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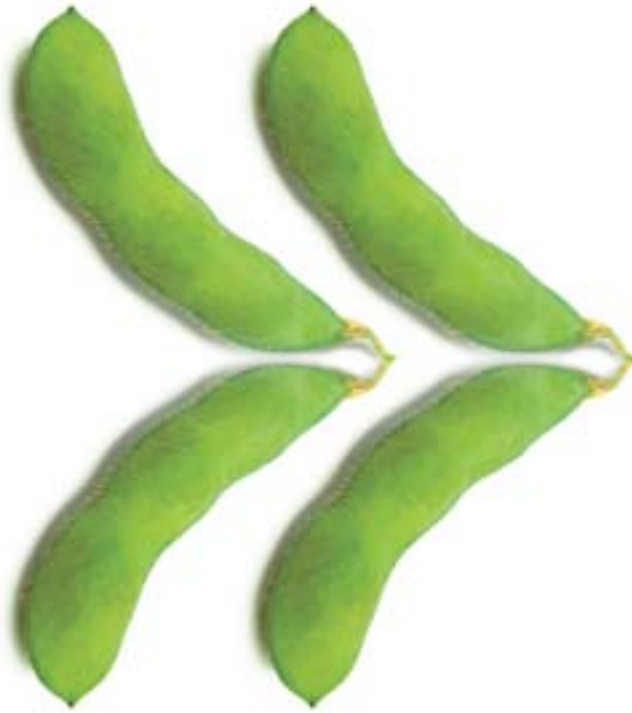
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SEE CENTRE





Tom Button is editor of COUNTRY GUIDE magazine

Something about 2015

All of us can probably already list the events in 2015 that are NOT going to reshape our farms or make us look back a few years from now with pride that we were here at the time.

Topping that list of no-shows is the federal election, scheduled for this fall.

From east to west and back again, our storage, transportation and sales infrastructure is crumbling. At the very least, it is falling further behind the world standard that our competitors are aiming for.

Similarly, our processing sector is ill matched to our farms and to our market opportunities, especially in livestock but also in oilseeds, grains and horticulture.

The truth is that our farms are much healthier than the business environment they are operating in. Agriculture needs investment, both for its own good and for the good of the country.

But this is not what the election will be about, in part because the parties believe there are sexier vote-getters, and even more because policy debate is so stifled.

I'm cynical enough to believe that this is partly by design. Farmers used to have healthy conversations with senior and mid-level federal bureaucrats. Those conversations helped both ways, by helping farmers imagine new policy options, and by helping the bureaucrats find areas badly in need of research and exploration.

Under the federal Tories, the days of such conversations are long gone. Admittedly, it must make it a lot more com-

fortable to the federal ag minister, but it certainly doesn't serve agriculture well.

Nor do we expect any great change in the financial realities that our farms face. We may be proved wrong, but at this point it seems unlikely that any increases in interest rates will be excessive, or that land prices will suddenly either rise or fall so sharply as to reset farm outlooks.

Commodity prices are less predictable, of course, but there seems little reason to doubt that 2015 will be a treading-water sort of year, at least in grains and oilseeds.

But if there is no great change in the political, economic or financial forces that act on agriculture, does that mean that agriculture will have its own treading-water year, with little evolution?

On the contrary, my own sense is that the pace of evolution among Canada's farms is intense, but that it is operating just below the surface.

Almost everyone believes that agriculture in 10 years will look very different than agriculture today, if only because so many farmers will have reached an age when they need to let go of the reins.

It's hard to know exactly what that agriculture will look like, but it is getting easier to know who will be part of it. They'll be the ones who, throughout 2015, make shrewd decisions to improve their skills as business managers. It's going to make all the difference. Are we getting it right? Let me know at tom.button@fbcpublishing.com.

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Spring seems to come faster every year, which is all right on the farm because speed is also the focus of today's newest planter designs. Getting the job done faster, and with greater precision and improved seed singulation are the hallmarks of this year's newest models, which are embracing enhanced electronics and some incredibly innovative high-speed designs. But one thing hasn't changed. It's still tough to make the best choice for your farm, so be prepared to spend some serious time studying the numbers and evaluating their fit for your operation.

CASE IH EARLY RISER 1255 →

By themselves, the Early Riser series planters from Case IH may not seem that new, but the company's new partnership with Precision Planting creates a new level of customized planting precision. Gone are the days when every grower had to accept the same package from the assembly line. Now, there's the option of customizing an Early Riser 1255 with Precision Planting's components, including hydraulic down pressure, all ordered direct at the factory. The company cites its industry-leading row unit and reduced sidewall compaction capability together with Precision Planting's two-stage closing system, saying it believes the combination will provide unbeatable performance in the field.

www.caseih.com



← KINZE 4900 SERIES (W/ RAVEN INDUSTRIES)

Each year, Kinze offers something new on its 4900 Series row-crop planter, and this year is no different. Late in 2014, Kinze announced a new partnership with Raven Industries and the introduction of a stand-alone monitor to eliminate the reliance on ISOBUS and other software. Simplicity makes the Kinze 4900 that much better, with easier setup and increased monitor reliability. The large colour touch-screen monitor is designed to access all planter functions, and it has a customizable screen layout, so the operator can not only keep an eye on everything that's going on but also focus in on specific aspects of the planter's performance. One special note: at press time, the availability of monitor on this unit is yet to be confirmed. It's suggested that you check with your local dealer for more details.

www.kinze.com



JOHN DEERE EXACTEMERGE →

The concept of high-speed planting is certainly nothing new. Other manufacturers have successfully introduced planters that have significantly increased speeds in the field. What's new about John Deere's ExactEmerge technology is that it features more precision, thanks to its new rigid bowl-shaped meter and a brush-type doubles eliminator. The seed tubes have been replaced by a revolutionary brush belt, for a smooth yet crisp seed hand-off. Not only is it capable of handling speeds up to 16 km/h (10 m.p.h.), the ExactEmerge is billed as having the ability to deal with all seed shapes and sizes, with 99 per cent singulation, even on land with up to 15 degrees of slope. The brush belt also allows the meter to turn at the right speed, no matter what the plant populations. Matching ground speed to the row unit is designed to result in exact placement with little or no bounce.

www.deere.ca



P.Ag.

THE ONTARIO AGROLOGIST

A conversation with Sam Zahnd, P.Ag., CPA, CGA and Manager of Business Development for Agricultural Credit Corporation (ACC) based in Guelph.

Q: Why is your P.Ag. accreditation important to you?

Sam: In my area of work, a fairly high level of credibility is necessary — that is, to be recognized as a professional within the agricultural industry. When I'm talking with individual producers and speaking to agricultural groups, that accreditation or designation gives me a level of credibility just as soon as I'm introduced, or when I present my business card. That's why I, initially, wanted to be a Professional Agrologist.

From a qualifications standpoint, in what I've gained personally and professionally, the OIA allows me access to knowledge about the Ag industry through the Institute's greatest resource asset — its member professionals who, as individuals, have a specialized knowledge and are working in areas of this industry where I have little or no in-depth experience. These individuals have an opinion that I feel, as a peer, can be trusted. That's a tangible knowledge base, so it's a real plus to have those contacts through my OIA affiliation.

Q: What advice would you offer a person who is new to the ag industry?

Sam: I can only share my own career experience. I was in agriculture for 12 years, and then left the ag industry for about five years to work in the manufacturing sector. A little over two years ago I returned to agribusiness and

a lot had changed. So I had to establish a network of resources.

Building a knowledge resource network is about the most important thing a professional can do in any sector and agriculture is no different. The agricultural and agribusiness industry is huge. It's a big industry, but in many ways it's also small...

It's big in terms of there being 212,000 producers in Canada, serviced by hundreds of companies and thousands of professionals — all the way from research companies to government and everything in between. So, on one hand it's huge. But on a day-to-day basis it tends to be small because you're always working at the individual level, and each person has their own problems and concerns that need to be addressed. At its core, I believe agriculture continues to be community oriented, which means it's still family based in many ways. There's that close-knit aspect. Yes, it's certainly big business, but can be a different kind of business than many others.

Q: Do you think that those in the ag industry generally share a common goal?

Sam: Yes, and that common goal is to produce a safe and reliable product — for most people in the ag industry that product is food for the consumer — in a sustainable way. Because it is so important, food production must be



sustained, and in a profitable way — which is key to long-term sustainability. I think everyone involved understands that's what we're here to do. I know that outside of the agricultural industry you rarely find that commonality of purpose. It's what makes the agricultural industry unique.

And as professionals we're here to make agriculture relevant. We're here to make our services reliable for producers. But in the end, we have to have a reliable, safe product for consumers. And all of that fits the Ontario Institute of Agrology's mandate perfectly.

The Ontario Institute of Agrologists is based in Guelph. OIA represents a membership of nearly 500 Professional (P.Ag.) and Technical (T.Ag.) Agrologists across Ontario. For a current listing of OIA members, OIA events and information, our website is shown below...



Strategy: The foundation

"If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there."

By Larry Martin

Many businesses, in farming and elsewhere, have no formal plan. Some are happy with the result, many are not. But many discover that developing a strategic plan and carefully implementing it has two effects. First is that it helps identify the desired outcome (where you're going, your vision for the future). Second, it identifies the path required to achieve your vision.

Developing strategy is fundamental to success. We start with strategy in our CTEAM and CFAME courses, and it is the foundation for this new series of columns we are introducing.

Strategy is a badly misused word. We hear: Strategy is the goal — "be No. 1"; strategy is intention — "be low cost"; strategy is action — "we are most efficient."

Strategy is none and all of the above. It is comprehensive. Harvard strategy guru Michael Porter defines strategy as "the set of integrated choices that define how you will achieve superior performance in the face of competition."

Strategy is how you position your organization to achieve its goals, and it is the actions taken to achieve the positioning.

Some will say this is high-falutin' hoovey, maybe relevant to non-farm businesses, but not for farms — what's to decide about a farm's strategy? Our experience is there is a lot. We see farms that prosper by being extremely low-cost commodity producers and financial managers. Others combine cost control with producing products that earn premium prices because of traits or services. Still others focus on adding value.

After they adopt a written plan with clear goals, actions and accountabilities, many farmers find it transformational.

STRATEGY AND PLANNING

Joan Magretta, author of *UNDERSTANDING MICHAEL PORTER*, provides a process to define strategy and undertake planning:

STEP 1: Examine Your External Environment. Businesses succeed by providing value to customers. Understanding your external environment, especially who might be your customers and what product traits or services they need and will pay for is the starting point. It also includes understanding your competitors and what they do or don't do well.

STEP 2: Define Your Value Proposition. Your value proposition defines the end-users to whom you will sell. It also defines which products, product characteristics and/or services you will bundle in your sales, and the relative price you will charge. This may be as straightforward: "We will sell to any elevator at the highest possible price." Or it may be more complex, such as producing specific feed ingredients for specific livestock operations at a premium over the average cash price, or contracting with a maltster to deliver at a premium.

STEP 3: Examine Your Internal Environment. This step links your internal operations to your customers. You examine your "internal supply chain" to understand your strengths and weaknesses against your value proposition. Delivering consistently on your value proposition at the best cost requires knowing what you do well, and what needs to improve.

STEP 4: Identify Your Mission and Strategic Intent. Mission defines what you need to accomplish over the next two to five years to fulfil your value proposition profitably. It describes the changes

that you will make to build on current strengths and overcome weaknesses. It is concrete and measurable: how else will you know if your mission is accomplished? Strategic intents then divide mission into three or four manageable pieces. For most farms, they often address improved human resource management, better financial management, new ventures, and expanded or improved operations. They are unique to each farm.

STEP 5: Articulate Your Vision. This step can be taken at any point, but is best clarified after examining the external and internal environments. Most owners have clarity about what contribution they want their business to make in the long term, but it should be clear enough to judge whether the shorter-term elements of strategy identified here are consistent with the long-term goal.

STEP 6: Develop Operational Plan. In this step, the conceptual meets the operational, identifying exactly how each of the strategic intents from Step 4 will be implemented. It defines actions that need to be taken, who is responsible and accountable, timelines, resources required, and measures of success in achieving the desired outcome. This component also is used to judge progress as the plan is implemented.

Strategic planning goes from the general to the specific. Our experience tells us this approach is equally good for large organizations and for individual farm operations. **CG**

Larry Martin is a principal of Agri-Food Management Excellence (AME), which runs national farm and agri-food training programs, including CTEAM for farmers and CFAME for the agri-food business sector. www.agrifoodtraining.com

This is thriving?

Maybe there's something we can learn from a media darling after all

By Maggie Van Camp, Associate Editor

THRIVE

By Arianna Huffington

Crown Publishing Group, \$31.00

In her new how-to on how to succeed, and how to know you are succeeding, Arianna Huffington emerges at her ironic best, calling one chapter "Sleep your way to the top."

The irony isn't really a surprise, but perhaps the message is (or, at least, the growing amount of science behind the message). Sometimes it's the soft stuff — the stuff that those of us on the farm can be quick to dismiss as "emotional" — that is essential for helping us make the next leap on our drive to thrive.

I guess the subhead should have clued me in: *The Third Metric to Redefining Success and Creating a Life of Well-being, Wisdom and Wonder*.

Say what?

Huffington was selected by *TIME* magazine as one of the 100 most influential people in the world and has written 14 books. Did I mention she sold *HUFFINGTON POST* to AOL a couple of years ago for \$315 million?

But it hasn't all been bliss. The best part of this book is the introduction, where she describes her collapse from exhaustion and lack of sleep. Dramatically, she lies on the floor of her home office in a pool of blood from having hit her head on the way down. It was Huffington's low point when she started asking herself whether this was really the success she had been looking for.

Much of the book is personal memoir, including talking of her mother and of spiritualism, so you might want to open up the concaves and blow out some of the chapters. But there are also chapters you will want to slow down and reread, with their focus on how large companies are trying to help their employees stay healthy and happy in order to improve profits and productivity. Here are some key points that resonated with me, even the cynical, practical farmer part of me.

It starts with this idea of sleeping your way to the top, and Huffington talks persuasively about medical studies linking poor sleep to high stress and an increased risk of heart disease and diabetes. Supposedly, about a third of people in the U.S. and U.K. are not getting enough sleep, and to remedy this, the Huffington Post offices added napping rooms.

To counter the chronic physical inactivity of her computer-driven world, Huffington also has walking meetings with her staff, and some of her offices provide yoga classes. Walking stimulates thoughts and creativity by changing your immediate environment and getting the blood flowing. Insights and discovery are also more likely when you're moving, she says. It makes me wonder if going up and down a 200-foot silo does the same thing?

Huffington charges on, however, offering even more tips that might work for small business.

Huffington also points to a study that says the average smartphone user checks his or her device every 6.5 minutes. That's an incredible 150 times a day.

It's also enough distraction to drive anyone into exhaustion, even a political web-blogger like Huffington. She says this overuse has led to chronic multi-tasking, which has been shown many times to be ineffectual and potentially dangerous. More people are getting hit as they cross the street because they are reading their smartphones. It seems we don't know how to unplug.

In the appendices, Huffington lists dozens of websites and apps to help the addicted turn off their phones, and help with social media anxiety disorder too. Block sites, control browsers, preset use times, set goals, and run automatic time outs. Even set up physical barriers so you can't peek when you aren't supposed to.

She calls the cramming of more work and stuff into the set hours of the day a "time famine." (I prefer to describe myself as time-optimistic.) On average



we're lucky to have 30,000 days to play the game of life. According to Huffington, North Americans overbook most days and don't leave enough time to enjoy the rewards of hard work. Moreover, the time we do have away from work is now being eaten up in front of glowing boxes, and being continually distracted by our smartphones.

She also says volunteerism and giving are ways to overcome depression. I'm thinking about asking her to see if she'll be available to teach a 4-H club, coach a hockey team, run the church board and help put on our local fair. Maybe that's why so many rural people are so happy? They volunteer and give to their communities all the time, but Huffington fails to mention that over-volunteering can contribute to burnout, especially while raising a family, running a business, keeping a large property and often working off-farm.

Research proves getting a good night's sleep, turning off the Internet, giving to others, slowing down to enjoy the moment, exposing yourself to new things and places, and putting the brakes on multi-tasking can all make us more successful, especially if we add some physical exercise too. According to *THRIVE*, many of us just don't do those basic things and it's resulting in poorer work performance.

Help someone in your community, wonder at the beauty of the sunrise, turn your cell phones off during meals and vacations, take a nap or turn off the TV and go to bed earlier. Did we need a rich Internet blogger to tell us that? Apparently the answer is yes. **CG**

ORGANIC BY CHOICE, SORT OF

If you think you've got what it takes to thrive at direct-to-consumer farming, maybe you better talk to Harry Stoddart first

By Steven Biggs, CG Contributing Editor

“We’re really selling the relationship, and the story of us,” says Harry Stoddart as he describes the markings on his White Park-cross cattle. The rare White crossbreed, he explains, is part of his story.

It’s because he can tell a story that I’m at Stoddart’s farm. His book, *REAL DIRT: AN EX-INDUSTRIAL FARMER’S GUIDE TO SUSTAINABLE EATING*, is the story of his farming experience, along with his thoughts on sustainable farming and eating. I want to meet the storyteller.

He gave a copy of his book to well-known American writer Michael Pollan (once referred to in a *NEW YORK TIMES* book review as a liberal foodie intellectual). Pollan’s response: “It’ll piss everybody off, I’m sure, but I found it very persuasive on many points.”

I wondered if he might also turn off some consumers by questioning the organic movement’s distinction between natural and synthetic pesticides so bluntly, or by saying things such as, “A good portion of the discussion around genetic modification (GM) is guided by misinformed bullshit.”

Yet a Toronto foodie assures me, “He’s our Joel Salatin,” referring to the American farmer who is well known in food circles for his pasture-raised livestock. It’s a compliment that surprises me, considering that Stoddart doesn’t candy-coat his views.

When I see Stoddart on YouTube — and when I meet him in person — he seems low key. He isn’t in-your-face preachy, and his explanation of sustainable farming from a farmer’s perspective weaves his views of the food system into his own story of farming, failure, growth, change, and success. He puts a human face on the issues.



WHOLE HOG

Stoddart is a sixth-generation farmer. He and his wife Silvia bought his parents’ machinery and livestock in 1995, and then the farm in 1996. Their aggressive plan was to double the sow herd on the confinement farrow-to-finish hog farm. But in less than a year, Stoddart found himself renegotiating financing with the bank after an outbreak of porcine respiratory and reproductive syndrome (PRRS).

“We got to count how many piglets would have been born, but instead of watching them grow, we shovelled up the dead bodies,” he writes.

Near bankruptcy, they kept the farm, but exited the hog business. Stoddart started commuting to a job in Toronto. “Being an agricultural economist, I could read financial statements about as well as most bankers. I had crunched the numbers in my head every way I could think of and had come to the inescapable conclusion that we would be better off if we shut down the hog operation and I got a job,” he says in the book.

He describes the shame he felt — and how he resigned from the local pork producers’ association



in writing because he couldn't face walking into a meeting in person.

But despite the shame and the stress, he considers the outcome lucky. Just as they were getting out of hogs, prices plummeted. Stoddart says the PRRS outbreak likely saved them from bankruptcy.

ORGANIC WITHOUT KUMBAYA

Stoddart credits a neighbour with explaining the economics of organic production to him, and, in 1998, he grew his first certified organic crop. He was lucky to have rented 100 acres he could certify immediately.

The profit from the rented land and his off-farm salary underwrote the cost of converting the rest of the land to organic. "Most of us end up investing many dollars per acre to make the switch (to organic production) — without our mortgage and equipment payments changing. Our family's food bill doesn't change either," he says.

"It's getting from year zero to year five that is the challenge," Stoddart says, comparing it to a salaried worker who gives up salary to go back to school for a new profession that might eventually pay more.

He switched to organic farming because he needed to make big changes for the farm to survive. "The external force that drove me to switch was near bankruptcy," he says. It was a business decision. "The switch to organic wasn't some magical event in our lives where we all sat around, held hands, and sang Kumbaya.

"I endured ridicule (most of it behind my back) when I switched to organic methods," he writes. He also had some spectacular failures, although some fields, which probably looked like failures, actually earned more per acre than a conventional crop.

With an office job and commuting to Toronto, he was trying to balance farm and work. "I'd come home after a full day at the office and an hour commute, and work until conditions wouldn't allow it or I was too sleepy to continue," he recounts in the book. One year he booked vacation time in May so he could seed crops, but it rained the whole time.

He and his partner grew the organic cash-cropping business to 2,000 certified organic acres. But

You don't have to believe everything you hear about organic, Stoddart says. But to succeed, you have to respect your customers.

Continued on page 12

The plus side of the new farm is that Stoddart has largely freed his farm from commodity markets. But it takes commitment.



Continued from page 11

then something happened that concerned him. While sourcing additional organic flax to sell, he found he could buy fully cleaned organic flax from China — delivered to his farm — for less than Ontario flax straight off the combine.

Stoddart was concerned because organic grain now looked like a conventional agricultural commodity — and that was the business model he had just left behind.

GOING COMMODITY FREE

Today, the Stoddarts farm 560 certified-organic acres, and the focus now is on grass-fed and pastured livestock: beef, lamb, pork, and chicken. No more cash crops. “We decided we needed a direct-to-consumer business in which our customers valued what we were doing and would not sell us down the river for a few dollars a tonne,” he writes.

Making a change wasn’t as difficult this time. It took five years for them to work out their current community-supported agriculture (CSA) meat-share program in which consumers purchase a share of the meat “harvest.” This direct-to-consumer model, he feels, is economically sustainable.

As Stoddart starts telling me about the sheep, he sees an animal down and puts our conversation on hold while he hustles over to see how bad things are. Luckily this sheep is just having trouble getting off its back. He helps it upright, and we keep talking as it rejoins the flock. These sheep, he explains, have been selected by Silvia for the fleece, which Silvia dyes and sells directly through their wool-share program. Subscribers get one skein of the hand-dyed yarns every other month.

The White Park cattle need to be more than a nice story. Stoddart says that the meat has to be very good, i.e. good enough to fetch a higher price. Rare breeds and grass feeding, he explains, add costs.

ON SELLING

It takes Stoddart about 90 minutes to get into Toronto, so travel time was a problem when they were going into the city twice weekly for markets and restaurants. “It put a big ding in our lifestyle,” he says as he talks about missed 4-H meetings with the kids.

Stoddart no longer sells to restaurants, which, with menus that continually change, tend to be less reliable customers. He prefers selling straight to consumers, who, individually, are not as big a portion of what he is selling, giving a more diverse base. Now, they go to Toronto twice a month to deliver to CSA customers. “It’s those long-term customers who you can count on,” he says.

He’s not nostalgic. “I’m quite happy never to go to market,” says Stoddart. His advice to farmers not sure how good they might be at hobnobbing: “You’ve just got to go do it. It’s a skill that can be learned like anything else.”

When selling directly to consumers he’s found it’s important to realize that what’s obvious to farmers might not be obvious to consumers. He’s had market customers ask for corn in June. He even had a customer ask if a lamb had to die for the lambskins he was selling.

But you also have to respect your customers, and to understand that their lack of knowledge isn’t their fault. “If you have a dim view of them,” Stoddart warns, “that comes through in conversation.”

ON CONTINUING TO CHANGE

The Stoddarts grew five acres of vegetables for a couple of years. “I’d probably skip the market garden,” he says, explaining that it was very labour intensive and they were a couple of weeks behind growers southwest of Toronto. The other thing he now knows is that he’s not so great at running a crew. “We found out I didn’t like managing people,” he says, talking about the summer they had six people working on the farm.

He believes in the importance of taking the time to think about what you want in life outside of farming, because when farming, business and life become so entangled, it’s easy to lose sight of the goals for each. “Where we are today is the accumulation of what we’ve learned about where we want to be for lifestyle, and what we’re good at,” he says.

He has sold about 1,000 books, a respectable number for a self-published volume. A number of farmers in his area bought the book. “I got fairly good feedback from most of them,” he says.

In the book he advises, “Choosing sustainable agriculture involves more than choosing a particular brand or label at your local supermarket. It involves gaining an understanding of the myriad dimensions of sustainability in agriculture.” His stories put a human face on these myriad dimensions. Even if they piss everybody off.

It’s a story of farming, failure, growth, and change. The change is easier for him now. “The first time I did it, it wasn’t by choice,” he remembers with a chuckle. “It’s easy to cross the bridge when it’s burning behind you.” **CG**



IFAO CONFERENCE 2015

February 24 and 25, 2015 Lamplighter Inn, London

Here's a conference with a difference. More opportunities for direct contact with speakers in breakout sessions and opportunities to share with Ontario's most progressive farmers at a banquet followed by a host bar and networking session. This is a conference that sends you home with more than general concepts and novel ideas. You will have the opportunity to ask "how will this work within my operation" and start the process of fleshing out how these new concepts could be implemented on your farm.



"Dirt: The Erosion of Civilization" author, David Montgomery

Dr. Montgomery believes soil loss and degradation is one of the most serious environmental crises facing the human race. "Dirt" traces the use and abuse of soil historically as civilizations have risen, prospered and ploughed through their fertile soils. David sees the rise of organic and no-till farming as a hope for a new agricultural revolution that might help us avoid the fate of previous civilizations.



The Value of Diverse Rotations For a Resilient Cropping System Dwayne Beck, Director of the Dakota Lakes Research Farm

Beck has spent 30 years developing successful no till ecosystems by diversifying crop rotations with cover crops cocktails to minimize weed, disease, and insect problems, sequester nitrogen, speed residue decomposition, create habitat for beneficial predators, increase organic matter and provide feed for livestock. Diverse rotations, input cycling and no-till are used to create a resilient, profitable system.



What Can We Learn From Organic Farmers? Jeff Moyer, Rodale Institute Farm Director

Cover crops and new farm equipment have enabled organic farmers to move away from tillage towards complete no-till strategies. Organic cover crop management strategies are now spilling over into conventional farms where together with long term diverse cropping systems, they improve soil biology, lower pest and disease stresses and stabilize the long term economics of the farm.



Spring Strip-Till: Transitioning From Fall to Spring Jeff Reints, Veteran Strip-Tiller from Shell Rock, Iowa

Jeff will share his experiences with strip-till over the past 20 years including equipment evolution and targeted fertility. His operation has evolved from pure no-till, to zone-till, then to fall shank strip till rigs and finally to spring strip till. Always with the goal of conservation and placing fertility where plants will benefit the most.

Blake Vince – *Global Perspective on Conservation Tillage, Water Quality and Diversity*
Brenda Robinson – *The International Challenge For Family Farms: Differences Are Not Difficulties*
The Hour of Innovation – Four Presentations on Farm Driven Innovative Solutions

For details or to register go to our website at www.ifao.com



THRIVE 2015

Hitting any of these 10 targets can make 2015 a year to remember. So get inspired. Pick goals that fit your farm and your vision. The whole year is waiting

By Maggie Van Camp, CG Associate Editor

A winter wheat leaf pokes through the snow. In the frozen white, that hardy leaf means hope and even optimism. It is a promise that winter will turn to spring, and that spring will make way for summer, and that then will come the harvest.

The plant thrives in spite of, and because of, weather that is too tough for other plants to take.

It's a great symbol of the farmer.

Nor did that wheat plant get there on its own. It took planning, skills, time and equipment, topped up with a good dose of science and the latest technology, all because the farmer had two amazing capabilities — the ability to dream, and the ability to make it happen.

Thriving means more than being profitable. The MERRIAM-WEBSTER dictionary defines thriving as growing vigorously or gaining in wealth or possessions, and to progress toward or realize a goal despite or because of circumstances.

On the farm, that's a definition of success. All the dictionary would need to add is that although you sometimes can't choose your circumstances, you can choose how you react to them.

Today, building a thriving farm requires more than long hours and hard numbers. Successful farm businesses need smart, healthy, happy farmers. Think of it as building strength from the inside out.

So with the help of Len Davies of Davies Legacy Planning Group in southwestern Ontario, farm family coach Elaine Froese, of Boissevain, Man., and a whole lot of others, COUNTRY GUIDE identified 10 traits that will help you and your farm thrive in 2015.

COUNTRY GUIDE's 10 ways to thrive include some number crunching and planning, but they also include ideas for personal development and wellness. This list is about creating positive habits, and managing numbers and people toward improvement.

So take a deep breath. Ask yourself, which goals are best aligned with where you want to go. Then check out our followup articles, because we took the whole process a step further and asked our writers to really dig into what this advice will mean for your farms. In other words, how can you turn the dream into an actionable strategy?

Then plunge into 2015 with resilience and intelligence.

Thrive in your life's work.

1

LEARN SOMETHING NEW

Davies and Froese are big promoters of continual learning. Over the years, they've taught thousands of farmers about on-farm financial and family business issues at conferences, and through webinars, articles and online videos.

Froese consumes books like other people drink their coffee, insatiably with big gulps and a smile on her face. Most of her articles have recommended reading lists attached on the end.

When Davies helps create a business plan, he makes his clients add some goals for personal development for the year. Going further, he gets his clients to write down at least one way they're going to improve their own skill set. "By writing it down, there's a bigger chance of it happening," says Davies.

It's all about proactively deciding the focus of your learning. Then systematically blend learning opportunities with practising what you've learned at home or on your farm.

Consciously moving through a series of selected learning activities in order to meet specific goals will help you master skills. Besides, you'll find that by layering your skills from various sources over time, you will retain more than sporadically watching random webinars or attending a blitz of random workshops.

This is especially important for learning leadership, supervisory, interpersonal and problem-solving skills. Successful learning on these topics usually requires time for reflection and may involve changing your behaviour, which takes thought and commitment.

3

GET AWAY FROM THE FARM

Whether it's a weekend at a relative's or a week at an all-inclusive, a little break can make all the difference, says Elaine Froese.

Taking time for a break can be difficult, but it isn't impossible and the payoffs can be huge. Time management is about priorities, not time. It doesn't have to be costly or involve hopping on a plane to some sunshine.

If the budget allows, book a nice hotel for your family or your partners and turn it into a team-building or strategic-planning exercise.

Froese suggests you stretch yourself by doing something you've never done before or going to a new place. It seems that transplanting yourself, even for a little while, stimulates your brain. Neuroscientist Greg Berns summarizes in his book *ICONOCLASTS* that insight and discovery are more accessible to us when we seek out environments that we haven't had experience with.

Maybe it's time to check out a farmers' market in a nearby city, or take in a local park you've never been to, or try a new sport or restaurant. Or it can be as simple as choosing to take a course that you may have to travel to get to instead of just going to the local AGM or crop production meeting. Try selecting a meeting that is taught by people you don't ordinarily see, or hear a new perspective on an unfamiliar topic. It might be full of new insights and ideas. Potentially, it may even change how you think about your farm, friends and family.

2

**REVIEW 2014:
BEYOND THE P&L**

Davies calls it a post-mortem. Review your last year. As a habit, he does this with many of his successful clients and usually it involves the whole business plan and then drilling down into the year's financial statements. "You cannot manage what you cannot measure," says Davies. "Completing your plan is great, but farmers should measure their progress from one period to the next."

It's not as morbid as it sounds and in fact, can be very affirming. Davies starts by looking at the positives. "Seeing all that you've done — and done well — helps you get motivated to really look at the 20 per cent that didn't go so well, things that can be improved on," he says.

Then he goes through the financial statements to identify trends in previous years' statements. That's when the red flags are raised. By using accrual accounting you'll have a clearer picture of what's going on. Having a qualified third party involved in the process tends to keep goals and explanations honest and realistic.

Davies brings along a big-screen laptop or a projector to use while filling in the blanks for financial analysis, and he suggests partners, farming children and spouses join this meeting. He wants his clients to understand how these ratios are calculated, instead of just outsourcing it. When everyone understands the plan, it helps stop procrastination. He has also found sharing financial statements and plans with your accountant and lender solidifies the commitment to action.

The process is like looking for leaks in gas lines by first seeing if you used more diesel. Then you figure out where it's leaking, followed by learning why it happened so you can fix it.

Once problems are identified, changes can be made to improve. Something should be learned from each failure, and a new process implemented quickly, using worst-case scenarios for the projections.

Comprehensive, usable data enables you to lead rather than be forced to make reactionary decisions.

At this post-mortem session, Davies also insists that farmers write down three or four specific things that should be done to meet their goals. Then they need to assign a person to each action, and back it up with a deadline. "Farmers tend to start with production goals and then link them to financial goals," says Davies.

Continued on page 16

4

PLAN A NEW STRATEGY

How long has it been since you thought about your farm's overall strategy? Many businesses do this annually, and this year's big changes in prices mean it's a great time to do this on the farm too. "Planning should be a habit," says Davies. "There's always something to improve."

Most farmers tackle the feasibility of their plans only if they are making big purchases or if it's demanded by the banks, says Davies. Doing it annually instead will take the emotions out of the planning process and help you with your decision-making.

If you plan to expand, take some time ahead to think about the implications. Does it change how you will market? How much human resources are you going to need to manage the expansion? How does it affect your farm's cash flow this year and into the future? How efficiently are you using assets like machinery? "Cash flow these changes," says Davies.

But be careful to ensure your plan isn't a reaction to this year's challenges or last year's successes. Most people just look back or default to what they know to create their strategic plan. A better question to ask yourself might be, where could you go off track next year? Take note if market demographics are changing, or if new technology is entering the industry, or if new legislation is threatened. Then consider what those changes could mean to your business and how you will accommodate or take advantage of them. Now that's strategic.

Understanding your current position and doing projections can take the fear out of change and debt. It's not all about commodity prices or interest rates. Moreover, you do not want to aggressively pay down debt at the expense of expansion. "Good debt is good," says Davies.

If you consider purchases ahead of time as part of your strategy, you are more likely to be realistic, Davies says. "If a piece of land comes up for sale next door and the question is should I buy that farm, often we tend to not be realistic enough in our number crunching."

You can have buckets of great ideas but they won't come to fruition if there's no action plan.

In many other businesses, re-evaluating the business plan is an annual job. It should be on the farm too.



5

REVIEW YOUR MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS

If your farm doesn't have mission and vision statements written down, do it when there's a lull in the production cycle. If your farm already has these statements, take a moment to read them. Do they still talk to you? Do they make you more focused?

Mission statements capture what you do and why you farm. Vision statements set out what your business aspires to become. They are the big picture of where you are going.

When making or redoing a mission and vision statement, Davies gathers everyone who's involved in the farm and asks each to write down their goals and prioritize them from high to low. Next he takes the top five and shares them with the group. He is amazed by how often they align.

The process of writing vision and mission statements is worthwhile as it opens up thinking and communication. Your team needs to reach consensus about goals and what the farm is striving to be in the future.

Think of it like stating what folks at your funeral will talk about when discussing why you were successful. Did you adopt technology, treat employees well, or take care of the environment? It might even talk about how much you loved your family, or produced a fantastic product or consistently improved yields. It'll likely make you feel good, and remind you of how far you've come and how great it will be to get where you are headed.

6

UPDATE YOUR MARKETING PLAN: PRE-PRICE 1/3

2015 is going to be different — maybe much different — than the last seven years. In this new reality, planning your marketing can be the difference between surviving, thriving and keeping the farm alive.

Market analyst Errol Anderson on page 22 says it's time to sit down and take stock. Start by writing out your total production, grades and quality, and then revisit the cost-of-production estimates you did at the start of the season. Now you are ready to watch for market opportunities and changes, so you can modify your marketing plan as needed. Importantly, it will also help you keep emotions out of your marketing.

One of the biggest errors farmers make is playing the game of market outlook and then trying to be "right" on the market. By knowing a realistic cost of production, and following market trends, you can be prepared to jump on profit opportunities.

Knowing ahead what your monthly cash flow needs are going to look like will help you meet cash obligations and not oversell. Also, add in your storage costs. Then consider your level of risk tolerance, and the balance sheet's ability to withstand a setback, like having to buy out a contract the farm can't fill. Anderson suggests considering some paper sales instead of storage, and he says paper can help motivate you to pay attention to the markets. But mostly he says we need discipline, so write down your marketing plan and be prepared to sell incrementally at a profit, instead of waiting for spikes like we've enjoyed over the last few years.



7

GIVE THANKS

Being grateful is a powerful attitude for family and business, says Froese. It's so powerful and so simple, yet so few people do it.

Like other ways to thrive, to fully enjoy the benefits of gratitude, it needs to become a habit. In researching her article on page 18, Helen Lammers-Helps found thankfulness was most effective if it was done regularly, at least once a week.

The article is full of ways to fit gratefulness into your days, with concrete recommendations from writing letters and doing the Facebook gratitude challenge, to saying five things you are thankful for every night before bed. It doesn't have to take a lot of time or effort, but it does have to be sincere.

The challenge, says Froese, is to make being grateful a part of your workplace culture, which on most Canadian farms means making it a part of family culture.

For families, it's sometimes more difficult to express gratitude. Family business adviser John Fast says a lack of appreciation is the biggest problem on family farms. Most people just want Dad's and Mom's blessing. Fast says family members come to every interaction with three core questions reverberating in their minds: Am I worthy? Am I competent? Can I influence events in my life?

"Everyone," says Fast, "wants to be lovable, competent, and feel in control of one's life."

8

SELF-CARE: FOLLOW THE 10 COMMANDMENTS FOR HEALTH

To be your best, you need to sleep, eat well and exercise. "Self-care is so important," says Elaine Froese.

Self-care doesn't mean not working; it means taking care of yourself while you do work so you can keep working at your best. It includes emotional and physical care. Burnout can destroy a family farm, says Froese.

Staying fit and healthy is imperative, so it's time to start integrating it into your routine. The article on page 25 describes all sorts of ways to combat unhealthiness, including a list of the 10 Commandments for Health. It doesn't have to be complicated or expensive.

Then make it a way of living. Get a flu shot, drink more water, join an exercise program, add a vegetable or fruit serving to a meal, book a physical, cut back on coffee, go to the dentist before you have a toothache, consume desserts or alcoholic drinks on the weekends only.

The reality is that farmers are not as fit as we used to be. As our farms become more automated we no longer have a built-in exercise program in our jobs. Like the rest of North Americans we can suffer from "sitting disease" which can lead to all sorts of physical problems. So get up from the desk and out of that cab for a few minutes every hour and walk around.

9

CONTROL COSTS: BE PART OF THE 44 PER CENT OF FARMERS WHO DO BREAK-EVEN ANALYSIS

Farmers who take a very sharp pencil to the expense part of the balance sheet can thrive even when the income part of the balance sheet looks a bit bleak. Ask any old-timer at the coffee shop: when commodity prices are low, costs can make or break you.

Having detailed information on hand will help you better manage input purchases and set marketing targets. It will also let you drill down into your costs per unit and to compare production units within your own operation. This cost knowledge is also the base of comparing year-over-year performance and for benchmarking.

Farmers tend to track direct costs, wincing at seed and pesticides price increases. But what about how much the operational expenses of fuel and general labour have increased over the last decade?

Anecdotally, farmers who know where they spend their money are in better cash flow positions. So 2015 should be a great year to take detailed stock of your expenses. Be realistic and take a good hard look in the rear-view mirror of your new pickup. Understanding up front where you can and can't cut back will help make the tough decisions easier.

10

COMMUNICATING MEANS YOU'RE 3X MORE LIKELY TO INNOVATE

Farms today are dealing with multiple family members, plus staff, outside contractors and a business environment that changes as quickly as Clark Kent. And yet, as Helen Lammers-Helps finds out in her interviews on page 44, poor communication is like farm-family kryptonite.

Even though today we can communicate in ways we could never have imagined 20 years ago, the gap in how we communicate has never been bigger. (I say this with my 14-year-old telling me that I'm texting incorrectly and my 77-year-old mother unable to figure out email).

It's time to ask everyone involved in your farm the way they each prefer to communicate. From setting up family meetings, to texting, to twittering, to taking a public speaking course, to hiring a third party to help you through some tough conversations, there are many ways you can improve communication, and it's never been more important.

Thriving is more than surviving, it's about growth and evolution. Even though your farm is probably ripe for innovation, to make effective change you have to give the people you are working with permission to share their perspectives. A 2013 study in the HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW found employees in a "speak up" culture were 3.5 times as likely to contribute their full innovative potential. **CG**

THANKS for EVERYTHING

These practical tips
will help your farm
tap the proven
benefits of gratitude

By Helen Lammers-Helps

Your parents might have taught you to always say thank you, but even they couldn't have known how powerful a lesson they were teaching. In order to thrive, you must be grateful.

Farmers can be skeptical, but research has proven it time and again. Gratitude is essential for living a life that is experienced as a good life. People who are grateful report being not only happier, but also healthier, more energetic, more productive, more helpful, less anxious and less depressed.

Robert Emmons, the world's most prominent researcher and writer on gratitude, defines it as "a felt sense of wonder, thankfulness and appreciation for life." And Sonja Lyubomirsky, who spent years studying happiness for her book, *THE HOW OF HAPPINESS*, goes on to explain that grateful thinking bolsters our self-esteem, helps us cope with stress and creates closer friendships.

But the first thing to realize is that there is a difference between saying thank you and living a life of gratitude.

It's true that you will get a short-term sense of well-being from saying thank you, or when you pause for a moment on a deck chair on a mild summer evening to reflect on all that you have to be thankful for. But to fully enjoy the benefits of gratitude, you need to make it a habit.

In a study by Lyubomirsky, participants who kept a gratitude journal showed a marked increase in happiness over the control group.

Once a week, participants were asked to write down three to five things that they were thankful for. These could be big things or little things, and repetition was permitted. It also made no difference what time of day the exercise was completed — first thing in the morning, bedtime or at coffee break.

On average the weekly frequency was the most effective in Lyubomirsky's research, but she says it's up to individuals to find a pattern that works for them. And it's also important to vary the timing so you don't become bored with the exercise.

Sharing the activity with a spouse or other loved one

Tips for creating a culture of gratitude

From Dr. Vanessa Buote, psychologist

1. Spend a few minutes at the beginning of staff meetings to reflect on what you are thankful for. This can be done privately, or people can be invited to share, although Buote recommends keeping it optional. "Don't force it."
2. Take time to recognize others for their work. It will be most meaningful and effective if you're specific.
3. Bring in a box of donuts or find another way to show your appreciation for everyone's hard work.
4. Offer help or social support to co-workers and employees.
5. Actively recognize it when people go above and beyond what's expected of them.
6. Hang a smiley face sign or other visual cue to remind everyone to practice thankfulness.
7. Seek feedback on the best way to show appreciation. For example, would your team like a pizza lunch, or is there a better way to reward them?

**"If you forget the language
of gratitude, you'll never
be on speaking terms
with happiness."**

can also strengthen both our appreciation and the relationship, Lyubomirsky adds.

Or, if you're not a writer, simply make sure you take a few moments each week to pause and reflect on what you're thankful for, because even that can also be beneficial.

Writing a letter of gratitude to someone important in your life is another way to boost both your own happiness as well as the recipient's. Lyubomirsky recommends writing in concrete terms about what this person means to you. Then, if possible, deliver the letter in person and read it to them.

If that sounds way too gushy, write the letter anyway. You don't actually have to send it to get the benefit from writing it. Lyubomirsky's research showed that writing the letter without sending it still has a positive impact on the writer.

GRATITUDE, ON THE FARM

Practising an attitude of gratitude shouldn't be limited to our personal lives. Research shows that making gratitude part of your approach to the farm and your overall approach to work has many benefits.

When gratitude is part of your work culture, job satisfaction is higher and your family and employees will be less likely to look for another job, says social psychologist Dr. Vanessa Buote, who works with Plasticity Labs, a Kitchener, Ont. firm that uses advances in positive psychology to help companies boost morale and create a happy, healthy workforce.

Not only does this result in a happier, more productive workforce, it also saves money since it's so difficult to attract and train new employees.

Striving to make gratitude a part of the workplace culture has other benefits too. Gratitude helps bind people together, Buote says. This in turn produces an enhanced sense of community, where trust and positive collaboration can flourish.

When people make a point of expressing sincere thanks, employees are kinder, and more agreeable, and there is less burnout. "People on the receiving end are more likely to pay it back and pay it forward," says Buote.

MEET THE REAL WORLD

Even though practising an attitude of gratitude produces both a better work environment and also economic rewards, and even though it is relatively easy to achieve, most workplaces have a dismal record for expressing appreciation.

Studies show that one-third of workers never express their thanks to their co-workers or their bosses, says Buote.

Research also shows that when we get busy, expressing gratitude often goes by the wayside.

Gratitude can also be well or poorly done. The most important factor is that the thanks must be sincere, Buote says. Mindless gratitude doesn't cut it.

It's critical to cultivate a habit of mindful gratitude and to express what you are truly grateful for. "It can be difficult at first, but it gets easier with practice," Buote says.

Elaine Froese, a Boissevain, Man. farm family coach, regularly encourages her clients to practice an attitude of gratitude. "Being grateful is a powerful attitude for family and business," Froese says.

Froese's mentor, business coach Tom Hubler, asserts that a lack of appreciation is one of the three major stumbling blocks faced by small and medium businesses.

Verbal affirmation is a great place to start, says Froese. Even simple things like saying: "The hot meals you brought out to the field tonight were delicious" or "Thanks for taking the garbage out to the burn barrel" can have a big impact.

"People appreciate being appreciated," says Froese, who recommends sending thank-you cards to show your gratitude. "Getting a handwritten card is a rare thing these days," she says.

Count your blessings. Showing our appreciation for those around us only takes a little bit of effort, but produces hefty rewards for your own health, and that of your farm team. **CG**

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Lyndon has been named the Canadian Agri-Marketing Association's Agri-Marketer of the Year and presented with the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal for his contributions to 4-H Canada. He'll help you see where Canadian agriculture is headed and provide insights to improve your farm management skills.

BEST LAID PLANS

Why put your marketing plan on paper? Because it pays, no matter where the market goes

By Gord Gilmour, CG Associate Editor

A military phrase jumps immediately to mind. Veteran soldiers often say that no battle plan ever survives its first brush with the enemy.

On the farm, you might think it means that the time you'd put into laying out a marketing plan is time you could better spend on any of the thousand other things that need your attention.

You'd be wrong, says Calgary-based market analyst Errol Anderson. Below, we challenge him to explain why.

COUNTRY GUIDE: When we set up this interview, we suggested the topic "Getting your marketing plan down on paper." You countered, saying we should make the focus "Getting it down on paper, and beyond." Why?

Errol Anderson: Yes, it is really important you get it all down on paper at the end of the production season. You need to know how much grain you have of what grades and quality, and you need to revisit the cost-of-production estimates you did at the start of the season to find out what it actually cost you to produce that grain. You need to gather as much market intelligence from a variety of sources as you can, so you will know where the opportunities may arise as the marketing year goes on. This is all still very, very important.

But I do think it's also very important to state that this is the beginning of the process, not the end of it.

Things are going to change throughout the year. New crop is going to come to market from other global production areas. New sales opportunities are going to emerge. As we saw last year, transportation issues can play a huge role in determining what opportunities are out there, and where. There are a lot of things that can and will change and evolve throughout the year, that's my main point. As a grain marketer, you need to be aware of these things, stay in touch with how these things evolve, and modify your marketing plan as necessary. When you get right down to it, in many ways marketing grain is more of an art than a science.

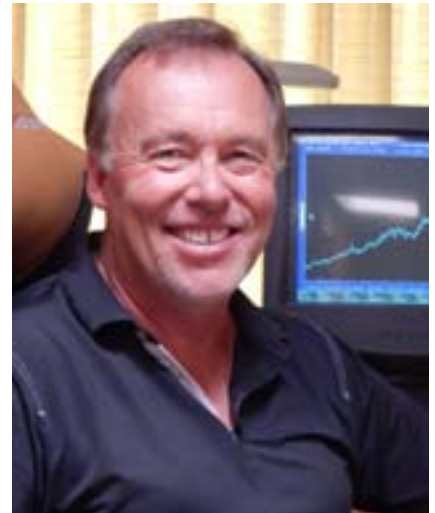
For example, in the fall we saw a rally in soybeans and canola, and if we're really honest, nobody saw it coming. It was a flow of outside investment money entering the ag commodity market.

CG: So let's start with getting the plan down on paper, then we'll work out from there. What does a successful marketing plan look like? What are the important things to keep in mind?

EA: Sticking to a plan is challenging, and not just because of the changing nature of grain markets or transportation bottlenecks. We're also battling ourselves and keeping our emotions in check. Emotions all too frequently get in the way of making solid pricing decisions. I don't want to harp on this too much, or sound like a broken record, because I know we've talked about this aspect a few times in the past — but it really is one of the core concepts you need to wrap your head around to be a better grain marketer. Emotions are deadly when it comes to making solid business decisions. To me, the success of a marketing plan is measured by a sense of business control. If you've got that, you're a successful marketer.

To attain this, we need to disregard our egos and respect the market. Another concept you've heard me talk about a lot is how the market doesn't care about your cost of production, and that it can and will price grain below it for long periods of time. Knowing your true cost of production and understanding the nature of markets mean that when you are presented with opportunities to price grain at a profit — and these always do appear, no matter how tough the market — you'll understand what's happening and you'll be ready to act.

If you don't have this knowledge, you can open yourself up to the risk of passing over opportunities to lock in profits while waiting for higher prices. Almost nobody prices grain at the top of the market, because those market peaks are so short and transi-



tory. It's better to scale in sales at various points throughout the climb up to that peak than risk missing them entirely, because markets move much more quickly when they're headed down.

Essentially you have to ask yourself this question: "Am I a marketer, or am I a speculator?" This isn't a new concept, and I'm certainly not the only market adviser to talk about it, but it is a really important point that every grain marketer needs to get a handle on.

CG: So how do you structure a plan to make the most of your marketing decisions?

EA: A selling plan is, in my opinion, always led by farm finances. Here there are three important things to keep an eye on. Your level of debt must be respected, you have to be mindful of your bill payment schedule, and your cost of production must also be respected. These are the three key areas to judge the health of your operation and to base marketing decisions off of.

It really comes down to understanding and respecting your balance sheet and need for cash flow. From understanding these needs, you can start to draw up a delivery plan. I'm a big believer in understanding when and why you'll need to start up the auger, fill the truck and head to town, as well as issues that you can predict that might limit your ability to do this.

You need to do this month by month. So in October, you might need to pay suppliers. November, you could have fuel payments. In December you may have land payments due. In January there could be land rent due. In March and April, there could be road restrictions that prevent you from delivering. In June you need to be paying for fertilizer and chemical. By summer you want to be emptying your storage for the next harvest. These are obviously just generic examples, and it's going to vary from operation to operation, but you get the idea.

After you've mapped this out, the second important thing you've got to do is make a decision to price grain. It sounds

simple, but of course it isn't. There are a number of factors that go into this decision, and to make it, you need to see some signals. How do the market conditions fit into your pricing plans, and what are your overall marketing goals? Do you have a hedging program, either through your elevator or a broker? How should you be managing it, given market conditions?

I think it's helpful to spread sales over four quarters, and manage them that way, as different periods of the year. Then ask yourself some pretty probing questions as you make these decisions.

CG: Can you run us through some of the questions you encourage growers to ask themselves?

EA: Sure. The most obvious and first question is: Should I sell now or wait? To make this decision you need a good handle on what the market outlook is. You need to stay connected with market research and get as much information as you can. In this day and age, the Internet is full of this information, but you also have to remember that the Internet can also frequently "be full of it."

So what I'm really saying is you need information you can trust, from sources you can trust. You may find, in the end, it really boils down to just three or four sources that know what they're talking about. These will be your central sources of information. Another important question to ask is: What sort of information is important? I personally think it's very important to get help identifying where the buyers and sellers are in the larger market, where they're located, and what they're buying and selling, as much as you can, because this information is going to give you insight into where the marketing opportunities are going to lay for you, the farmer.

Then there's the question: Should I sell into the cash or the futures market? Here, the basis is central to the decision. So for example, if the basis is weakening and futures are rising, it

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"Thank you for helping me on my journey as a woman, rancher, mom and human. All the speakers were amazing and relevant in so many ways."

- Holly L., Didsbury, Alberta, 2014 AWC Delegate

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might be time to lock in the futures in your contract with your local elevator. Or if you're using a broker, it could be a very good time to purchase some put options, scaling them in so that you have the opportunity to capture the rising futures market. I like using put and calls, rather than the straight futures market, because they don't have margin calls, which can be pretty tough to take. I think using them helps maintain focus and discipline, and prevents distraction and emotion from creeping in. Again, I won't harp on the emotional aspect, but I will highlight how important it is to insulate yourself from them so you can make sound business decisions.

CG: Let's talk a bit about managing cash flow. We touched on it earlier when you talked about figuring out when you were going to need money to meet your obligations. How can a farmer step off that treadmill? Or is it possible?

EA: I think you can be creative in your pricing and delivery plan using the marketing tools you have at your disposal.

Let's say you have bills to pay right after harvest. A lot of other farmers are going to be in the same boat. Combine that with the reality of a new North American crop having just come off, and typically we don't see a great environment for locking in profitability, and a lot of farmers deliver at a loss, seeking cash flow to pay bills.

Now I'm not saying, don't deliver. Sometimes it really does make sense to deliver then to get the cash in hand. You can pay your bills and avoid financing penalties, for example. I suggest one strategy growers might want to consider is delivering early post-harvest, getting the cash for the grain, and then buying the paper on the market, probably in the form of call options.

A lot of people might not agree with me on this, but I really do think that, with the marketing tools farmers have at their disposal, they should reconsider how much grain they want to be storing on their farms. They're always going to have to store some, especially any specialty crops that have been pre-sold under delivery contracts. But should they also be storing as much of the commodity crops as they do?

In my mind, stored grain is a liability, not an asset. Certainly it has value, but it also has a lot of risk attached to it. There's a lot of room for things to go wrong, and a lot of hassles delivering through the long, cold winters. I just think it's simpler and less risky to manage paper than stocks. This can obviously also help farmers better manage bin space, which is always at a premium.

Another benefit of having some paper might not be obvious, but I've heard this from a number of farmers that I've worked with over the years. They say having a position in the market makes them more interested in the market, and makes them pay more attention to it. I suppose it's like the casual hockey fan who signs up for a hockey pool — suddenly those results have a personal impact, so they're following the games much more closely.

CG: What are some of the other pricing issues and risks growers need to be aware of when planning?

EA: We've already covered a lot of them, but one thing we haven't talked about yet is production contracts that you're pricing in the production year. Here, the balance farmers need to strike, of course, is between pricing risk and production risk. Often these contracts present attractive opportunities to lock in profits during the production season, but the trade-off is the crop isn't in the bin yet, and since Mother Nature always bats last, you don't know for sure you're going to get it into the bin.

Most growers price some, but not too much. How much is a question of the individual farm and that farm manager's level of risk tolerance, and the balance sheet's ability to withstand a setback, like having to buy out a contract the farm can't fill. I think for most farmers that lays somewhere around a third of their potential crop, though some growers will go up to as much as half. I think most, when they get up to around 35 per cent, they start thinking "that's enough." There isn't really a hard and fast answer about what's the "right" balance. It's risk tolerance and respecting your financial position.

CG: The elephant in the room this marketing year is how the markets have changed. We're no longer running with the bulls, we're wrestling bears. Any tips on how to do this?

EA: Yes, they've certainly changed, that's undeniable. I think the best analogy might be football. We went through a few years where the defence on the other side had fallen apart, and it was relatively easy to throw a touchdown pass. But now that's changed and we're fighting for every inch we can get. That doesn't mean you can't score, you can still find the end zone and put points on the board — but it's going to be a lot more work.

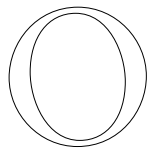
We've already covered a lot of it. Know your true cost of production, have a plan, set up a trading account or work with your local grain buyer to use the marketing tools available to you. Know the market as well as you can, using trusted sources, and respect what you've learned. Don't pass up opportunities to lock in profitability today because you're hoping for a return of the high prices of the past few years, because I'm afraid it might be a long wait.

Work with your local buyers and make sure they have a good idea of the quantity and grades that you have on hand. Frequently the best opportunities for profit are going to be very short term and transitory — a local elevator agent who needs a few truckloads very quickly. If they know you have that grain, you're going to be the farmer that gets that call and has that opportunity.

This is going to be a period of time where marketing discipline is very important. If you can be disciplined and approach your selling, pricing and deliveries systematically, you will get better results over time. **CG**

Make your health a priority

By Helen Lammers-Helps



ften farmers overlook the first requirement for successful farming — good health.

It's too important to take it for granted. And it's also at risk. Farmers, their families and their employees work amid myriad occupational hazards, points out Kendra Ulmer, a registered nurse with the Canadian Centre for Health and Safety in Agriculture at the University of Saskatchewan. The list of those hazards is long, including agricultural chemicals, viruses, moulds, dust, zoonotic diseases, and noise, as well as work-related injuries and psychological hazards.

Unfortunately, if you tell your doctor you're

It's easy to manage your health so you can better manage your farm. Here's how to get started

a farmer, they may have little insight into what occupational hazards this involves, or what kinds of hazards you personally are most in danger of contacting, says Glen Blahy, agricultural health and safety specialist at the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (CASA) in Winnipeg.

In fact, the occupational hazards that farmers and farm workers face vary considerably between farms. They also vary depending on your job description.

To help ensure you and your employees get appropriate medical care, CASA developed the Confidential Personal Wellness Assessment. Farmers and farm workers complete the assessment prior to meeting with

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JUST DO IT — GET CHECKED OUT

How long has it been since you've had a physical, seen the dentist or had your eyes checked. If it's been a while, make those appointments now. Then add a reminder to your smartphone calendar so you'll be reminded annually.

If you need extra motivation, dig into the following resources:

For information on health risks specific to farming, go to the website of the Canadian Centre for Health and Safety in Agriculture at the University of Saskatchewan, www.aghealthandsafetynetwork.usask.ca/.

Dr. Mike Evans, a medical doctor and professor at the University of Toronto, has made a name for himself translating technical research data into entertaining and easy-to-follow advice in short, animated YouTube

videos. His video "23 and 1/2 hours: What is the single best thing we can do for our health?" has had almost five million views. (You'll find this video and many more at <http://www.youtube.com/user/DocMikeEvans>.)

According to Evans, walking or doing some other form of exercise for at least 30 minutes every day is the most effective thing we can do to maintain our health. Evans came to this conclusion after studying all of the available preventative health research.

Exercise, even moderate exercise like walking, was found to reduce depression, dementia, fatigue, diabetes risk, blood pressure and heart disease.

Even better, the exercise doesn't have to be all in one stretch. The effect could be seen even if the walks were broken up into three 10-minute segments. This is very do-able and doesn't require investing in expensive exercise equipment or enrolling at a gym. Anybody can do this anywhere.

10 Commandments for Health

(adapted by Kendra Ulmer, RN)

- 1. PRIORITIZE**
Plan and pace yourself.
- 2. TAKE CONTROL OF STRESS**
Don't let stress take control of you.
- 3. EAT WISELY**
And drink plenty of water.
- 4. EXERCISE**
Do your best to find time for physical activity daily, build it into your day.
- 5. IF YOU SMOKE, QUIT**
And if you drink alcohol, try and cut it down.
- 6. TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOUR BACK**
One bad lift can cause a lifetime of misery.
- 7. WATCH YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE**
Keep close tabs on your blood pressure and cholesterol levels.
- 8. REDUCE YOUR CANCER RISK**
by eating healthy, being physically active and maintaining a healthy body weight.
- 9. BEAT ISOLATION**
Join a group or talk things through with your partner, a family member, a friend or neighbour.
- 10. VISIT YOUR DOCTOR REGULARLY**
Never delay getting help if you are concerned about any changes in your health.



Continued from page 25

their family doctor to ensure the doctor has an accurate picture of specific occupational risks involved in their day-to-day work.

For a copy of the assessment form, contact CASA at www.casa-acsa.ca or your provincial farm safety association.

Completing the assessment also helps farmers become more aware of the risks that they and their workers face, which can then motivate them to find ways to reduce exposure to occupational hazards and ensure that proper protective gear is used.

THE NEW THREAT — “SITTING DISEASE”

As farms have become larger and more automated, farmers have also become more prone to what the media has dubbed “Sitting Disease.” Research in the past 10 years has shown that now that we are spending so much time sitting at a computer, driving or watching TV, we are at increased risk for diabetes, heart disease, premature death and some cancers, says Dr. Travis Saunders, an assistant professor at the University of Prince Edward Island in Charlottetown.

Even if you are getting the recommended 150 minutes per week of exercise, the more time you spend sitting, the higher your risk, Saunders says.

When we sit too long there is a surge in blood sugar and then a corresponding surge in insulin, explains Saunders, who recommends getting up and walking around for a couple of minutes every 30 minutes.

Saunders says there are many simple ways to add more movement to our day if we think about it. For example, when talking on the phone, stand instead of sitting. Walk to get the mail. When you go to town, walk — don't drive — between stores, and set a timer on your computer to remind you to get up and move every 30 minutes.

“Don't make sitting the default,” Saunders says. For example, if you need to meet, you can walk while you talk. Some offices are using work stations which give people the option of standing while they work. Some people have even started using treadmill desks so they are always moving while they work. Such ideas are adaptable to farm offices.

Watching TV is particularly bad, adds Saunders. Not only are we inactive when we watch TV but research shows our food intake increases which results in weight gain, another health risk.

Wearing an activity monitor or pedometer will make you more aware of how much you are moving. There are also apps you can get for your smartphone to help track your activity levels.

What it comes down to is, if you want to be healthy, you have to make your health a priority and schedule it into your day.

That means dropping bad habits and replacing them with good habits. Even small changes can have a big impact. **CG**

Improve your health by integrating healthy attitudes into your work day



Farming used to keep you healthy with a full day of work-based exercise and fresh air. That's not true any more, so farmers who don't make health a regular part of their day are putting themselves at risk



HEALTHY EATING TIPS

With so much information out there about healthy eating, it's easy to be overwhelmed. Ellen Gregg, registered dietician with the Region of Waterloo Public Health Unit shares some simple rules of thumb for making healthy food choices:

- Eat a fruit or vegetable with every meal and snack.
- When you eat dinner, half of your plate should be covered with vegetables.
- Avoid deli meats and other processed meats such as hot dogs.
- Limit sugar-sweetened beverages (like pop) to an occasional treat.
- Practice moderation with treats. For example, eat dessert only one to two times per week.
- Eat more whole grains by choosing whole-grain pasta, whole-grain bread, and brown rice.
- Don't shop when you are hungry. You're more prone to make bad choices when your blood sugar is low.
- Plan what you will have for dinner ahead of time and make shopping lists so you'll have everything you need on hand. This will stop you from getting "hangry."

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What good would talking do?

By Lisa Guenther

Megan McKenzie has observed elections in Congo, she has documented human rights issues in Columbia and the Middle East, she has worked at a reconciliation centre in Ireland, and along the way she has earned a doctorate in conflict resolution and international peace studies, along with mediation training.

All this despite growing up on a farm near Portage la Prairie, just west of Winnipeg.

Or maybe it hasn't been such a jump after all.

These days, McKenzie calls Boissevain, Man., home, and she recently co-authored a book, *FARMING'S IN-LAW FACTOR*, with farm family coach Elaine Froese.

It turns out that there can be conflict in Canada's farming families too, and that there are simmering issues that have the potential to boil up into paralyzing disputes.

Your dad may not loosen his grip on the reins, for example, which means you can't make the management decisions that will help position the farm where you think it needs to be when you take over in the future. Or maybe your husband and your in-laws don't respect you enough to involve you in financial decisions. Or perhaps you don't have the energy to take care of yourself and your family, let alone a multi-generational farm.

Whatever the issue, one thing is clear — you don't want to talk about it, and if your farm is like a lot of farms, no one else wants to talk about it either.

But it's better to deal with problems as soon as they appear, instead of waiting until they become "an explosive mess," McKenzie says.

"I've talked to many people where they just haven't had these important conversations," says

It's simple enough to avoid discussing the big things and the little things that really matter. It's just that most farms will never really thrive until you do

McKenzie, now working as a conflict and mediation specialist. "Then someone dies without a will and the whole family fights for the next 20 years because they weren't brave enough to have that conversation when the time would have been right."

At the opposite side of the Prairies, Reg Shandro, like McKenzie, was also a farm kid. After leaving the family farm in northeastern Alberta, he earned a bachelor of science in agriculture, became a professional agrologist, and held several agricultural lending positions around Alberta. He's also certified in conflict management and negotiation with the Alternate Dispute Resolution Institute of Canada.

These days Shandro helps farm families with succession planning through his company, Farmacist Advisory Services. When it comes to communication, he says, "the general theme is that they don't like to talk about anything except for operations and production."

McKenzie agrees succession is one of the big topics people like to avoid. Other hot topics include management decisions, or when "one or two people are doing something terribly wrong."

When it comes to conflict and communications, Shandro and McKenzie have seen it all, so *COUNTRY GUIDE* asked them to share their insights into why these conversations are so tough, how families can broach sensitive topics, and when families need outside help.

A FIGHT IS A FIGHT, EVEN ON A FARM

Whatever continent you're on, farm conflicts look much the same, McKenzie says.

Farmers' identities revolve around being farmers, how they farm and what they've accomplished with their farm, she explains. "And so any time the pieces of that identity are challenged, you see the same type of patterns playing out as you do in Ireland."

Shandro also finds that many issues and situations are virtually universal among farms. But, he says, "the 10 to 20 per cent that's unique to your farm makes all the difference."

Sometimes communication breakdowns result from bad habits as much as anything else.

Families can fall into negative patterns, McKenzie says. "They're just used

to interrupting each other. Or they're used to not listening to one particular person — like that person's never had anything to say anyhow."

Some fall into the trap of thinking the loudest person must be right, Shandro says. "We're primal in our communication and it has worked for us over the generations. But when you tie family and business together, it implodes."

People who struggle with communication tend to panic and let their emotions run high during tense conversations, Shandro says, "and then we default to our old system."

When non-farmers marry into an agrarian clan, they're likely to have "little cultural clashes where things are just done a little bit different in the country

than they are in cities," says McKenzie. "But even on different farms you do things differently."

Apparent miscommunication issues are sometimes rooted in bigger issues, such as a lack of agreement over roles and decision-making, McKenzie says. For example, a daughter-in-law may be angry that her husband and father-in-law don't consult her about purchasing a bull even though her money goes into it, says McKenzie. On the surface, this seems like a communication blip.

"The actual root of the problem is that they don't consider anything that she says valuable," says McKenzie. "Or that they don't think that she has anything to offer and she's not included in the farm activities."

WHEN DO WE NEED HELP?

It's worth considering bringing in a facilitator for potentially messy conversations. McKenzie finds people who tend to be "less than agreeable" can be more agreeable when an outside person is present.

"Just having another person around can sometimes just help bring out the best in people, too," she says.

Shandro has seen church-going families ask a member of the clergy to facilitate, but he cautions families to be choosy about who they invite behind the curtain.

"It's very awkward to invite somebody who is not arm's-length to do this type of thing. I'd rather have somebody indepen-

dent, who's qualified, who's following some type of code of conduct," Shandro says. Confidentiality is a huge concern, he adds. "Some of this stuff gets extremely sensitive."

Unskilled mediators can fall into the trap of trying to play the hero, instead of trying to get people listening to each other, he explains. "It's very dangerous to come in and plug your filters in."

Before mediators get to the issues, they need to gain the family's trust and understand their culture, Shandro says. The better they are at setting the tone in the beginning, the more effective the conversation that follows.

Next, mediators need to pinpoint issues. But before jumping to solutions, the mediator needs to take time to understand the complexities beneath the surface, Shandro says. Getting a good handle on those complexities, he says, "is the Holy Grail in this whole process."

Shandro finds spending a day with the family reveals the aptitudes of the people in the room. The best candidate for the family mediator may be "the daughter-in-law whose father is a surgeon in Edmonton, who doesn't understand the culture of agriculture," Shandro says he positions it "so that person would be invited into that role."

HOW TO TALK GOOD

Even families with the resources to tackle tough conversations on their own will need to put some thought into it.

"You just can't round up everybody in the room between chores and dinner and say, 'OK, we're going to talk good now,'" says Shandro.

McKenzie says sometimes family members can set the ground rules and stick to them without an outsider's help, although basics such as timing can make or break a family meeting. "Don't do it in the middle of harvest. And make sure everyone's fed and not cranky," she says.

Regular meetings to discuss the nuts and bolts of the farm help with communication, McKenzie says. But there are also special meetings where families need to draw on people who don't attend the day-to-day meetings.

For example, "when my grandfather was starting to get dementia, we had to get the whole family together to discuss how to get him off the farm," she says. McKenzie adds families should let everyone know about the meeting, and seek input for the agenda.

"It costs you big money if you don't invest in these relationships with one another," says McKenzie

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Manners matter too. McKenzie lists several ways to show basic respect, such as turning off cell phones, making eye contact and being sincere.

People should also use kind words, she says, “and know that the relationship is as important as the outcome.”

Families tend to have their own set of unspoken rules and assume everyone has the same rules, McKenzie says. “And actually being able to bring those to the surface and talk about them is really important.”

McKenzie says having a sense of humour can help too, because different isn’t necessarily wrong. Each family has “their own bag of tricks that’s kept them alive. So they’re going to be different than what you’re used to.”

Still, some communication patterns are less than pleasant, to say the least. McKenzie says sometimes individuals can make a difference by changing their own behaviour.

“When people yell, I’m going to not yell, and I’m going to say, ‘I will talk to you after you’re done yelling. I’m not going to talk to you while you’re yelling at me. I don’t accept people screaming in my face anymore,’” she says.

Whether or not families work with a facilitator, it’s worth making sure everyone in the farm meeting throws in their two cents. Both McKenzie and Shandro mention the token system as one possible method.

Everyone gets three pennies, or whatever tokens are practical. Each penny is worth a set amount of time, such as two minutes. To speak during the meeting, a person needs to spend a penny. Once a person spends all three pennies, they are done talking.

Shandro says the family members who normally dominate the conversation spend their pennies right away, giving the last word to the people who tend to hold their tongues.

The next meeting is more effective, Shandro says, because “before they spend their penny and invest it, they think about what they’re going to say.”

SHOULD YOU WALK AWAY?

Empathy is in order when someone in the family is struggling with mental illness.

“Yelling at or getting frustrated with somebody with mental illness or a disorder is the equivalent of yelling at somebody with a severe disease that’s out of their control,” says Shandro. “Depression’s not voluntary.”

Mental health issues and addictions make resolving conflict “very, very difficult,” says Shandro. When mediators or family members identify those issues, they need to call in experts in that field, since mediation will stall.

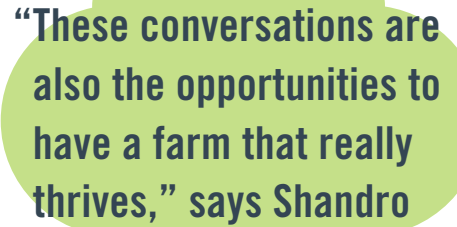
And, unfortunately, mental health isn’t the only difficult problem farm families struggle with. Research from both Statistics Canada and the Department of Justice indicates that rural people are more likely to suffer from police-reported family and spousal violence than urbanites.

McKenzie says while talking to farm families for the book, there were a couple of times she cringed through entire interviews. Red flags for violence kept popping up, she says. “And nobody was talking about it.”

“A couple times during interviews, I just flat out asked people and they would say, ‘Yes, Dad is really terrible to Mom,’” she adds.

McKenzie says when people are being abusive, it’s important that family members acknowledge it and seek help.

Shandro says he’s really sensitive when he sees young children in families suffering from violence. “You know when they get caught in this type of environment, there’s hurt that’s going to perpetuate into their adult years.”



“These conversations are also the opportunities to have a farm that really thrives,” says Shandro

McKenzie points to several signs that individuals might need to walk away from a partnership. Abusive or destructive behaviours within the farming family are flags. Complaining about the same problems for over a year is another, she says. Lacking sleep, bursting into tears for unknown reasons and health problems or headaches from stress are warning signs too.

While working on farm succession with families, Shandro looks for overlapping or eclipsing values among individuals, which indicate a common interest.

“If you don’t have a common interest, it’s not a resolvable situation,” says Shandro. If a conflict can’t be resolved, he adds, people need an exit strategy.

While leaving even tough situations can be hard, McKenzie says she’s talked to many people who’ve done well “striking out on their own” or forming partnerships with non-relatives. And Shandro quotes a woman who survived an abusive relationship: “Sometimes the worst thing that could happen is nothing changes at all.”

AN OPPORTUNITY TO THRIVE

It’s no wonder rural families are so hesitant to dig into tough topics. People tend to think it’s a dangerous thing to do, says McKenzie.

“But they don’t realize that they’re missing opportunities by not having these conversations,” says McKenzie. “Because these conversations are also the opportunities to have a farm that really thrives and that’s really wonderful to work in.”

Shandro says that once he wraps up the succession planning work, it’s common for people to say they’ve been begging for such meetings for years.

McKenzie advises people to make an effort to communicate with their families and understand what’s going on with them.

“And just be really kind and loving to them, because that relationship is important,” McKenzie says. “It costs you big money if you don’t invest in these relationships with each other.” **CG**

Competing in the new food economy

University of Guelph provides perfect balance

BY DR. MIKE VON MASSOW, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, HOSPITALITY, FOOD, AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT, UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH

The food economy is changing. Managers need a broader foundation of skills and knowledge to compete regardless of where they work in the value chain. They need to understand the entire value chain from input supply, through production and processing, distribution and retail or food service. More and more industry professionals are considering an MBA to enhance their management skills and accelerate their career development. The challenge for business schools is to provide industry relevant training within the context of the critical curriculum core to an MBA. The University of Guelph, known as Canada's food university, has a program that strikes the perfect balance of a strong business foundation and agri-business specific training in areas such as policy and risk management.

Food is different. Policy makers think differently about food. Food safety and labelling regulations are more stringent than for any other products. Food production and processing are policy priorities.

Food is global. Currency issues beyond the control of individual companies or managers affect food prices and food security. Changing trade rules create both opportunities and challenges which vary with currency fluctuations. Oil prices significantly affect production costs as well as changing the relative competitive strengths of different supply chains.

Food is biological. Production depends on short and long term on a variable and changing climate. Biotechnology is a critical strategic lever for increasing production and adding value to products.

Food is personal. Consumers think differently about food than about other products. They are changing what they value in food, paying more attention to how and where it is produced. This influences where they buy it and how often. GMO, organic, local, animal welfare and various other issues are coming into the consumer consciousness and affecting the products they choose.

The Guelph MBA recognizes these important characteristics of the food economy and is explicitly designed to prepare managers to

succeed anywhere in the food economy. This is explicitly reflected in the students enrolled in and graduating from the program. One of the significant strengths of the program is the diverse experience and perspectives within each cohort of students – producers, input suppliers, processors, bankers, plant breeders, distributors, retailers and food service are all represented in the program. This food focused program attracts food focused students who learn with and from each other.

The curriculum reflects both general business and food focused topics but all are presented within the context of food value chains. The case studies and examples are largely taken from food to explicitly incorporate learning from the range of issues managers will face – problems and

opportunities are not considered in isolation but in broader competitive context. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the "live" case study that forms the foundation of the capstone strategic management course. Students work competitively in teams to address a real world issue with a real company. Work is done on site with the company so students have access to managers and information key to making a recommendation that works and recommendations are presented to senior managers at the end of the course.

The food economy represents outstanding opportunities for managers to develop rewarding careers. The Guelph Agribusiness MBA is the best choice for managers interested in honing and enhancing the skills to allow them to compete and excel.

When comparing MBA programs, remember what field you're in.

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The critical role of cost control

Upgrading your planning, tracking and benchmarking processes isn't always easy, but it can put you in charge of your farm's future

By Amy Petherick

Forget good luck. As a strategy, it obviously has its weaknesses. Worse, it takes your eye off the factor that really makes a difference — how good you are at tracking and managing your costs.

If there's any luck involved in that, says Drew Fowler of Eyebrow, Sask., it's a word that never comes to mind when he's talking to his most successful neighbours. Instead, they live in the same volatile world as other farmers, but their focus on cost control makes them quick to recognize opportunities.

And there's also more to it than that.

"You can't control the uncontrollable. A lot of the costs we face are variable, the prices of inputs are highly volatile, and you don't know from one year to another how bad machinery repairs will be," Fowler says.

"That said, the producers who I speak with on a daily basis who know where their money goes tend to be in a better cash flow position."

Paying cash makes him more aware of costs, says Drew Fowler. "It's easy to put something on credit."

Fowler and his father farm 3,000 acres of grains and oilseeds, when Fowler isn't working his day job in ag retail. The combination of experiences has brought him to the conclusion that cash is king.

"It's easy to put something on credit, but it's hard to part with cash," Fowler says, and he has seen how that has an impact on the purchasing behaviour of farmers in either case. Although it's not something he can manage very easily just heading into his early 30s, Fowler says part of his vision of financial success now includes the ability to pay with cash.

"If you're using your own cash, you determine what you're doing with it," Fowler says. "You don't have to worry about some financing contract you signed that's 14 pages deep."

Sure, in recent years the banks have been mostly happy to accommodate farm expansions of 300 per cent over five years, or cash flow crunches caused by grain transportation challenges. But Fowler says that, as the person who sits down with customers who sign these input financing contracts, he's become very familiar with all the finer print they contain and cautious about overextending himself.

"Our cash flow will be less next year and our incomes are going to be down," Fowler predicts. "I'll be thinking twice about novelty purchases, staying ahead of the game on opportunities to save five or 10 per cent on seed bookings, and just do a better job of monitoring costs."

It's a case of smart business minds thinking alike, because without even knowing it, Fowler is heeding the first two of the top expense management tips from the Business Development Bank of Canada: making a plan, and tracking expenses diligently.

Input prices are under pressure everywhere you go in farm country, and supplies can be too. In the West, a poor-quality grain harvest means more canola growers will looking to buy more canola seed this winter. Through what he's seen at work, Fowler has known since the fall to plan for higher seed costs in 2015.

"In retail, canola seed costs are up so I know that's going to the farmer." He has also learned that nine years out of 10, farmers who buy fertilizer in the fall save as much as 20 per cent over those who simply buy in the spring.

Fowler is also bracing himself for higher pesticide costs this coming spring. "We're in some pretty wet cycle years, we have pretty saturated soils and there's a pretty high presence of disease now from four years of heavy trash, so our fungicide use will probably be



way up next year,” Fowler forecasts. “The only thing I would see going down are machinery purchases and depreciation along with it.”

Already when COUNTRY GUIDE talked to him in the fall, Cedric McLeod of Fredericton, N.B., was looking to forward contract some 2015 corn, and he had been calculating his cost of production.

McLeod, who is also a farm financial adviser, says tracking costs is the first hurdle to overcome when he’s called in, since only 44 per cent of farmers conduct break-even analysis, according to a 2007 Agriculture and AgriFood Canada survey.

“Typically when I get called in, the first challenge is having a good system to track costs,” McLeod says. With 260 acres of his own, a beef herd and a succession opportunity to take over the 800-acre family farm and seed sales business, he knows the value of separating farm activities into distinct enterprises.

“That’s when you start to talk about fixed and variable costs,” McLeod says. The simple online tool he likes best for doing this is the Ontario agriculture ministry’s Publication 60 worksheet. McLeod says it’s the most intuitive and robust method he’s used yet that offers benchmarking, which is another top cost controlling tip.

“There’re two schools of thought on benchmarking,” McLeod says. “The best way to benchmark is to make a goal and benchmark yourself against whether or not you’re able to achieve that goal on an annual basis.” But, McLeod agrees, benchmarking against your own operation alone does carry the risk of falling behind industry averages. He thinks Farm Credit Canada offers the best publicly available benchmarking data to compare to, but he believes peer advisory groups are more effective.

“In a peer group everybody wants everybody to succeed, so I want to challenge you to think a little more strategically, a little more objectively and don’t let yourself off the hook,” McLeod says. “The real power in having a plan and benchmarking yourself is you’re holding yourself accountable to the plan you’ve put together.”

McLeod believes everyone is inclined to low-ball costs, but benchmarking against Publication 60 and peer input ensures your targets are realistic.


For many farmers, upgrading their planning, tracking and benchmarking will make a noticeable difference in controlling costs. But even the professionals can still dig in deeper to manage variable costs and crack down on fixed expenses.

“I took every piece of gear we have on the farm and wrote it in a spreadsheet,” McLeod offers as an example, “its width, typical speed we travel, applied 10 per cent turn time, the fuel use per hour, the labour per hour, the depreciation of the

machine, and I know how many acres I can do an hour and what my cost is.” Armed with pinpoint numbers on the operating cost of every piece of iron on the farm, McLeod says he now has a spreadsheet that can generate cost differences between conventional, minimum, and no-till crops, and McLeod says this in turn will be invaluable in helping him determine where his money is best spent on equipment.

John Molenhuis, the producer of Ontario’s Publication 60, says this level of planning comes long after farmers have overcome their first and most difficult, year of tracking costs. Just deciding how to allocate fuel use and labour can be enough of a challenge for most people, he says.

“I’ve had guys say they start with their main crops — corn, soybeans, and wheat — but once they start getting into that, they fan out to more crops or they start refining to a field-by-field basis,” Molenhuis says. “They start seeing the value in doing it and start managing it on a more detailed basis the longer they have it.”



Cash analysis seems tough when you start, agrees John Molenhuis. Soon, though, you see the value

Molenhuis says that although benchmarking is helpful, he has always said the most important column in the worksheet is the one that comes blank. To generate the other values given and updated annually, he relies on a number of resources including the Ontario Farm Input Monitoring Survey conducted by the University of Guelph’s Ridgetown Economics and Business Group. Molenhuis says the last survey conducted in the fall of 2014 showed that fuel prices were relatively similar to the previous fall survey, fertilizer prices were down five per cent on average, and pesticide prices were up by two per cent. Of course regional differences have to be taken into consideration outside of the province. McLeod, for instance, says he usually has to account for increased drying costs and trucking, and Fowler says one of the fastest growing costs in the West is quite possibly general labour.

“We compete with the mining industry, the oil and gas industry, and good general labour is hard to find,” Fowler says. A decade ago, minimum wage plus an extra three dollars at harvest was fairly common. But now farmers are paying \$15 to \$25 for “a warm body that won’t wreck your \$400,000 machine too bad,” Fowler says. **CG**

BUILDING A BETTER BRIDGE

The gap between farmers and consumers is still way too deep, but new programs are proving they can make a difference

By Lois Harris

Although public and private marketing campaigns aimed at bridging the gap between farmers and consumers are making real strides, two studies conducted in 2014 point out just how far apart the two groups are in their attitudes to modern agriculture and food production.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) commissioned a \$100,000 qualitative research study from Strategic Counsel last spring that said not only that consumers don't really know much about agriculture, but also that they think it is stuck in the past and is neither modern, innovative nor progressive.

The urban and rural consumers in the survey also had a negative attitude to the term agri-food, which conjures visions of chemical enhancement and bio-engineering.

Canada's consumers think farming is uncompetitive, unsustainable, and stuck in the primitive past

Those consumers also felt the future of agriculture is fraught because of a shrinking land base, because the next generation isn't interested in farming, and also because current farm practices are environmentally unsustainable and potentially harmful.

Consumers also believe we're on a track toward fewer, larger "factory farms."

The Strategic Council report said many consumers get their information from the grocery store — they see and buy a lot of imported produce, and think that Canada is a net food importer.

The general feeling is that the country's competitiveness in the food industry has "declined sharply in the last several decades."

In contrast, a study released by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) that canvassed farmers in the fall said that they are optimistic about the future. Just over half of them plan to adopt

new technologies, it reported, and 44 per cent plan to expand their businesses.

Almost all farmers in the study said they are doing things to protect the environment, such as investing in energy-efficient machinery, improving their management of hazardous products and protecting waterways. Of the 28 per cent of farmers who said they were retiring, more than four out of five said they were transferring the farm to family members.

AAFC said it commissioned its study to increase the public's understanding and interest in the sector. The idea was to get a better handle on public perceptions in order to figure out ways to garner support for what the ministry calls "a competitive sector with strong growth potential."

The stakes are high. Canadian consumers lay out close to \$200 billion a year for food, beverages and tobacco, or a fifth of their personal spending.

Both public and private organizations are working in different ways to encourage consumers to not only spend more domestically, but also to get behind the research, innovation, science-based regulations, financial resources and other steps needed to maintain a thriving agricultural sector.

"AAFC used the public opinion research findings for the design and content of the new Discover Agriculture section on agr.gc.ca," said Miriam Wood, the manager of the ministry's communications branch in an email. "We are continuing to engage in marketing activities aimed at the general public such as open houses, exhibitions, and augmented content on agr.gc.ca to help generate interest and boost awareness of the agriculture sector and its importance to science, innovation and the economy."

In the private sector, the Agriculture More Than Ever campaign, launched by Farm Credit Canada (FCC) in May 2012, is "an industry-driven cause to improve perceptions and create positive dialogue about Canadian agriculture," according to its website. It has a \$1-million budget and is run by a few FCC marketing staff who are dedicated full time to the campaign.

Earlier in 2012, Farm and Food Care Ontario was formed from two farm advocate groups that had pro-

Continued on page 36



CHRISTIAN FARMERS FEDERATION OF ONTARIO

642 Woolwich St. • Guelph, ON • N1H 3Y2
Voice: (519) 837-1620 Fax: (519) 824-1835
Email: cffomail@christianfarmers.org
Web site: www.christianfarmers.org

CFFO 2014 Convention: Celebrating 60 years

The theme for the 2014 Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO) Convention was Faith, Family and Farming, in recognition of the 60th anniversary of the accredited farm organization. The convention was held on Dec. 2nd in Waterloo, Ontario, where over 150 members and guests enjoyed the day reflecting on the past, but also looking forward in anticipation of another 60 years of working within the Ontario agricultural industry. The CFFO has worked hard over the last 60 years, representing its members and influencing government policy to reflect their values in life.

During the morning session, Lorne Small was acclaimed as President for another year and Ed Scharringa and Ted van den Hurk were elected as Vice-Presidents for the upcoming year. The keynote

"Don't give up, look up"

The Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario is one of two accredited General Farm Organizations in Ontario. The organization is focused on the long-term issues facing the sector, and is supported by 4000 farmers in the province. Learn more about us at www.christianfarmers.org



speaker was Dr. Rev. Michael Bootsma, who reminded the membership to reflect on the intentions of the founding fathers of the organization and to carry those into the future, realizing the changes in agriculture and how there are differences in the make-up of today's family farms. He encouraged members to remember the importance of family and family time when business decisions are made.

During the afternoon session, Jim Wheeler shared some of his thoughts on the relationship

between society and farmers and what each will expect from the other over the coming years. He cautioned that if farmers want to maintain the respect they have in society, they need to make positive environmental and welfare decisions in their businesses or society could become much more demanding.

The CFFO recently moved into its new offices in Guelph. Staff has settled in and is preparing for the 2015 FBR season to ensure a smooth registration process for its members and supporters.

A general farm
organization that is
rooted in faith and
guided by values

- 22 District Associations Across Ontario
- Supporting our members since 1954
- A Professional Organization of Entrepreneurial Farming Families

www.christianfarmers.org

A professional organization of entrepreneurial farming families

Continued from page 34

moted livestock and crops, respectively, since 1988. It has a \$2-million budget to provide the public with information on food, farming and associated businesses.

Both groups agree that one of the best ways into the hearts of the Canadian public seems to be through real-life storytelling by credible spokespeople — the farmers themselves.

“People trust farmers but not agriculture,” said Lyndon Carlson, senior vice-president of marketing at Farm Credit Canada (FCC). “And people believe people who have passion about what they do.”

Carlson said that “agriculture” brings to mind large corporations, and doesn’t have the personality of farmers.

The “Ag More than Ever” website offers infographics, posters, presentations and brochures that point out many positive facts about the industry and its importance, including that one in eight Canadian jobs is in agriculture and agri-food, and that food and beverage processing is Canada’s largest manufacturing industry with \$92.9 billion in shipments.

But facts can only go so far.

“The public is not as moved by a fact as by a story — story is what makes people engaged,” Carlson said. “The key to influencing public opinion is to build relationships — once you have these, then they trust your information.”

“The public is interested in knowing more about their food, they don’t want to be educated about farming,” said Crystal MacKay, executive director of Farm and Food Care Ontario in an email. “It’s a subtle but important difference.”

MacKay’s group released its popular REAL DIRT ON FARMING publication in November 2014. It’s a 52-page document that’s chockablock with facts about Canadian agriculture, how different kinds of farms work, profiles of farmers and researchers and more. The online version even includes short YouTube videos to show and tell real farm stories. It is going nationwide for the first time, with a distribution target of one million.

At “Ag More Than Ever,” more than 550 individuals and groups have signed up for the campaign’s Advocate program. Advocates are equipped with template PowerPoint presentations, speaking points, questions and answers and other materials to help them when they spread the word at local meetings, classrooms and conferences.

Another 330-plus corporations, businesses, organizations and even provincial governments like Saskatchewan, Manitoba and New Brunswick have signed partnership agreements in which they promise to speak up for the industry with their employees, customers, members and stakeholders.

Most recently, FCC partnered with the Canadian Federation of Agriculture to produce the “Farm to Table” supplement in the November 25 GLOBE AND MAIL.

In terms of popularity, both organizations have put up some impressive numbers, especially in social media, each with thousands of Facebook fans and Twitter followers.

In one of its more successful projects, Farm and Food Care partnered with Foodland Ontario on a number of activities during Local Food Week in June, including hosting CITY-TV’s Breakfast Television live on location at a farm, touring city reporters around a large beef feedlot and grain farm, holding a Twitter party, and even conducting some “guerrilla marketing” that had farmers giving out apples at Toronto City Hall while saying, “thanks for buying our food.”

The project, which cost \$70,000 and took six weeks of front-end work, recently won a Best of CAMA (Canadian Agricultural Marketing Association) award.

“Our goal was to reach one million people in a week with positive messages about local food and the farmers who grow it,” said MacKay. “With all our partners’ help from across Ontario, we reached over 25 million people.”

Both organizations are measuring the effectiveness of their overall campaigns in the coming months.

Carlson said the “Ag More Than Ever” staff will be conducting a survey “probably sometime in 2015” to follow up on their 2013 survey.

Farm and Food Care Ontario is also running its attitudes survey again in 2015, and will combine it with food and farming research that the Centre for Food Integrity does in the U.S., so they have North American data. The organization and its predecessors have been measuring public opinion since 2001.

“This work is really important for us to ask the audience and really understand consumer questions and concerns versus what media or special interest groups might want people to believe,” MacKay said.

Results of the research will help shape the future of these marketing campaigns, and whether they can bridge the consumer-farmer attitude gap. **CG**

Helpful Websites:

Discover Agriculture: www.agr.gc.ca/eng/about-us/publications/discover-agriculture

Farm and Food Care Ontario: www.farmfoodcare.org

Agriculture More Than Ever: www.agmorethanever.ca

Canadian Federation of Independent Business: www.cfib-fcei.ca



Passion or obsession?

“Our passions are the winds that propel our vessel. Our reason is the pilot that steers her. Without winds the vessel would not move and without a pilot she would be lost.” — Anonymous

By Pierrette Desrosiers

Years ago, I met two men, Steve and Martin, preparing their cows for a show. Both very proud of their cattle, and also proud to help bring this prestigious livestock event to their area. They told me how passionate they were.

If there is one common characteristic shared by all entrepreneurs and leaders, it is passion.

However, when I take a closer look, there is a world of difference between the two men. Steve has a passion, but Martin's passion possesses him.

Let's start with Steve. What's important for him is to improve himself, to set his own goals, to develop himself fully and, above all, to love what he does. When he prepares his heifers to show, he keeps an open mind. “Of course, I hope to win some prizes,” Steve tells me. “But I concentrate on preparation and on the experience I get out of it.”

Steve appreciates the people he meets and what he gets out of the show. “In fact, if I win, that's the icing on the cake, but if not, I have still appreciated my experience. I like what I'm doing and winning or being the best is not an end in itself.”

Even though Steve devotes a lot of time to exhibitions and his business, he also has other passions in his life. He gives some time to photography too, and he likes taking vacations and spending time with his family. In short, there's life beyond these shows.

For Martin it's a very different story. These shows seem to be his only passion. “For me, anything not related to exhibitions is a waste of time. I have only one thing in mind: bringing home the first prize, nothing less.” It goes without saying that if Martin doesn't place, he gets depressed, angry and discouraged. His spouse privately told me, “It takes him days to get over it. He is obsessed. He is envious of others and sometimes even hates them. He becomes very aggressive for days, even weeks, if he doesn't win first prize. I don't think it is healthy. Sometimes my children and I feel that his cows are much more important to him than we are.”

It is important to distinguish between harmonious and obsessive passion. The term harmonious passion is used when a person is passionate about an activity that he pursues for the pleasure it gives him. He can spend a significant amount of time on it without pursuing admiration, recognition or prestige at all costs.

However, when that admiration and recognition

are expected, or even considered essential, the passion has become obsessive. When social recognition means everything, and the individual expects solely external rewards, issues of self-esteem come into play. As a result, there is no longer pleasure in the activity itself.

Harmonious passion is about the journey, and obsessive passion is about reaching the goal. The problem is that, more often than not, we can't entirely control whether we reach our goals. There are too many contributing factors. For example, would you like to produce 20 per cent higher canola yields this year? You could set this goal, but too many factors that you can't control could interfere with achieving it.

How do you know which passion you have?

- How do you feel when you finish an activity?
- Are you able to go on to something else, or to stop, or do you feel a constant need to continue, to the detriment of your relationships?
- Do you enjoy the activity itself?
- Do you do it for its own pleasure or to prove your value to others?
- Does your self-esteem vary based on your results?
- Does your passion eat into other areas of your life?

In the extreme, when obsessive passion takes over, it can lead to dependence (often seen in gambling, Internet and work addictions). The individual may no longer derive any pleasure from the activity, but unfortunately they cannot cut back.

Both types of passions can lead to success. Among athletes, musicians and business people, there are successful individuals who have harmonious and obsessive passions. However, the path of obsessive passion is empty, tortured, painful and expensive.

In short, research shows that people with obsessive passions aren't as happy, either in their personal lives or in the realm of business. Plus, when the obsession is directly related to work, burnout is never far away.

As my mother said, “Everything is good in moderation, even passion!” **CG**

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



Canada on the fringe

In a world where a country's market power starts with its grain storage capacity, we're losing ground fast

By Gerald Pilger

Canada's performance, its objectives and its market power as a grain producer and exporter have changed significantly since the mid-1900s. Unfortunately those changes have not always been positive.

In 1966 Alex McCalla, who was then at the University of Minnesota but who would go on to become one of the world's top economists studying agricultural trade, described the world wheat market in his paper "A Duopoly Model of World Wheat Pricing."

"Canada and the United States are the duopolists, with Canada the price leader and the United States the usually silent partner," McCalla said.

He went on describe the world's other exporting nations as "a fringe of price followers," and he theorized that the acutal objective of the close Canada/U.S. relationship was to maximize exports of wheat from each country.

That was then.

By the late '60s, the world wheat market began changing. In 1978 Chris Alaouze at the University of Wisconsin collaborated with two University of Melbourne agricultural economists on the paper "Oligopoly Pricing in the World Wheat Market." They described the wheat market in the '70s as a "triopoly involving the United States, Canada, and Australia."

Alaouze credited Australia's growing power to the boom in its wheat storage capacity, coupled with the country's willingness to hold wheat stocks over to the following marketing year instead of selling into depressed markets

Canada and the United States recognized the power that this strategy had brought to Australia, and they began inviting the Aussies to quarterly meetings to discuss wheat price and market share.

However, according to Alaouze, with a third major wheat producer at the table, Canada switched its marketing objective from maximizing exports to maximizing revenues.

This opened a door for the U.S., and William Wilson at the North Dakota State University has postulated that by the mid-'80s, the Americans had become the world's recognized wheat price leader.

In his 1986 paper "Competition in the International Wheat Market," Wilson wrote, "Canada's exports were restricted due to logistics and transportation problems which served as constraints and had an overriding influence on their stockholding decisions. Decisions were made in the mid-1970s to solve these problems, and thereafter the apparent Canadian strategy was to export according to transportation capabilities, as opposed to stockholding. This was an indication of perceived reduction in market power, and Canada essentially became a part of the competitive fringe."

Fast-forward to today

In the 30 years since Wilson's paper, and despite numerous Canadian studies of our grain-handling system, we have not solved our transportation, storage, and handling bottlenecks.

Our exports are still constrained by a lack of capacity beyond the farm gate. And farmers and the agricultural industry are suffering because of this.

While commercial storage capacity over the past half-century enabled Australia to become competitive in world wheat markets, the rationalization of branch lines and replacement of local elevators with inland terminals has actually reduced Canada's storage capacity, even though our production continues to increase.

Canadian Grain Commission data reveals that in 1970 we had 19.6 million tonnes of elevator storage. By 2014, this number had dropped by more than a third to 12.1 million.

So, although Australia can store two full crops in commercial storage, Canadians can store only about 20 per cent of their average grain output.

If it is true that storage capacity is a key determinant of market power, then Canada is losing out.

Theoretically, our evolving country collection system should be both more efficient and lower cost,

Who is AEGIC?

- A not-for-profit public company set up to improve the international competitiveness of Australian grains in global markets.
- Focuses on research, development and market intelligence.
- Created and funded by the government of Western Australia and the Grains and Research Development Corporation of Australia.
- Offers training opportunities for growers, consultants, marketers, food processors, plus technical training for end-users of Australia grains.
- Collects and provides production and yield data on Australian crops.
- Provides grain quality testing.
- Conducts supply chain analysis.
- Publishes strategic market intelligence reports.
- www.aegic.org.au/media/25873/aegic_supply_chains_report_2014_v3.pdf
- www.aegic.org.au/media/30985/140704%20aegic_supply_chains_report_postscript_hr.pdf
- www.aegic.org.au/

given faster loading, inland cleaning, increased blending ability, and multiple turns at facilities. But in a system where capacity is constrained, these advantages can only be optimized if there is transparency of supply and demand, and if deliveries are efficiently co-ordinated so the right grains go to the right facility at the right time.

Who is responsible for ensuring this transparency and for co-ordinating delivery in an open-market system?

Unfortunately, the competition in the world grain markets is also increasing. Nizami Imamverdiyev of the Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies (IAMO) looked at the increasing competitiveness of Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine (KRU) in the world market for a paper he presented at the 2014 IAMO last June.

Imamverdiyev made two points that Canadian farmers might want to pay close attention to. First is that according to USDA forecasts, these KRU countries will ship 22 per cent of the world's grain exports by 2021. Second, their increased output will largely mitigate all the concerns that we hear so often about whether the world's farmers will be able to feed our growing population.

Imamverdiyev also listed advantages the KRU countries have that will help them grow their market share, including low cost of production of high-quality wheat in Kazakhstan, better transportation links from Russia to both the EU and former Soviet Union countries, and the ready access from Ukraine to deepwater ports on the Black Sea.

In a 2013 MARKET WATCH interview, Arkady Sichevsky, president of the Russian Grain Union was quoted as saying: "We are capable of offering the global market less expensive wheat than competitors."

In the same article, Volodymyr Lapa, general director of the Ukrainian Agrarian Business Club said, "In the midterm perspective, the share of Ukraine, Russian and Kazakhstan in seven to 10 years will grow to 30 to 35 per cent of global wheat exports as compared with 12 to 17 per cent currently."

The KRU is not the only region that has the potential to increase production and exports. For instance, infrastructure improvements underway in Brazil could have a dramatic impact on global markets.

On October 29, 2014, the WALL STREET JOURNAL also reported that the Congo would be leasing up to 25 per cent of its arable lands (640,000 square kms; an area bigger than France) to foreign investors in the hope that those investors will build the infrastructure needed to transform the subsistence farming in that country into a modern agricultural industry.

Know your competition

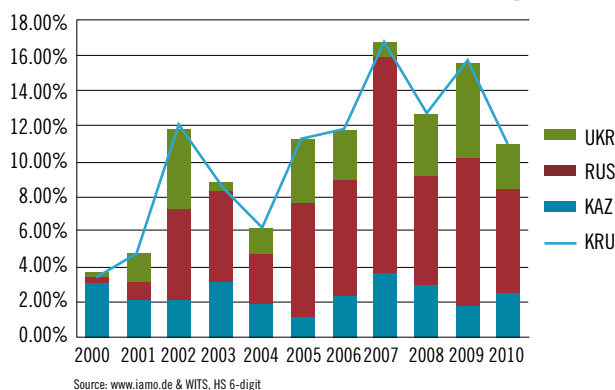
Perhaps the best description of the current Canadian strategy for exporting grains might be "let the market decide." But for this strategy to be successful, we must have better co-ordination between all sectors of the value chain. We need transparency of supply and demand, costs, and prices at all levels of the value chain.

We must have market intelligence into consumer preferences for types and quality of crops, plus insight into timing of sales and delivery. Then this information must be transmitted throughout the value chain — all the way back to the producer.

Most importantly, all sectors of the value chain must work together to ensure we can and will deliver what the market is asking for in a timely and efficient manner. If any link in the chain is unable or unwilling to meet this objective, we simply will not be competitive.

A cardinal rule for any business, no matter its size, location, or

KRU share in the world wheat export



product, is that management must know their competitors. To be successful, management must find out where they are outperforming their competitors, and where competitors have an advantage. Businesses must learn from their competitors' successes and failures as well as from their own experiences. They must adopt or adapt what their competitors are doing to stay competitive.

Canadian grain farmers need this information as much as anyone. We need to understand every step in getting our grain to the end-user, which means beyond the local elevator.

The Australian solution

Three years ago Australia recognized the need for increased market intelligence in grain exporting to identify potential export markets and to increase the international competitiveness of Australia grains.

Its solution was the creation of the Australian Export Grains Innovation Centre (see sidebar). AEGIC has not only completed a review and business analysis of the Australia grain system, it also sent a delegation of seven people to Canada in October to do a similar study of the Canadian grain export system and to look into what we are doing, both right and wrong.

According to Dr. Peter White, AEGIC supply chain specialist, "These analyses form two purposes — first, the identification of profitable and strategically desirable investment decisions, and second, the identification of unprofitable or spurious activities."

And, White adds, "The overall outcome is the enhanced efficiency of export grain supply chains and the return of a greater percentage of export value creation to producers."

Nor is AEGIC ready to rest on its heels. After it completes its Canadian studies, it is planning a business analysis of the Ukrainian grain system next year.

Through AEGIC, Australia is doing what every successful global business is doing. It is learning from its competitors how to make its system more efficient, and it is using those efficiencies to identify and grow markets.

While Australia works to grow its exports, Canada has been busy rationalizing in the name of efficiency. We have been deregulating under the guise of freedom, and privatizing in hopes of farmers receiving higher returns from corporate "partners."

Yet in many cases the opposite has occurred. Canadian farmers have been so busy building their individual farm businesses they have ignored the Canadian grains industry as a whole. Simply put, we cannot see the forest for the trees. And because of our short-sighted, inward focus we have been and continue to lose market share in the global grain market. **CG**

A new colour in farm tractors

Kubota moves toward its goal of being a major player in the ag equipment market

By Scott Garvey, CG Machinery Editor

The rumours had been building for months. There were even spy pictures posted on the Internet as possible proof. Then in September, Kubota's global headquarters made it official. The company is taking direct aim at the farm market.

More specifically, Kubota launched a new, powerful line of M-7 Series tractors, and these new tractors are pushing their upper horsepower limits well beyond anything the brand has ever offered in its previous smaller, utility-class models.

The launch means Kubota intends to play in an entirely new arena, and it represents the biggest step yet toward making the orange brand more appealing to farmers, allowing it to make serious inroads into the ag equipment market.

The company has apparently envisioned itself as a much larger player in that segment for some time. A few years ago, at least one corporate executive stated Kubota would eventually become a full-line ag equipment manufacturer. But is that still the target?

"I think it is," says Todd Stucke, Kubota's vp of ag and turf in the U.S. "I mean, we are constantly looking for areas to grow. We have, basically, three different product segments. And in each of those areas we're looking at how we expand the product line."

David Webster,
general manager
of Canadian sales
and marketing,
Kubota.



When COUNTRY GUIDE sat down for interviews with Stucke and his counterpart David Webster, general manager for sales and marketing in Canada, the two execs agreed the M7s are just one step in that effort. There is much more on the horizon to interest farmers.

"... As we look at getting into larger farming operations, we'll definitely continue to see product-line expansion, evidenced by the M7 tractor that was introduced," says Webster. "And we'll definitely see that product line continue to grow. The company isn't done there."

So for farmers who envision themselves spending a day in the field in a high-horsepower Kubota, i.e. something far beyond the 170-hp model that currently tops the M7 line, that day is likely to come.

But the brand isn't about to rush to market with a host of new equipment.

"We're going to do it right," says Stucke. "One step at a time. We have to get this tractor launched correctly."

Kubota's plans for the M7 Series in the short term are ambitious. As production begins in its new French factory, the company has set its sights on retailing 3,000 units per year globally by 2017. If initial orders from North American dealers are any indication, that shouldn't be a problem.

Over the long term, building tractors in France for North American dealers may not be the best strategy, as AGCO discovered. A couple of years ago it moved production of North America-bound Massey Ferguson and Challenger mid-range tractors from its Beauvais, France factory to Jackson, Minn., in order to be more responsive to market orders from this side of the Atlantic.

"Loaders for the M7 will come out of a facility in Georgia," says Webster. "We'll look for opportunities to localize production where it makes sense."

"I see that (North American M7 production) based on our performance over here," adds Stucke. "Once we get to a critical mass here, we'll look at a factory."

While the new tractors have a relatively broad appeal to farmers in Europe — where the average horsepower demand for field tractors is typically a little lower than in North America — they don't here. But they do fit nicely into Canadian and U.S. livestock operations.

"That's the difference between Europe and North America," says Webster. "Where that would be a tillage, field tractor in Europe, in North America, espe-

PHOTO: COURTESY KUBOTA

cially out west, we view that as a cattle tractor, fitting into livestock and haying operations. As we look to expand, that's where that tractor fits for us."

To complement that appeal to livestock growers in Canada and the U.S., dealers can now offer M7 tractors partnered with an expanding line of equipment made available by Kubota's latest corporate acquisition, Norwegian equipment manufacturer Kverneland, which has an established line of haying and tillage products. Selected haying implements are already being offered in Kubota orange. And there are plans to make new versions of them more attractive to North American farmers.

"One of the biggest things we'll be introducing is the silage baler," says Webster. "We have a 4x5, 5x5 (round) baler that we offer now in a couple of different models. And we offer those in silage configurations as well. We don't have a 5x6 baler yet, which is probably more applicable to customers in Western Canada, in the Prairie provinces. But that's something I expect to see in our product line in the coming years. With the acquisition of Kverneland, we'll see more of those products being offered under the Kubota brand."

Although the Kverneland acquisition is the only one Kubota has made in the ag sector recently, there has been persistent speculation in the industry of others pending — none of which seem to have yet come to fruition. Perhaps giving some credence to that chatter, the company isn't ruling out the possibility there actually could be more.

"The acquisition of Kverneland, I think, has demonstrated Kubota's appetite for acquisitions, not that there is an abundance of ag acquisition opportunities," says Webster. "But there are some, and I think there are other opportunities that will continue to be reviewed."

"We look at the opportunities out there," adds Stucke. "If any provide a synergy and stockholder value, then we'll look at that opportunity."

As the brand adds more products to its line and moves closer to full-line status in North America, at least one European trade publication is already referring to Kubota as a full-liner, because of the additional Kverneland products tailored for that market that are being sold there.

How becoming a full-line (or nearly full-line) brand would affect its Canadian



Todd Stucke is vp of Kubota ag and turf in the U.S.

dealer networks remains to be seen. On the surface, the fact that many Kubota dealers are also primary representatives for one of the Big Four major brands might seem to complicate retail agreements. Would some dealers be forced to drop a "full-line" Kubota?

"I think we'll see some of that," says Webster. "But over half of our (Canadian) dealer network is (already) Kubota only, so they're focused on providing Kubota solutions. I think we'll actually see more of that going forward. But our model looks a little bit different than the typical ag dealer in the West. We have compact construction equipment, skid steer loaders and small wheel loaders as well as turf equipment. When you look at that full product portfolio, those are areas your typical ag dealer isn't involved in."

The new line of M7 tractors designed to push Kubota deeper in the ag market generated a lot of buzz from dealers at the company's October convention.

"If dealers can make money selling our product, the transition will work itself out, whatever way that is," Stucke says confidently.

As the brand makes inroads in the ag market, Stucke believes Kubota will need a product support system that can offer farmers parts and service in a way that meets their often urgent needs, which is a different consideration than the company faces with its residential products.

"As we enter into a new segment, there are new customer demands," Stucke says. "We realized it's as much about product support as it is about the products themselves. It's a different demand than the residential customer. As Kubota enters that segment, we have to be ready."

Although both Webster and Stucke are keeping their cards close to their vests on the schedule for future product rollouts, they reveal there will be more of them, and their launches will be strategic.

"I'll speak for the U.S.," says Stucke, regarding Kubota's hay tools. "We're going to roll out the products as they match the horsepower of the tractor lines. We want our products to be pulled by a Kubota tractor. As we get higher-horsepower tractors we'll get more products. That's been our strategy here."

Adds Webster: "Our product line is definitely going to continue to expand." **CG**



Summer maximums haven't changed, but winter highs are much warmer.

Winter change

Winter is getting shorter, and this Ontario study found the growing season is four weeks longer

Instead of calling it climate change, maybe the phrase should be “winter change.” For the last six years, Trevor Dickinson, professor emeritus and a team from the University of Guelph have been studying temperature records from across Ontario, most of which date back 70 years, with some as old as 145 years, and their big finding is that our winters are warming much faster than our summers.

“We thought that we’d just look at the temperature data, and we found that yes, temperatures have been going up, and they have been going up — for any of the stations — for as long as there are records,” says Dickinson.

Then Dickinson and some of his colleagues took a closer look, monitoring daily types of temperature data, since he’d been studying those while engaging in earlier research work. “What are daily temperatures doing, and not only that, what are extreme maximum temperatures doing?” asked Dickinson. “That gave us some surprises.”

It turned out that Ontario's extreme summer temperatures, i.e. the highest temperature this year versus last year, etc., haven't gone up at all.

But the extreme minimums in winter did go up, and in many years, they've shown a considerable jump.

Similarly, summer minimum (i.e. nighttime) temperatures have gone up a little, but winter minimums have gone up much more.

“When the minimum dailies go up in the winter, it means the number of frost days goes down... the number of nights we go below freezing starts to decrease,” says Dickinson. “Across southern Ontario, we’ve gained 25 frost-free days in the last century. That’s almost a month just in the winter period.”

Dickinson's team also looked at winter precipitation. With fewer frost days, there's the potential for snowfall to turn to rainfall. There's also a greater potential for more snowmelt, due to warmer winter temperatures, fewer frost days, and more rainfall and more snowmelt during those “winter shoulder” periods (late November into December and then in March).



It all means that run-off and stream flows were likely much smaller 50 years ago, Dickinson suspects. He has begun to examine some of the stream-flow hydrographs across Ontario. Even though results are limited, he is seeing winter flows that are up and in some cases double what they were.

That seems to support anecdotal evidence from associates who monitor tile flow, and reporting more tiles running in the winter compared to years ago when they didn't.

Dickinson cautions against reading too much into these results: if winter flows in the past were one per cent, doubling means they've only risen to two per cent. Still, the bottom line on this branch of his research is that winter flows are increasing.

"It means there's more water moving," says

Dickinson. He adds that if there's less snowfall and more snowmelt in the winter, it suggests that the end-of-winter snowpack will be smaller, leading to the potential for a smaller spring freshet. "We're just beginning to look at the hydrographs that way in these natural areas, and sure enough, the spring freshets are down and occurring a little earlier."

THE ROAD (OR WATERWAY) AHEAD

There are also more facets of Dickinson's research that may have more direct impacts on farm and crop management. In spite of the fact that the more concrete change has come in winter, Dickinson has heard from another Guelph professor emeritus, Dr. David Hume.

"He has encouraged me to look at other things — that if frost-free days have gone up, well, what about heat units?" poses Dickinson. "So we've toyed with some of those, and even with the summer maxes, the extremes haven't gone up, but nighttime temperatures (in summer) have gone up a little bit."

Farmers can help themselves in many ways, he adds, noting that most know the parts of their fields where surface water collects or that experience the most run-off. If they can put measures in place that limit that — or enable it to run under the surface, for instance with properly installed Hickenbottoms and tile drainage systems — then those practices do more to help mitigate the impact of weather. **CG**

Shorter winters will mean more snowmelt, so low spots merit better flood protection.

Family first, or colleagues?

There are times when it's best to treat each other like business associates instead of family

By Helen Lammers-Helps

While everyone seems to agree that good communication is essential for success on today's multi-generational farms, many of us don't seem to be making much progress. That's not surprising to Reg Shandro, a Lacombe, Alta. mediator who specializes in helping farm families. After all, we get very little education on how to become good communicators, Shandro says. "Many people don't know what good communication looks like."

Communication breakdown is the No. 1 reason farm families seek out her coaching services, says Elaine Froese, a farm family coach in Boissevain, Man. Sometimes families don't know how to start the conversation, or they are overwhelmed, says Froese. Other times fear of conflict or fear of losing control are the problems, she says.

Poor communication comes with a high price tag. It leads to divorce and to loss of opportunity, and it can also lead to skilled people leaving the farm, says Froese.

But communication is an extra challenge on the farm, in part because when family members work together, they often relate to each other as family members instead

of business associates, says Pam Paquet, a psychologist and business coach in Port Coquitlam, B.C.

That gets you started on the wrong foot, although it's not hard to understand why it happens. It can be difficult to differentiate when a brother is being a brother, and when he is being a colleague, Paquet agrees. "Business etiquette doesn't always trump family habits."

Her advice is to hold regular formal meetings where business is discussed. This helps to keep your personal life separate from business issues. "It's powerful," says Paquet. "It centralizes where you talk about things and it avoids inappropriate conversations at other times."

There's a tendency to say you don't need a meeting because, after all, family members already talk at dinner or at the hockey game, points out Paquet. Unfortunately those get-togethers may not involve all the players who need to be there. By holding regular meetings you avoid the "you talk to him but not me" scenario and accusations of favouritism.

It also helps maintain boundaries around business issues. When a family member approaches you outside of work about a tough situation, you can tell them to put it on the agenda, says Paquet.

Paquet says these meetings need to be held at least once a month at a regularly scheduled time so everyone can keep the time open. And you must make room for meetings year round if you want them to be an effective communications tool. "Only holding meetings in the winter won't work," Paquet emphasizes. "You'll have an unhappy team if you don't meet during the crisis times."

It can be a challenge for families to keep the farm talk out of the Sunday supper. Paquet recommends limiting business talk to just 10 minutes during dinner. Come prepared with topics to discuss that don't involve the farm, she advises. For example, ask how your brother's kitchen renovation is coming along.

Paquet says it's essential to separate family and business relationships. This means that you need to present a balanced view when sharing details about your work with your spouse. "Don't just talk about the bad," she says. And you may need to filter what you say when reporting back to a spouse about other family members, she adds.

Also consider identifying communication as a skill that the entire team can get better at, Paquet recommends.

Five tips for better communication

From Elaine Froese, farm family coach, Boissevain, Man.

1. Speak in a calm and respectful tone. Look each other in the eye.
2. Ask permission if now is a good time to talk or when would work better.
3. Paraphrase what you heard the other person say to check that you got the correct intention of the message.
4. Make requests. Request that items that are hot issues be dealt with in a formalized meeting session, at a certain date and time, so that folks can process their responses and do research on the issue before the meeting.
5. Ask better questions. What would you like me to do differently in order to communicate better? What assumptions am I making? What am I responsible for? What can I learn about this situation?

Helpful books

CHANGE YOUR QUESTIONS, CHANGE YOUR LIFE by Marilee Adams
DO THE TOUGH THINGS RIGHT by Elaine Froese
FARMING'S IN-LAW FACTOR by Elaine Froese
CRUCIAL CONVERSATIONS by Kelly Peterson
FIERCE CONVERSATIONS by Susan Scott

Paquet says we often have a lot of unconscious bad habits and may not be aware of how we are treating our family and business colleagues. This makes it a good idea to tackle the issue as a form of professional development.

One option is to search Chapters or Amazon for a book on “good communication for family businesses.” Look for one that speaks to your situation, Paquet says. Then get a copy for everyone. After everyone has had a chance to read it, discuss it at a meeting and determine three take-away messages from the book.

Another option for professional development is to watch a webinar together at a staff meeting.

It's also important to understand that conflict is a naturally occurring part of any relationship, adds Shandro. Conflict can be both positive and negative. On the positive side, it helps us identify concerns and issues, create new opportunities and bring about change. It's how we manage conflict that's critical.

Shandro says we all have a conflict style based on genetic and environmental influences. There are varying degrees of assertiveness and co-operativeness that define our dominant styles, so ask yourself if your conflict style is working for you.

Most of us would also benefit from improving our listening skills, adds Shandro. “There's a difference between hearing and listening.

“Slow down to understand. Don't interrupt! Don't assume you know what they are going to say,” Shandro advises.

Shandro says we may need a trained third party, such as a mediator, to help us identify and change bad habits. “You don't know what you don't know.”

Chris Perry who farms with his brother Harold in southern Alberta, brought in a communications consultant a few years ago to help their staff of 10 full-time employees get along better.

While they initiated several strategies for better communication, such as weekly Monday morning meetings with the main crew and spring planting and fall harvest orientation sessions, one simple thing that has really made a big difference is saying “good morning” and finding out how the other person is doing before launching into discussing a problem. “It's not rocket science but it works,” he says.

“Having a happy crew is important,” says Perry. “If we're going to live, breathe and eat together, we might as well have fun while we're doing it.” **CG**



Helping the medicine go down

By Marie Berry

Lack of medication adherence (that is, taking your medication as you should) is called “the other drug problem.” It's thought that one in four people fail to take their prescribed medication, with half doing so because they struggle with compliance to their medication regime.

Some don't take their prescriptions because of drug side-effects. Others may not understand how or whether they should be taking the drug, and still others may simply forget.

Difficulty swallowing tablets and capsules is another of the reasons. But this is one that can be solved.

Making swallowing easier is one approach. Moisten your mouth with saliva or a couple of sips of water before swallowing because a dry mouth makes swallowing very difficult. Take a sip of water, swallow the tablet, then drink some more water. The quantity of water is also important. At least four ounces or about half a cup is needed to efficiently move a tablet or capsule down the esophagus and into the stomach. How much water do you take with your medicine?

Sometimes a thicker liquid such as juice works better, and if children like a specific type of liquid, for example an orange liquid, try that. Using a straw to drink the liquid means that there is some suction, which may also help. (If you sometimes “gag” after you swallow a tablet, take a deep breath after swallowing. This may help suppress this reflex.)

Throwing back your head after swallowing is another approach, but putting your chin down to your chest may work better.

Food may also help. Chew a little bit of a soft food like bread, but before you swallow it, take the tablet or capsule. You'll be swallowing both the food and the medication. After swallowing, following up with

some more food will help move the tablet down into the stomach. You can also use foods like applesauce, peanut butter, cottage cheese, yogurt, or pudding to help take your medication. Fill a larger spoon with the food and tablet or capsule and swallow the whole spoonful.

Before you add any medication to any food, you need to check with your pharmacist if the combination is suitable. Some combinations, for example tetracycline and milk-containing foods, counteract drug effectiveness. Crushing tablets or opening capsules and mixing the drug with a food is another option, but you also want to check with your pharmacist to ensure that the crushing or opening doesn't interfere with the drug therapy.

With children you want to be aware of flavour because adding a poor-tasting medication to their favourite juice may mean they won't like the juice in the future. A better approach may be to use the juice as a “chaser.”

Remain upright after you take any medication, either standing or sitting straight. This posture lets gravity help move the tablet down the esophagus and also helps prevent tablets or capsules from getting stuck in your throat. And, for some medications like alendronate, remaining upright is essential in preventing esophageal ulcers.

You do want to get the most from your medication, but if you just can't swallow it, look for alternatives. There may be a liquid, patch, or even suppository option that you can use. Another formulation may be available, meaning you need to swallow it fewer times daily. Or there may even be an alternate drug that has a smaller tablet size but is equal in therapeutic effect. Just don't give up!

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

A recent study showed that drugs like benzodiazepines certainly increased nursing home residents' risk for falls. While you may not think this research is important for you (after all you are young and not in a nursing home) it is important because it points to the link between some drugs and falls. Next issue, we'll look at this relationship.



By Leeann Minogue

The hard decision

Elaine was furious. "I know exactly what you're doing."

It was nearly midnight when Elaine and the baby got home. She carried the sleeping little girl in from the car. It had been a long day for one-year-old Jenny. Four and a half hours each way to Saskatoon and back, and a long afternoon entertaining her grandmother while Elaine went to a meeting.

Elaine was exhausted too. After she tucked Jenny into her crib, she peeked into five-year-old Connor's bedroom. He was sound asleep. She smiled, and looked into her own bedroom. Jeff wasn't there.

She found her husband in the living room, asleep on the couch while an infomercial hawked hair extensions on the television set. Connor's farm toys were spread all over the floor.

Still wound up from the long drive and the stressful meeting, Elaine went to the kitchen for a glass of water. On her way, she was distracted by papers spread all over the kitchen table, and Jeff's open laptop, still turned on and glowing in the darkness. Elaine glanced at the screen. Then she frowned. She pulled out the chair and took a seat in front of the computer and started investigating Jeff's Internet browser history.

I probably shouldn't look at this, she thought to herself. This is his computer. Not mine. But, we're a family. And he knows he shouldn't be looking at this stuff.

The more she looked at the colour photos on Jeff's screen, the angrier she got. I wasn't even gone a whole day, and he's looking at this? What am I going to do?

Then she found the worst of the incriminating evidence. A name and a meeting time, scrawled on a sticky note. A meeting set for Monday afternoon, when Elaine would be busy, volunteering with Connor's preschool.

Elaine slammed the laptop closed and went to the kitchen. She poured herself a glass of water and paced around the kitchen as she drank it. She weighed her options, and poured herself more

water. Then she went back to the living room couch. She shook Jeff awake.

"Oh, good, you're home," Jeff mumbled, blinking his eyes. "Sorry about the mess in here."

"Never mind the mess," Elaine said. "I've been looking at your computer. I saw your note. I know what you were doing today."

She could see the panic in his eyes. He'd been caught.

"I'm sorry, Elaine."

"Did you really think you could get away with this?"

"I was just looking. Nothing happened," he said.

"Yet."

"Elaine..."

"I know exactly what you're doing."

Jeff was silent.

"You're buying a second combine."

Jeff gave up on his own defence, and tried for pity.

"It's been a long day, looking after Connor. I'm half asleep. Could we talk about it in the morning?"

Elaine was still fuelled by fury.

"Do you even remember last year when we sat down with your parents and set out a vision for the farm?" she said.

"Well, yes," he said. "But we agreed. We'd expand if we got the chance. And now we've got the chance. Ron Friesen is pulling the plug on his farm. We finally have a chance to rent those two sections of his that butt up against ours. Dad and I have been watching that land for years. I've been blowing snow in the Friesens' yard after every blizzard for three years, hoping we'd get a chance to rent that land. Now we have our chance. Dad and I talked to Ron this afternoon. We've worked out a pretty fair price."

"But..." Elaine started, but Jeff interrupted.

"We have two kids. Don't you want to grow the farm?"

"That's not why I'm mad," Elaine said.

But Jeff was on a roll now. "You know as well as I do that we can't farm the extra land without a second combine. There's just not enough time. And did

you forget? Our combine was down for three whole days this year. If we had a second combine, at least we'd have a chance at finishing harvest before Thanksgiving next year."

He knew what he said was making sense, but he could see she was still angry.

"I've done all the math," he said. "I'll show you the spreadsheet, as soon as I rub all the sleep out of my eyes. It makes sense. Especially with the rent deal Ron cut us. All that snow blowing paid off. Now if we can just make a good deal with Greg on that used combine... Did you take a look at the specs? It looks perfect. Just what we need."

But Elaine still looked mad.

"Come on Elaine. You know this is what we need to do."

Finally, she exploded. "That's it exactly! You keep saying 'we!'" Jeff was puzzled.

"I thought we were partners in this. The 'we' should be you and me. But it never is. It's you and your dad."

"But," Jeff started, "you've never been that interested in machinery."

"That's not the point," she said. "I'm in charge of the finances. I do all the books. I know all the numbers. And you and your dad set up a meeting with the salesman to make a huge buying decision when you know I can't come. Would you have even told me about it if I hadn't seen the sticky note?"

"But you weren't here..." Jeff started lamely.

"I was gone for the day," she said. "I wasn't taking a six-month round-the-world cruise with no cellphone coverage. Remember the vision we made? It was about all of us making decisions together!"

"It's not like we've finalized everything..." Jeff said, knowing he wasn't really telling the truth.

"So we can just call Ron Friesen and tell him you don't want the land after all? And cancel the meeting with Greg if we decide not to buy another combine?"

Elaine stormed off to the bathroom, to wash her face so she could go to bed.

Jeff stood in the living room, wondering what to do. He looked down at the floor, where Connor's two combines stood in a row, ready to pick up more imaginary canola from the hardwood floor as soon as the boy jumped out of bed in the morning. Jeff followed Elaine down the hall and stood watching her from the bathroom doorway. He could see she was trying not to cry.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I should have waited for you. But Dad was excited. And if I thought you didn't want to expand the farm, I wouldn't have done it."

"I know that," Elaine said. "I just want to be part of things. I want your 'we' to be 'you and me.' Not 'you and your dad.'"

"You're right. I'll work on it." Jeff meant it, and Elaine could see that. Neither of them were sure if anything actually would or could change, but they could try.

"I'll reschedule the meeting with Greg. To a time when you can come."

"Good," Elaine nodded.

Jeff went back to the living room to shut off the TV before he went to bed.

Elaine heard him. "What's wrong?" she called.

"Stubbed my toe on Connor's damn second combine," he yelled back. **CG**

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



A shear bolt on my snowblower breaks in the middle of a Saskatchewan blizzard. I know where to go. I visit my dealer's parts counter. Searching for parts for my ride-on mower, grass sweeper, snowblower or 1945 John Deere AR leads to regular contact with Bruce, my favourite parts man.

There is a lineup, even in winter. Conversation is about the weather and hauling grain. The lineup waiting for Bruce is the longest. He is the expert on "the old stuff." The staff patiently search computer screens and flip through parts catalogues. When they have found the right part they hand it over the counter saying, "There you are," or, "That will do."

The brief conversations remind me of the man who claimed you could go through life with just those two phrases. "All you have to say is, 'There you are,' and, 'That will do.' You don't have to make conversation with anyone." He was a real minimalist. He also told me, "The only two expensive items you need in life are a good pair of boots and a good mattress. If you are not in one, you are in the other."

Few things in life have as much significance as our speech. Words can bring peace and joy. Words can reassure a fearful child. Loving words can cement a relationship. Words such as, "I love you, you are important to me, thank you so much," and, "I am proud of you," affirm the value of people.

Words can also wound and scar and push others away. Among the words we speak there are bound to be some delivered in anger, carelessness, or haste. We regret speaking some words. Once spoken, they are difficult to retract. Nothing impacts life more than the words coming out of our mouths. Words are powerful, important and significant.

The American philosopher and historian Will Durant said, "Talk is cheap because the supply always exceeds the demand. Nothing is often a good thing to do... and always a clever thing to say."

Paul, the New Testament preacher, became embroiled in a riot at Ephesus. The silversmiths were becoming wealthy by making idols. They were afraid the growth of Christianity would put them out of business. Paul and his travelling companions were the objects of their anger. Verbal chaos ensued: "Some were shouting one thing, some another; for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together" (Acts 19:32). The town clerk quieted the crowd. "You ought to be quiet, and do nothing rash."

Inconceivable harm comes from rash talking. Many people are quick to give opinions on subjects concerning which they really have no knowledge. People jump to conclusions without serious thought. Many are rash in blaming and condemning others. They do not take time to inquire into the circumstances, or to hear explanations. Others suddenly give way to temper and say words that are not only unfitting — but also cruel and unjust. Family tensions result from ill-chosen words. Often the questions wrangled over are of no importance.

"The Desiderata," written by Max Ehrmann in 1927, advises "Go placidly amid the noise and haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence... Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others."

Suggested Scripture: Acts 19:21-41, James 1:19-27


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