the 1930s, through the Second World War and the Korean conflict. In his book FATE IS THE HUNTER he asks the question, “How is one man ill used by fate and another dares deceive it?” Gann does not claim to know the answer. He asks an older pilot: “Tell me, since you are older and wiser, does fate control your life? Is your life a matter of fate… let us admit that the pattern of anyone’s fate is only partly contrived by the individual.”

As I flew home from Gordon’s memorial I reflected on the hymns we sang at the service, “For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies,” and, “… he will raise you up on eagles’ wings, Bear you on the breath of dawn…”

Suggested Scripture: Psalm 17:6-8, Isaiah 40:28-31

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

Dan Needles is the author of “Wingfield Farm” stage plays. His column is a regular feature in Country Guide

By now you’ve probably read the news of our Thanksgiving weekend in Petunia Valley. Either that or you saw the YouTube video that Ronnie Garbutt posted. There was some muttering that instead of running a video camera he should have been doing something useful, but there you go.

I think the problem really started with wild turkey season landing right on top of the holiday for the first time. Generally they hunt turkeys in the spring and it doesn’t affect anybody. But this year they opened a hunt for tom turkeys the week before Thanksgiving, the weather was beautiful and before you could say Pumpkin Pie, a dozen skinny turkeys were sitting in the fridge down at the fire station.

The other factor is the amount of spare time the guys at the department have on their hands. Since they switched from a volunteer force to a full-time paid staff they’ve built quite a little empire down there. They renovated the fire station and put in a pool table and an eight-man sauna and hot tub. With pensions and benefits and new equipment, the carbon footprint for fighting fires jumped about a hundredfold and the ratepayers started yowling about the cost. The department only gets an average of two genuine fire calls a year up here and the rest of the time they’re running oxygen cylinders to old guys at the Legion with a 40-foot ladder truck.

Sparky Wilson, the fire chief decided the crew needed to be more publicly visible so he sent them door to door inspecting for smoke alarms and handing out tickets to violators.

Sparky never had much of a gift for public relations. He was completely taken aback when the Port Petunia Gleaner called for his head on a platter. But young Ronnie Garbutt, the chief assistant to the assistant chief, must have done a traineeship with a Hollywood agent after he graduated Fire College. Ronnie organized a big fundraiser to cover the cost of free smoke alarms and hand them out at a turkey barbecue at the firehouse over the Thanksgiving weekend.

Suddenly all was peace and light and goodwill. It was like the night they agreed on a debt ceiling deal in Congress.

Now if you haven’t tried it, frying a turkey isn’t the nutritional nightmare you might suppose it to be. The Canada Food Guide claims that a nine-ounce serving of roasted turkey delivers 27 grams of saturated fat onto your fork, and deep-frying adds only another four grams. And I am told it is just about the only way to make a wild turkey edible.

But fried turkey still presents a serious health risk. My own kit came with a 25-page instruction booklet and 19 of those pages were taken up with safety warnings. When I read that a 30-quart pot of vegetable oil cooked to 400 F has the same properties as a flame-thrower, I stashed the kit out of sight in the chicken house feedroom and it’s been there ever since.

But not the firefighters. They went ahead with their fundraiser and set up five turkey fryer kits in the parking lot in front of the fire station. There were games for the kids and the ladies made pies and Sparky was a really good sport about the dunk ‘em tank. But then it clouded over and dropped one of those cold sun showers that are so common in the Valley this time of year. Now, Page 12 of the instruction booklet is very explicit about the danger of combining hot oil and cold water. Even the firefighters understood this and they dashed to get the pots of oil under cover. But Sparky’s pants, sodden from the dunk ‘em tank, were dragging around his ankles. He missed his footing and we all watched in a kind of slow-motion Sam Pekinpah state of horror as the pot of oil went sluicing under the last propane burner.

And you know the rest. They did manage to haul the hot tub out of the building after they had drained it with buckets, but the sauna, the pool table and two fire trucks were lost in the inferno. No word from the provincial fire office investigation. That doesn’t come out for at least five years but the Gleaner says there is general agreement that the response time for this incident was actually pretty good.
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