



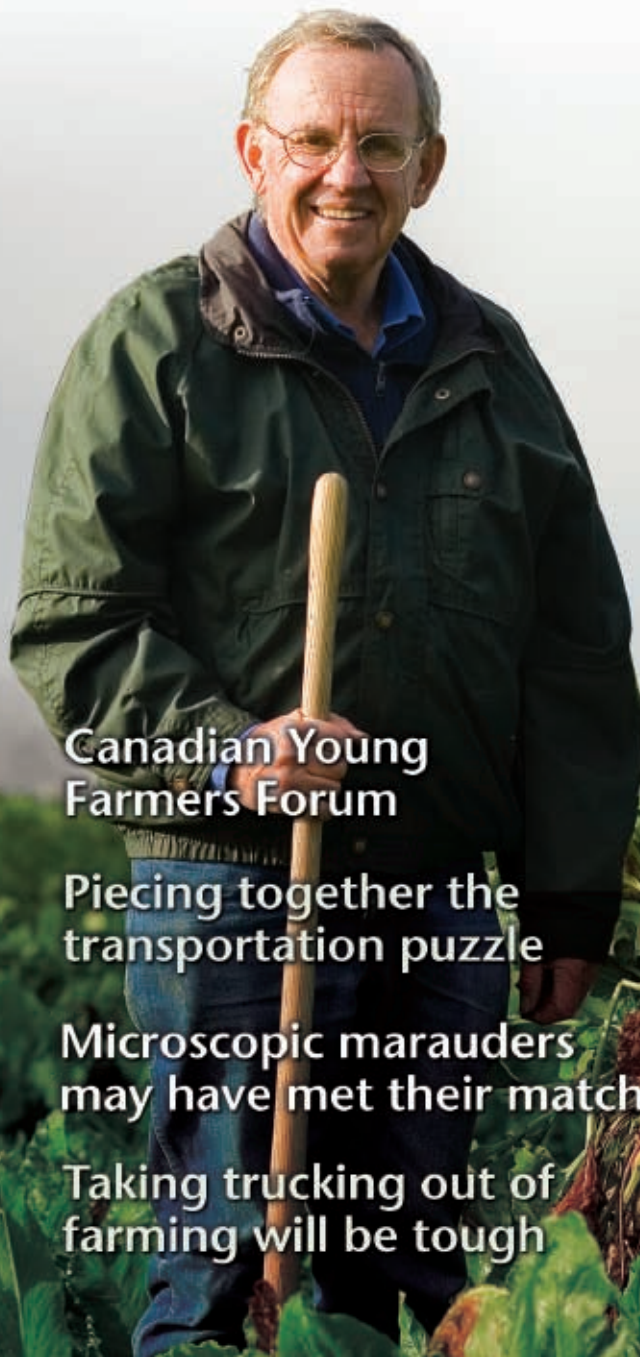
Farm Credit Canada

Canada

January/February 2008

AgriSuccess

JOURNAL



**Canadian Young
Farmers Forum**

**Piecing together the
transportation puzzle**

**Microscopic marauders
may have met their match**

**Taking trucking out of
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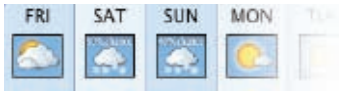
Canada

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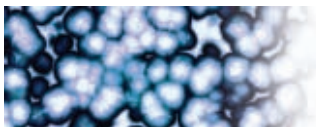
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On the cover:

Owner Bob Kerr and Dave Hunter on Kerr Farms in Chatham, Ontario.

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Letter from the editors



FROM KEVIN HURSH AND ALLISON FINNAMORE

The journalists who write for the AgriSuccess Journal seldom meet face-to-face. The only event that brings many of us to the same location is the annual Canadian Farm Writers' Federation (or CFWF) meeting, which is at a different location across the country each fall.

At the end of September, the CFWF meeting was in Belleville, Ont., and one of the main conference themes was local food. During that timeframe, journalists were working on material for this edition of the Journal. Coincidentally, the theme of this edition is transportation, which relates directly to the local food movement.

It was great to hear and see successful examples of producers tapping into local markets. A growing number of producers as well as consumers are committed to this concept.

In locations like Ontario's Prince Edward County, there's a wealth of local fruits and vegetables as well as wines and apple cider. There's also a large nearby population of affluent consumers happy to buy fresh, local food products.

However, many of the farm writers in attendance came from regions of the country where the local food movement has a much more limited potential. Most commercial scale cattle, hog, dairy, poultry and grain operations produce far more product than can be sold locally. Plus, their products need extensive processing before going to consumers.

Indeed, Canadian producers are major exporters to consumers around the world. For most producers, transportation considerations are a major component of conducting business.

In this edition of the Journal, we highlight a number of local food success stories. We also take a critical look at rising transportation costs and what producers can do to help manage this expense. And we have a number of other topics as well, ranging from keeping kids safe on the farm to controlling mold in stored produce.

We hope you find information and insights that are useful to your farming operation. You can reach us with your questions or comments by e-mailing info@AgriSuccess.ca or by calling 1-888-332-3301.

AgriSuccess Journal is a magazine dedicated to helping producers advance their management practices by providing practical information, real-life examples and innovative ideas that foster personal solutions.

AgriSuccess JOURNAL

This month's contributors

Kevin Hursh, Editor

Kevin is a consulting agrologist, journalist and broadcaster based in Saskatoon, Sask. He also takes an active role in the management and operation of a grain farm near Cabri, Sask.

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D. Lorraine Andrews

Lorraine is a freelance journalist who lives in High River, Alta. She grew up on a large grain farm at nearby Vulcan and has written for a number of agriculture related publications.

The editors and journalists who contribute to AgriSuccess Journal attempt to provide accurate and useful information and analysis. However, the editors and FCC/AgriSuccess cannot and do not guarantee the accuracy of the information contained in this journal and the editors and FCC/AgriSuccess assume no responsibility for any actions or decisions taken by any reader of this journal based on the information provided.

The views expressed in this journal are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editor or FCC/AgriSuccess.

Wheat for ethanol

BY RAE GROENEVELD

Winnipeg-based Canterra Seeds is trying to be the first to register wheat varieties specifically suited to the ethanol market.

Two red spring wheat varieties called Chablis and Shiraz are being tested in the Co-op registration trials. Canterra's hope is that after the 2008 growing season, they will be able to get these varieties registered in the new general-purpose wheat class.

In 2002, Canterra started developing high yield feed wheat varieties that were low in protein and high in energy. With the growth of the ethanol industry in North America, they now believe the varieties are better suited for ethanol production.

Canterra claims these varieties are 10 to 15 per cent higher yielding than the current highest yielding wheat.

Save money with better weather info

BY D. LARRAINE ANDREWS

A new Internet-based network in Western Canada will allow producers access to live instantaneous local weather data.

Promoters say the information has the potential for major financial benefits for producers, especially when it comes to spraying expensive crop protection products or predicting yields.

The Canadian Wheat Board has teamed up with Pioneer Grain Company, WeatherBug® and Parkland Agri Services to connect 600 micro-weather stations across the West over the next three years.

The stations can update conditions on a farm every two-and-a-half seconds, including temperature, precipitation, humidity, pressure, wind speed and wind direction. The machines link to an Internet-based network, allowing subscribers to access data for the entire region in real time from their computers, cell phone or wireless devices (e.g. BlackBerry).

Users will be able to access an online weather website, including historical data and a locally generated weather forecast, for \$100 a year. Producers who want a station on their farm will pay a one-time fee of up to \$800 with free installation. For details, check www.cwb.ca.

Net metering encourages green power

BY KEVIN HURSH

Saskatchewan has launched a net metering program that will allow customers generating their own electricity to send any excess back to the electrical grid for a credit on their power bill.

The program applies to sources such as wind, solar, low-impact hydro, waste heat recovery and biomass. The electricity will be measured through a certified bi-directional meter installed by SaskPower.

The province has allocated \$300,000 per year for four years to help offset the cost of purchasing the required generating equipment for those who wish to participate. Funding will be administered by the Saskatchewan Research Council. See www.src.sk.ca.

David Quick with Solar West, a Saskatoon-based company distributing wind turbines and solar panels, says the new program dramatically improves the economics for agricultural producers who wish to generate some or all of their own electricity requirements.

A number of other provinces, including Ontario and British Columbia, allow net metering.



Just send it on an airship



BY KEVIN HURSH

At first blush it seems far-fetched. Except for hot air balloon rides and floating billboards, most of us give little thought to this method of transportation. But within five years, there will be new-age commercial cargo airships predicts Barry Prentice, professor of supply chain management with the I.H. Asper School of Business, University of Manitoba. Once they reach the 100-tonne lift mark, he says, they will start moving agricultural commodities long distances.

Talk of airships today conjures images of the Hindenburg disaster and large ground crews straining on ropes, however, Prentice says 12 projects in eight different countries are actively developing the airship technology. With advances in carbon-fibre construction materials, vectored engines and computerized avionics, no technical barriers remain.

Imagine the benefits of bypassing the congestion of ports, airports and highways.

Prentice points out that airships and airplanes were neck-and-neck in development heading into the Second World War. Massive wartime investment in the airplane for military use made all the difference. The potential for airships is just being rediscovered.

Currently, some seafood and fresh flowers are moved to market via airplane. Jet transport is expensive and restricted to high value products with a very short shelf life.

On the other end of the spectrum, products with a very long shelf life and comparatively low value – such as grains – are moved long distances by marine transport.

It's in the middle of these extremes that Prentice sees the best application for airships: products like fresh meats and medium-valued tropical fruits. Bulky cargoes such as lettuce, green peppers and ripe tomatoes would seem ideally suited.

Airships can travel surprisingly fast – about 80 miles per hour. Travelling 24 hours a day in a straight line, they can cover a lot of distance. And imagine the benefits of bypassing the congestion of ports, airports and highways!

Being lighter than air, fuel consumption is required for only the forward motion. Thus airships are much more fuel-efficient than airplanes and cause much less pollution.

Prentice also points out that the large surface of an airship could support thin solar films. Solar power would reduce fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.

Northern Canada is expected to be one of the first places to use new generation airships because freight rates are very high and there are few alternatives. Once the industry gets a foothold, however, airships could have a major impact on north-south trade.

“We’re a protein-rich region, with high yielding grain and forage crops,” Prentice says, referring to the northern hemisphere. “In the tropics they are protein deficient, but they can grow fruits and vegetables.” He sees airships as a viable way to facilitate two-way trade.

As an agricultural producer, you aren’t likely to read this and then hurry away to develop a business plan based on the future potential of airships. There are simply too many unanswered questions.

By the same token, technology continues to have a huge impact on our lives and businesses. Just a few years ago, talking GPS maps in our vehicles seemed improbable and generating electricity from the wind didn’t seem viable. New technologies are being adopted more quickly than ever.

If Barry Prentice is right, airships could have a profound impact on agricultural trade and the bottom line of many producers. Links to a number of papers on the topic can be found at www.isopolar.ca. ♦



Canadian Young Farmers Forum

BY RAE GROENEVELD

Canada's young farmers have an outlet for dealing with the challenges they face. The Canadian Young Farmers Forum (CYFF) was established in 1997 as a way for producers to get professional development and to find solutions to the problems they face.

"It's a lot about leadership, training, building a network and personal knowledge to help you better succeed in your farming endeavors," explains Robert Brunel, Manitoba and Saskatchewan representative for the CYFF.

"There is always something you can pull out of the different workshops and networks that we hold and host."

Brunel, 32, farms in the Ste. Rose, Man. area and has been involved in the CYFF for three years. Brunel farms 3,000 acres of grains, oilseeds and forage seed.

"A lot of this (CYFF) is similar to what I took in university, but this is maybe a step further," remarks Brunel.

"Whether you are just entering farming or have been farming for 10 or 15 years, there is always something you can pull out of the different workshops and networks that we hold and host."

The CYFF conducts business training sessions, communications workshops and other forms of professional development to help young producers survive in today's high risk farming environment.

With producers from across the country participating, there is a wide range of interests to try and balance. Members' backgrounds range from fruit growers to chicken producers to grain and oilseed farmers. Despite that diversity, the CYFF tries to move past industry-specific issues and focus on common challenges that all young producers face – such as intergenerational transfer of farms.

"There are always similarities no matter what type of operation it is. There's an entry point for everyone."

Brunel points out that access to capital is a big issue for new farmers trying to enter the business.

"That's the common similarity that we all have no matter whether you're in supply management or a grain and oilseed producer or an apple grower from B.C."

The ability to network about the challenges of getting started and being profitable is one of the most valuable aspects of the CYFF, according to Brunel.

"A lot of the challenges are very similar and there's a huge benefit from interacting in a network of young farmers from across the country."

Part of the CYFF's goal is to help prepare the agriculture leaders of the future. While most of the focus of the organization is on professional development, there is an aspect of developing policy that helps young producers.

"We are not a lobby group and that is very clear," stated Brunel. "We do interact with policy makers from across the country and hopefully have a small impact on policies that impact young farmers."

The CYFF has eight affiliate organizations in the 10 provinces. It is open to young producers between the ages of 18 and 40. To join, producers can go through an affiliate member or they can join on their own. For more information, check the Canadian Young Farmers Forum website at www.cyff.ca. ❖



Educating the customer



BY ALLISON FINNAMORE

It's one matter to promote a Canadian food item to foreign buyers. It's quite another to woo them into becoming experts on the product and get them to turn the Canadian food ingredient into something of their very own, specific to their culture and domestic production practices.

The Canadian International Grains Institute (CIGI) is a non-profit market development organization promoting Canada's field crop industries in international and domestic markets. They run educational programs and technical training sessions, inviting industry representatives from grain, oilseed, pulse and specialty crop industries to participate.

"The magic is being able to show the customer how to use our grain in their process."

Training includes classroom presentations, tours and field trips. CIGI, located at the Canadian Grain Commission facility in Winnipeg, includes a pilot flour mill, pulse processing and specialty milling facility, commercial-

scale pilot bakery, test bakery, pilot noodle plant, pilot pasta plant and quality control and food quality testing laboratories (for more details, visit their website at cigi.ca).

Len Seguin is director of programs at CIGI. He feels the educational element is a real strength. "We bring customers into the country and teach them how to use wheat in their domestic circumstances – Canadian grain, their process," he says.

Follow-up with customers is another of CIGI's strengths, Seguin states. With teams of technical experts in the various test sectors, help is available if customers encounter problems. CIGI technology staff specialize in analyzing food properties and processes, but programs also focus on feed ingredients like wheat, barley, canola meal, flax and flaxseed meal, peas, processed alfalfa, rye and grain screening pellets.

"We help customers resolve their problems, like an after-sales program," he says. "If they get a cargo of grain and it's not working like it should, we help them."

CIGI's work also extends to some applied research, like investigating opportunities for industry expansion with other crops. Seguin says they've studied incorporating ground flax into pasta and muffins, for example, finding the right mix for optimum health benefit and taste.

The added value of CIGI's testing and training programs – and maybe its key to success – is the opportunity to show current and future customers how Canadian grains work in their own environment.

"The magic is being able to show them how to use our grain in their process – let's do it the way you do it," he says.

Since it opened in 1972, more than 25,000 individuals from 110 countries have attended CIGI programs. The institute is headed by a board of directors with representatives from the Canadian Wheat Board, the Canadian Grains Commission and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

The road from farm to fork is often long and complex. Local food movements may be a fabulous way for the horticulture and livestock industries to connect with consumers, but the task is more challenging for grain producers. CIGI creates a valuable connection that helps bring grain producers and processors together. ♦



Seeds in a test tube in agricultural lab.

Piecing together the transportation puzzle

BY KEVIN HURSH

If transportation costs continue to increase, will the face of agriculture be altered? How long will it remain feasible to move food products across the country, across the continent or even halfway around the world? Perhaps buying food locally will become a necessity rather than a consumer choice.

While that's what the trend line numbers might suggest, the issue isn't as straightforward. Transportation costs are affecting production patterns and how business is conducted, but the movement of agricultural products is as brisk as ever.

Extreme freight costs

The rail freight to get barley from a central Prairie location to export position at Vancouver is around \$40 a tonne. If it is feed barley destined for Saudi Arabia, the ocean freight in recent times has been more than \$80 a tonne.

Do the math and the cost to get barley from Watrous, Sask., to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, is more than \$2.50 a bushel. And that doesn't include getting the barley from the farm to the railway in the first place.

When you examine transportation costs related to the value of the product, it makes you wonder if the system is sustainable.

Most feed barley from Western Canada stays in the region to be used by cattle feedlots and hog operations, but when international prices are sufficiently strong, feed barley also goes to export markets. For that to happen, offshore prices need to be high enough to offset the big freight bill.

Ocean freight costs have risen rapidly in recent years but fuel costs are not the main reason, says Brian Morris, transportation analyst with the Canadian Wheat Board. Imports of raw materials into expanding economies such as China and India have meant a shortage of ocean freighters.

"The major shipyards are booked solid building more vessels, but delivery takes years," Morris notes. Thus the squeeze on transportation capacity could continue for the foreseeable future.

High ocean freight costs have affected competitive advantage. Australia is far closer than Canada to markets



in China, Japan and India. Therefore Aussie producers have a higher net return from those markets than Canadian producers.

Of course, that doesn't matter much if you don't have product to ship. For the past two crop years, Australian production has been dramatically reduced by drought.

We can't afford to have transportation such a big percentage of the total value anymore.

China is a huge exporter of manufactured consumer goods, and those products reach markets around the world in containers. Business is so strong that the containers often go back to China empty. Prentice believes that as transportation costs rise backhauls will become more important, opening up the potential to move more agricultural products in containers returning from the Western world.

Many specialty crops (such as chickpeas) and organic grains already move by containers. Prentice says many users like the quality control and smaller quantities. They often prefer just-in-time delivery rather than holding large inventories.

From bulk to containers

Rising transportation costs as well as other factors could accelerate the switch from bulk shipments to containers, says Barry Prentice, professor of supply chain management with the I. H. Asper School of Business, University of Manitoba.

Important transportation principles

As the move to container shipping shows, transportation systems are constantly evolving to meet business needs. Ethanol from wheat and corn has been relatively easy to develop because we have a well-established handling system. Transportation is one of the barriers to producing ethanol from biomass.

Producers know intuitively that heavy, bulky products are not good candidates for movement, particularly if they have relatively low value. Another example is hay, which is costly to move long distances when there are feed shortages. The transportation bill can quickly exceed the value of the hay. As a general rule, the more processing that goes into a product, the less transportation costs matter. Refrigerated transportation for meat may seem expensive, but as a percentage of value the cost is much less than shipping grain.

Access to processing plants is a big issue for livestock producers. As slaughter and processing plants have consolidated, producers in many regions of the country have had to ship their animals much farther. In addition to the extra trucking costs, death loss and shrink (weight loss) become part of the equation.

Pooled transportation costs

For the producers of some commodities, transportation costs are not a major consideration. For instance, it's common to have pooled transportation charges for milk going from dairy farms to processing facilities.

Every dairy producer in the province pays the same amount – about 2.5 cents per litre for raw milk transport,



says Dairy Farmers of Ontario transportation manager Dave Hitchon. Compared with many other commodities, that transportation charge represents a low percentage of the total value.

Hitchon notes that a new dairy farm setting up in a remote part of Ontario would be required to pay a transportation fee more reflective of the actual cost.

Transportation in your business plan

In its massive greenhouse complex at Leamington, Ont., Seacliff Farms propagates plants for sale to other greenhouses in the region. Owners John and Bob Ondejko also have a thriving business in potted plants, which are sold to retailers such as The Home Depot.

Seacliff used to sell potted plants all the way from Leamington to Montreal. With rising transportation costs, their marketing region now goes only as far as Toronto.

“Margins are tight. We can’t afford to have transportation such a big percentage of the total value anymore,” John Ondejko explains.

The brothers use a special software program to calculate the most efficient routes for their deliveries.

Seacliff runs its own trucks. The 53-foot insulated and heated trailers have custom tailgates to service delivery at retail stores. A trailer can hold about 2,000 pots with a 10-inch diameter. The freight bill to Toronto is about \$1,000, or about 50 cents per pot. That represents more than their typical labour cost per pot.

Practical transportation tips

It’s difficult to come up with advice that fits all the different circumstances surrounding transportation issues, but here are some thoughts for consideration:

- In your business planning, it’s important to treat transportation costs consistently. If you’re comparing returns from corn to returns from soybeans, it might be best to use net prices f.o.b. the farm to account for differences in transportation costs.
- Many producers are faced with decisions about whether to custom-hire the movement of their products to market or whether they should own the trucks. Here’s a consideration to put into the mix: who is in the best position to find appropriate backhauls – you or a custom-trucking firm?
- Try to anticipate changes. How will you be affected if a particular grain elevator or meat processing facility closes? If a buyer is currently paying you a trucking premium, how long is that likely to last?

For transportation issues we need to think globally, but act locally. All indications point to increasing transportation costs in the years ahead. That will affect trade patterns, but people still need to eat. ♦





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Advancing the business of agriculture

Local food

moving to the mainstream

BY ALLISON FINNAMORE

One of the hottest trends in food marketing these days is the local food movement. Promoting the benefits of buying agriculture products grown right in consumers' backyards is breaking through in nearly every sector.

The marketing is taking many forms, too. Some programs point out how far food travels to reach consumers' plates, while other promotions highlight the economic and health benefits of purchasing food grown closer to home.

The marketing seems to be working. Statistics show the public trend towards purchasing sustainable food has increased 92 per cent since the beginning of 2007, according to Mike Schreiner, vice president of Local Food Plus, an Ontario-based local food organization.

"What's clear to me is that the local food movement has gone mainstream," Schreiner says.

By pointing out that local food supports local agriculture, which supports the local economy while protecting farmland, Schreiner says it creates a winning combination for producers. In addition, local food programs need to stress that food purchased from nearby farms is often as affordable as non-local food, and of higher quality. Price

is often the scapegoat of why shoppers stray to imported food, but Schreiner believes consumers are willing to pay more now.

"The number one desire of consumers is an authentic food experience. People want the real deal and they vote with their dollars," he states.

And while it creates the opportunity to turn much of agriculture into a "value driven market," Schreiner also acknowledges the realities encountered by farm producers. It's hard to compete with imported food produced in countries with lower wages, but he maintains that consumers are ready to make the switch to local food.

"Buyers are willing to pay more for products that reflect their values," Schreiner says, adding that if local food practices are agreeable to neighbouring residents, customers will support the initiative.

Schreiner believes this rising interest is about to plateau and hold steady.

"We're in this huge spike upwards – the interest is going to wane soon and local food is going to become the new norm," he predicts.



In 1999, Bob Kerr and his team decided to focus on growing for the local market. The driver? Farm income was declining with traditional farming practices. He saw the need to identify a niche market and opted to venture into organic food production, embracing the opportunity to promote local food at the same time.

Kerr farms 1,700 acres of crop and pasture land at his farm in Kent County, Ont. Of that, 1,100 acres is certified organic land where he has field-scale production of crops like tomatoes, eggplant, asparagus, squash, feed corn, soybeans and green peas for both processing and fresh food markets as well as beef.

"The commodity prices were low; farming was not as profitable," Kerr recalls. "What could we do to get back to a decent level of income? I set out to make changes and farm organically and develop niche markets."

Kerr believes in a strong future for local food production with room for the industry to expand. However, he cautions producers just entering the field to be patient as they develop their new contacts and get themselves established as local producers.

"It's a new opportunity to make a living and make a better living as the market develops, but there is a learning curve," he says.

Kerr says the key ingredient to success is selling shoppers on the opportunity to buy locally grown food.

"Local food is important because that's a competitive advantage that the greenhouses in Mexico can't take away from us. It opens new markets and creates new opportunities for local farmers." ♦

Local food production programs abound across the country. In some cases, agriculture producers are joining together to form marketing groups. In other cases, the grower groups are taking on the job. Various levels of government are also starting local food promotion programs, with provincial governments, counties and municipalities in various locations in Canada getting in on promotion.

Here is a brief overview of some programs across the country:

Ontario's Local Food Plus is a non-profit organization bringing "farmers and consumers to the table to share in the benefits of environmentally and socially responsible food production." Producers and processors go through a certification system and are linked with local purchasers. www.localfoodplus.ca

Eat B.C.! campaign is a provincially operated program targeting restaurants, grocery stores, farm markets, universities and cafeterias and some health care facilities. www.eatbc.com

Select Nova Scotia is a provincially driven program backed by support from the food services sector, agriculture and grocery stores. The program is working to increase awareness and consumer knowledge. Increased consumption within government is also a goal. Already, local products have been made available in health care and justice institutes. www.selectnovascotia.ca



Bob Kerr grows organic produce.

Taking trucking out of farming will be tough



BY HUGH MAYNARD

Food miles – how far the food on supermarket shelves travelled – is a big issue now. This is being driven (no pun intended!) by concerns about the impact of transportation on climate change and the evolving socio-economic context around food production: why are we putting local farmers out of business and trucking our food an average of 2,500 kilometres before it gets served at the dinner table?

All types of agricultural produce have to be shipped some distance.

A good question, but one that has two sides to its coin. Saskatchewan wouldn't be – well, Saskatchewan – without wheat and the ability to export around the world. All types of agricultural produce have to be shipped some distance given the concentrations of urban populations where the bulk

of consumers reside. And a great deal of energy can be expended just moving around trying to locate local foods for the now famous “100-mile diet.”

The global economy for food has been around for a long time, and it's not about to go away given that there are areas of the world that offer a natural advantage in the types of food produced. The real issue is not just the miles that food travels, but the total impact – socially and environmentally – of the global trade in food.

Even with the abandonment of short-track railroads across Canada, there's still less environmental impact from shipping a trainload of western wheat to eastern cities compared with lots of smaller truckloads making local deliveries. And is producing greenhouse tomatoes in a Canadian winter more energy efficient than trucking them from Florida or filling empty planes coming back from Chile?

Local food production deserves renewed importance in policy and program decision-making because of the socio-economic benefits that it brings to both producing (rural) and consuming (urban) communities. But it can't be exempt from the environmental judgments being made on food imports that travel from afar, and this is where opportunity knocks.

Farmers still have to truck their local produce to market regardless of distance, so here's an opportunity to use biodiesel to make the trips more environmentally friendly. There are plenty of other opportunities to convert biomass into energy for carbon-neutral food production: wood or grain-hull pellets for the greenhouse furnace, or manure for co-generation of electricity to use in refrigeration and other processing.

The Canadian Farm Business Management Council (www.farmcentre.com) provides lots of information on different ways producers can use bio-energy.

Interested producers can even go one step further by signing up to buy carbon credits – some of which will come back to the agriculture sector in support of activities that help reduce the carbon footprint of farming. Many producers are interested in selling carbon credits, but a farm could also buy credits for the same reasons that some other businesses do.

A Canadian organization offering the offset service is Planetair (www.planetair.ca), among several others. It's also a great marketing tool to show consumers that producers are capitalizing on their ability to effect change related to climate change, and a good way to keep on truckin' in an environmentally friendly way. ♦



Keeping kids safe



BY PETER VAN DONGEN

I haven't met many kids who would turn down an offer to get out and explore life on the farm. Whether born and bred on the farm or out visiting from the city, it's easy for a wide-eyed and curious six-year-old to perceive the farm as a giant playground.

As a new dad, this fact has taken on a whole new meaning for me. My four-month-old daughter hasn't even started crawling yet, but already I can see the day in the not-so-

Farms can be particularly hazardous for children.

distant future when she has figured out how to work her little legs and is eager to investigate every inch of that vast new world called Grandma and Grandpa's Farm. While I look forward to this day it also concerns me – not because there is anything amiss on the farm, but because of the inherent characteristics of farms and children.

Farms can be particularly hazardous for children because of the proximity of the work site to living and play areas, the isolation of the farmstead, and the fact that farm parents often face hectic and unpredictable work schedules, making child supervision a challenge. At the same time, children are naturally curious creatures and often lack the knowledge and experience necessary to identify and avoid risks around the farm. These underlying forces conspire to produce some rather telling statistics.

According to the Canadian Agricultural Injury Surveillance Program, 171 children under the age of 15 were killed in agricultural incidents on Canadian farms between 1990 and 2000. The three most common causes were bystander runovers, extra rider deaths (where children have fallen from a machine and then been run over, or have been involved in an event while riding on a farm machine) and drowning. Collectively, these accounted for 78 per cent of deaths in children six years old and younger.

Fortunately, when we know the primary causes we can develop appropriate prevention strategies. One of the most important things you can do is set up a designated safe play area that protects children by removing

them from traffic and work areas. The best safe play areas incorporate a fence or some other physical barrier, provide enough room for kids to run around and explore, and are easily supervised. It's also important to include safe and age-appropriate play equipment such as a sandbox or playhouse to make sure that the play area is more enticing than the farmyard.

The Prince Edward Island Farm Health and Safety website suggests you ask your children to help select the best location for the play area. This ensures you identify locations the children find interesting that you may have overlooked, while also helping the children develop a sense of ownership in the area as "their space."

There is a wealth of information available online about how to make your farm a safer place for children. Consider starting with a Google search for "Creating Safe Play Areas on Farms" to access a free handbook. ♦



Microscopic marauders may have met their match



BY OWEN ROBERTS

When harvest ends in the fruit and vegetable sector, certain microbiological troubles begin. Harmful microscopic pathogens – including the particularly nasty and widespread *Botrytis cinerea* (commonly known as grey mold) – discreetly accompany their hosts into cold storage facilities. And in as little as a few weeks, they're having a feast.

In fact, post-harvest disease experts estimate grey mold and a few other molds cause losses from five per cent to more than 20 per cent, depending on the commodity. It's even

**In most years,
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worse in developing countries, where the lack of refrigeration can spark mold-related losses as high as 50 per cent. Disease incidence varies from year to year, and with location, due to environmental and biological factors. But in most years, grey mold takes a toll on almost

everything in its path – grapes, apples, pears and cherries, as well as greenhouse cucumbers, tomatoes and peppers.

One solution is to spray fungicides. Besides being expensive, many consumers have concerns about pesticide use.

So, researchers are trying to stop the problem before it starts. Professor Louise Nelson, post-doctoral fellow Danielle Hirkala and graduate student Daylin Mantyka of the University of British Columbia Okanagan, along with research scientist Peter Sholberg of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's Pacific Agri-Food Research Centre, are setting out to identify fruits and vegetables that are infested by the miniscule fungi long before harvest.

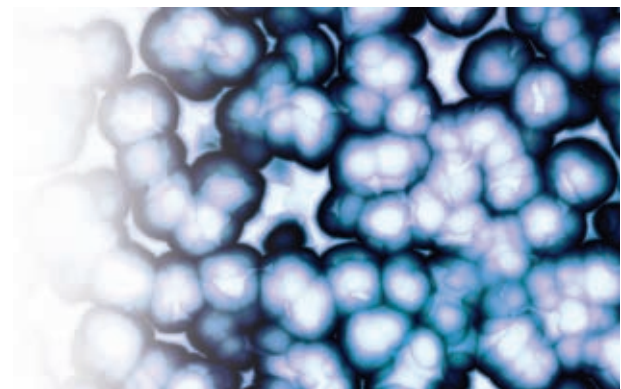
With support from the Advanced Foods and Material Network and Western Economic Diversification Canada, they're putting a finger on the potentially troublesome molds – while the host organisms are still on the tree or vine – through a process called DNA-based macroarray technology. A tissue sample is analyzed and compared to established DNA to unearth the presence of anything unusual.

But suppose something slips through the cracks, isn't found in the sample by macroarray analysis, and starts on the way to post-harvest storage. In that case, the researchers have an insurance plan called a soil bacterial isolate bath. They've found soil bacterial isolates (called pseudomonads) that suppress the growth of three problematic pathogens: grey mold, blue mold and Mucor rot. The process is straightforward: as the produce enters storage, the researchers simply run it through a solution containing the isolates.

The question is, will consumers be comfortable with produce that's had a bacterial isolate bath? That, says Nelson, is a challenging part of the project. However, as she notes, we consume bacteria all the time. They're a part of the environment. And we are able to handle certain bacteria, the same kind the researchers are using in the baths.

"If you pulled a carrot from the garden and gave it only a quick wash, you would likely be consuming a significant number and variety of micro-organisms associated with that plant," she says. "And yogurt manufacturers seem to be making headway in convincing consumers of the benefits of eating yogurt with live bacterial cultures present."

This fall and winter, the researchers are sampling apples during storage to determine the survival of the applied bacteria from the bath. They hope that by the time the produce is ready for the market, the bacteria's numbers are insignificant and the fungi have met their match. ❖



It's all about the customer for Stewart

As the new president and CEO of Farm Credit Canada (FCC), Greg Stewart has big plans. And at the center of it all is serving those involved in Canadian agriculture.

"Whatever our employees are working on, they consistently ask each other, 'How is this going to help customers?'" says Stewart, FCC's former chief operating officer who succeeded John Ryan as president in November 2007. "That's the checkpoint for what we do. Everything focuses on assisting producers and agribusiness operators reach greater success."

Stewart has a deep understanding of Canadian agriculture, having served the industry for the past 20 years as a professional agrologist and in various roles with FCC. He sees first hand the passion people have for their business.

"I've probably visited a hundred farms and agriculture operations from coast to coast in Canada over my career," says Stewart. "What consistently impresses me across all sectors – whether it's cash crops, livestock or processing operations – is the excitement and dedication they have about their livelihood. We call it a business, but it's so easy to see in a customer's eyes that it is way more than that. It's a way of life. Their pride is awesome, humbling and inspiring."

"Agriculture is a vibrant and sophisticated industry. An increasing global marketplace and emerging niche markets are creating opportunities for producers. We're seeing opportunities in the areas of alternative fuels, for example, which impact grain and oilseed prices."

Stewart says it's easy to enjoy the prosperous times as a business, but the true test is the support that financial partners offer to producers when facing adversity.

"I also hear directly from customers about the challenges they face. A rising Canadian dollar, higher input costs, and outbreaks of BSE and avian influenza are impacting exports and profit margins. Through the cyclical nature that is agriculture, I'm proud that we stand by our customers with support programs and financing options."

Stewart's vision includes encouraging more young people to choose agriculture as a career, and helping customers embrace technology, knowledge and business skills to prepare for the future.

"As a federal Crown corporation serving the agriculture industry, we fill an important public policy role in enhancing rural Canada with loans and other services. We're helping producers become better business managers by providing learning and information, we're offering farm management software, and we give back to the communities where our customers live and work."

"How we partner together – FCC employees, customers, industry groups, governments and business – will contribute to the future of Canadian agriculture."

"I see FCC taking a leadership role as a champion of agriculture, anticipating where our industry is headed, and advancing the business of agriculture. I feel very fortunate to be the new CEO of FCC, and to be involved in an industry I love."





Ag Day in Canada

Be part of something big

Join us to celebrate the first ever Ag Day in Canada.

We'll gather in communities across Canada to recognize the people who live and breathe agriculture and make it one of the country's most vital and vibrant industries.

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Wednesday, January 23, 2008
1 – 3:30 p.m.

Coming to a community near you

For more information about Ag Day in Canada, visit www.AgDayinCanada.ca or contact your local FCC office at 1-800-387-3232.



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