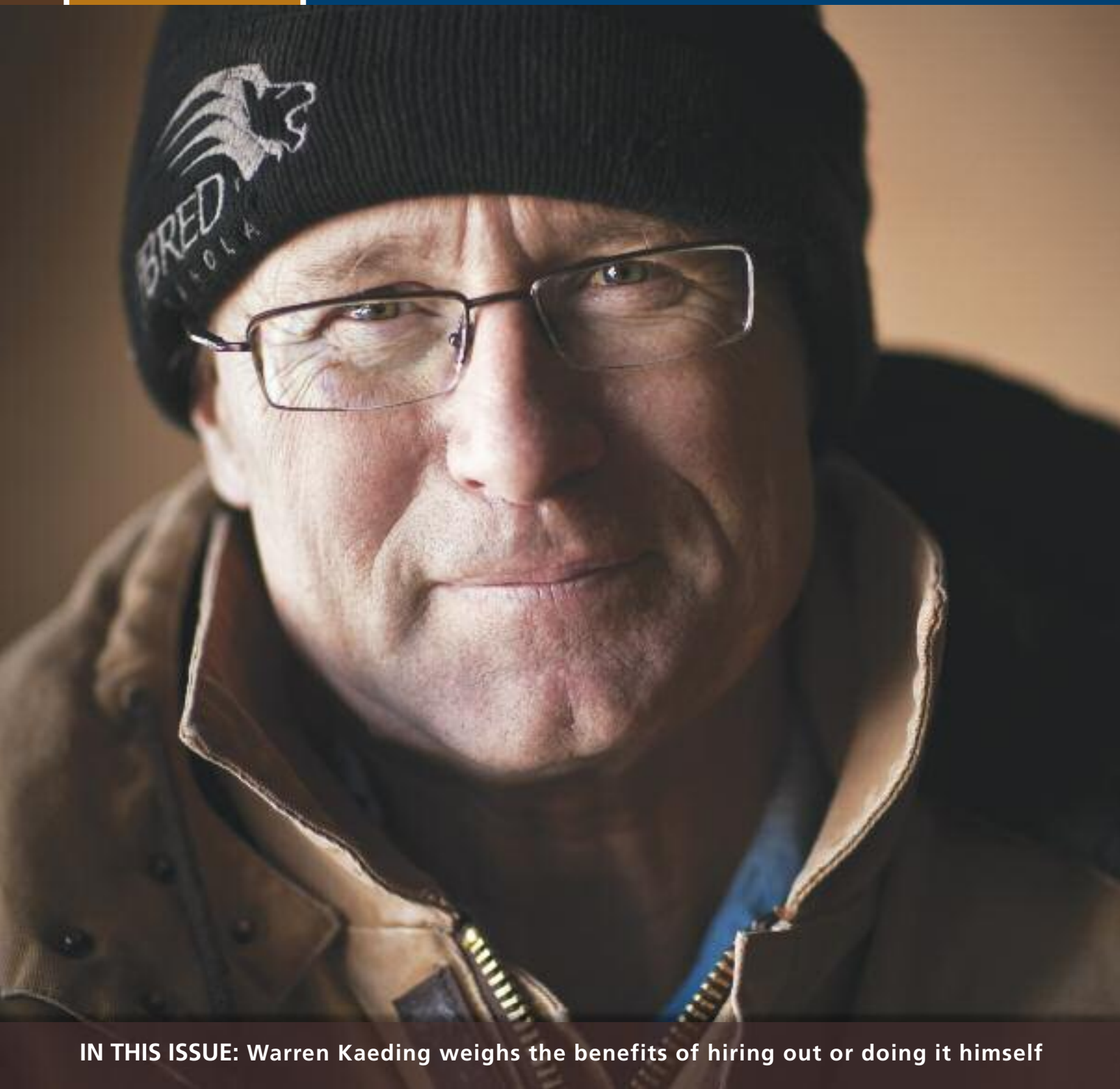


MARCH / APRIL 2010

**real-life**  
farm management  
stories

# AgriSuccess



**IN THIS ISSUE:** Warren Kaeding weighs the benefits of hiring out or doing it himself



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### On the cover:

Warren Kaeding on his farm near Churchbridge, Sask.

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## from the editor



**Efficiency:** the degree of effectiveness with which something is done, or of the person who does it.

**Optimum:** most favourable or best possible for a certain purpose or under certain conditions.

The theme of this edition is efficiency, but in the real world, you have to keep optimization in mind as well. A bigger milking parlour, combine or conveyor is no doubt more efficient, but that piece of equipment may be oversized relative to the rest of your operation and, therefore, not cost-effective. You need the optimum size.

The same goes for time efficiency. Multi-tasking can make more efficient use of your time, but at some point, you could jeopardize safety or quality. There's a reason that texting on your cell phone while driving is banned in most jurisdictions.

One of the best uses of your time as a farm manager can be measuring efficiency.

You have two tractors with similar horsepower doing the same job. Have you ever compared fuel consumption between the two? Have you ever compared their service records?

If you buy that new parcel of land that's five miles away, how much travel time and cost will be involved?

One employee takes 2.5 hours to do the morning milking. Another employee averages 3.2 hours. Assuming they both do an equally good job, that measurement can be a useful management tool.

What about your own time? Keep a log for a few days or weeks to see exactly how your time is allocated. You might be surprised.

What about your decision-making process? If there are a number of people involved, how much time is that taking? You may find that small decisions are taking an inordinate amount of time compared to decisions that have a much bigger impact on your operation.

We'd love to hear your thoughts on this topic. Pass along your efficiency tips and we'll share them with everyone in the future.

Just email [kevin@hursh.ca](mailto:kevin@hursh.ca).







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# All work and no play

## can lead to inefficient work habits

Everyone is busy. The world seems to spin faster and faster. It's not unusual for producers to balance farm management and operation with family commitments and even off-farm employment or volunteer work.

Some people make it look easy. Others struggle and always seem to be running behind. Most of us fall somewhere in between.

You can't create more hours in a day. There are, however, a few ideas that may help increase your time efficiency.

### Some people make it look easy. Others struggle and always seem to be running behind.

We've all met people who seem to be "on the job" all the time without accomplishing as much as their hours would indicate. They study a job from five different angles before tackling it or they flit from one task to another as their attention span wavers.

Sometimes you'll hear these folks complain about how hard they work and the fact that they never have time for a holiday. Hard work is admirable, but maybe the tasks are expanding to fill the time available.

You also meet producers who manage to schedule some time at the lake or some time to travel to visit friends and relatives. They may even find the time and resources for a winter vacation.

How do they get all their work done? Spending time away is easier on some farm operations than others, depending on the family and employee situation. But if you've promised your kids or grandkids a trip to the lake starting next Sunday, there's a lot of incentive to focus on the tasks that need to be completed before you leave.

There are always stories about producers who were gone on a fishing trip while their canola crop was ravaged by diamondback moth larvae, but there are also stories about producers who would never leave the farm, which eventually led to marital problems.

Producers who can't tear themselves away from the day-to-day operations are also the ones less likely to attend seminars or visit producers in other regions. That kind of renewal is valuable for your mental well-being and ultimately your work efficiency.

There are competing adages too. On one hand, we're told to keep our nose to the grindstone. But we intuitively know that all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.

We all have to find a balance in our lives. But if you seem to be working more and accomplishing less, you might need to re-balance. Working efficiently and effectively and with motivation is what really matters. And usually that requires some time away from the regular work regime.

BY KEVIN HURSH / *Kevin is a consulting agrologist and journalist based in Saskatoon, Sask. He also operates a grain farm near Cabri, Sask., growing a wide array of crops.*



## Full-time or part-time farming?

There's an old saying that you can never have too much money. However, it is certainly possible to have too little. The Statistics Canada Low Income Cutoff Rate (LICO), the most common method for estimating poverty in Canada, places the national after-tax poverty line in rural Canada for a family of four at \$22,206 (\$11,745 single).

If your farm isn't netting this amount, someone in the household has to earn outside income to keep the family above the poverty line.

Off-farm income is becoming steadily more common for Canadian producers. In the 2006 Census of Agriculture, nearly half (48 per cent) of the 327,055 census farms reported off-farm income. That's hardly surprising since the same census showed that 44.2 per cent of farms don't make enough gross sales to cover their total operating expenses.

While many farms are financial success stories, producers often choose to farm for cultural – not economic – reasons. If a second job is the only way to make the farm viable, it's a price they're willing to pay. This makes agriculture a very unique business. For example, many Ontario producers have worked 40 hours a week at an auto plant to be able to farm on the weekends; few would be willing to do the reverse.

Either way, it's important to have a written business plan to help you define and meet your goals, says

Harris Ivens, who teaches farm business planning to new organic farmers at the Everdale Environmental Learning Centre in Hillsburgh, Ont.

"All partners in the farm operation should sit down, look at the big picture and discuss what role they want their farm to play in their lives as early as possible," Ivens explains. "Discuss what your goals are and what you want your work-play balance to be. Ask each other if you want the farm to be a full-time or part-time venture and decide what your guiding principles are going to be."

Once you answer these essential questions and set your basic goals, Ivens says the next step is to work out how you plan to reach them. If you want to make a living from farm income only, how can you make it happen? Do you need to reach a certain scale, or is value-added processing a better option? What are the risks?

If you plan to remain a part-time farmer, remember that there are only so many hours in a given day. You can only work 90-hour work weeks for so long before something has to give.

**BY LORNE McCLINTON** / Lorne has worked in the communications field for the last 20 years as a journalist, photographer, scriptwriter and corporate writer. He divides his time between Quebec and his grain farm in Saskatchewan.





## More small farms

The U.S. Census of Agriculture shows that small farm numbers are growing rapidly in the United States. Even though the Canadian census doesn't show it, the publisher of Small Farm Canada magazine says the same trend is happening here. Tom Henry believes the difference may be in how the two countries classify small farms.

"In the U.S., farms with gross sales up to \$250,000 are considered to be small farms," Henry says. "In Canada, the cutoff is \$50,000. I see a lot of small farms starting to become really successful here too. Some now have sales in the \$250,000 bracket, getting up into the range of what used to be considered a good-sized family farm."

Small farms account for half of the farms in Canada. Henry says his magazine's circulation research shows that most of these are clustered within a one-hour commute of an economic hub. This is because land

closer to cities is often cut into smaller parcels, and because producers – or their partners – have to commute for work.

"To flesh out the observation, the boomers are retiring and there's a whole young generation that really want to tap into the local food movement," says Henry, who also farms on Vancouver Island. "There are a pile of them out there, renting, leasing, borrowing, buying farmland and starting up little enterprises."

The 2006 Census of Agriculture showed more than 60 per cent of census farms with gross revenues below \$10,000 took outside work. One-quarter of all farms with gross revenues of more than \$250,000 supplemented with off-farm income.

BY LORNE McCLINTON

## Distance matters

Commuting isn't just a concern for part-time farmers. It's also a major cost in sparsely populated regions. Producers in these areas usually have long commutes to do just about anything.

Consider a 100-kilometre round trip to the nearest machinery dealership for parts. If you drive a late-model pickup and factor in all the costs, including depreciation and maintenance, this parts run hits about

\$40 before you buy a single nut or bolt. And that's before you pay yourself or hired help.

Distance really starts to cost when you look at moving farm equipment to distant fields. The total cost of owning a Class 7+ combine, excluding labour, is about \$280 per threshing hour, or \$4.66 per minute. If you attach half that value to engine hours, it costs just under \$7 every time you transport the combine one mile.

BY LORNE McCLINTON



## YOUNG FARMER PROFILE

# Your farm is stronger with a supportive spouse

When Martin Boutin and Mélanie Chaîné met, they saw fireworks – literally. It was summer 1997 and the two were at a fireworks festival on the outskirts of Quebec City.

“It was like being struck by lightning,” recalls Boutin, then a 27-year-old professional agronomist and hog producer. He had recently purchased his family’s 200-hectare farm in the Bellechasse region





near the provincial capital. “From the moment I saw Mélanie, I knew she was the girl I wanted to spend the rest of my life with.”

The feeling, it turned out, was mutual. Within weeks, they were engaged and building a home on Boutin’s farm, right next to his mother’s house. “It was like something out of a fairy tale,” says Chaîné, then 21. “Martin was my Prince Charming – and he still is.”

Chaîné easily took to country living. Born and raised in the nearby city of Lévis, she ran her own salon and was impressed by Boutin’s business on her first visit – the first time she had ever been on a farm. “I really enjoyed the sights and the sounds and the space and being in close contact with animals,” she recalls. “I remember thinking, ‘Agriculture is beautiful.’”

They were married the following summer, and soon had the first of their four children. By then, Chaîné was pitching in with her new family’s business and adding urban touches to the property.

She started a home-based salon and planted industrial quantities of flowers and trees around the yard, creating spaces to relax and enjoy the rural surroundings.

“I think it’s really important to take the time to enjoy being in the country,” Chaîné says. “I think farmers sometimes forget that, because they’re always working in and around their homes.”

After a two-year program in farm management at a nearby college, Chaîné took over the nursery

where Boutin rears batches of 2,000 piglets, allowing him to concentrate on his 4,000 hogs. “I learned about farming from the barn floor up,” she quips. “But I had to, because I wanted to be Martin’s partner.”

Chaîné used her \$20,000 college bursary to buy a share in the farm. “It gave value to all the work she’d done and was doing,” Boutin says. “And it recognized her as my partner in all aspects of my life.”

Incorporated as Ferme Marnie ([www.ferme-marnie.com](http://www.ferme-marnie.com)), the farm has become known for sustainability and neighbourliness. They mail notification cards to their neighbours every spring, advising them when Boutin will apply pig manure to his fields. “It’s to give them a chance to plan ahead and avoid, say, putting their clothes out on the line all day,” says Chaîné. “And we ask people to call us if they have a kid’s birthday party or something planned outside for that day and we’ll change our dates.”

The couple also installed odour-blocking windbreaks and shelterbelts on the roofs of manure pits.

“I couldn’t and never would have done all this without Mélanie,” Boutin says.

For Diane Parent, the couple is a textbook example of how a happy marriage between a farming and non-farming spouse can benefit a farming business.

An agriculture professor and researcher at Université Laval, Parent studies young farmers and

the technical, financial and social challenges they face. In one major study of young farmers, Parent found that one of the most important factors in the success of start-ups was the support or lack of support from the non-farming spouse.

“Marriage is a real and determining factor in the quality of the affective life of individuals and it is especially true on farms, where life revolves around the agricultural activities practised there,” Parent explains.

## The couple is a textbook example of how a happy marriage between a farming and non-farming spouse can benefit a farming business.

Although there’s no data on the number of farmers who marry non-farming spouses, Parent believes the trend is likely on the rise. One reason is the decline in the number of farmers across Canada, which forces young producers to look outside the farming community. The professionalization of the industry also means that many young farmers meet a non-farming spouse at college or university.

For Boutin, the trick is finding the right partner, then encouraging their efforts to adapt to the farming life.

“I think it’s crucial that you sell your spouse a piece of the business quickly – and the same goes for parents and their kids,” he explains. “I’ve seen too many people keep shares in the family farm even after they’ve stopped working and their grandkids are almost old enough to take over. It just saps morale and puts pressure on couples who are eager to build their own lives.”

**BY MARK CARDWELL** / *Mark Cardwell is a writer and freelance journalist who lives in the Quebec City region. He is a regular correspondent for a dozen newspapers, magazines, trade and specialty publications in Canada, the United States and Europe.*

### PHOTOS

**PREVIOUS PAGE:**

1-NO ENTRY

BIOSECURITY IN EFFECT







ASK AN EXPERT

## Good management improves **farm efficiency**

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Originally from a German family farm, agricultural economist Dr. Joerg Zimmermann has worked extensively in the agribusiness sector in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and other eastern European nations.



## How do Canadian farms stack up to other countries in efficiency?

A good indicator of efficiency is that Canadian technology and genetics are in demand around the world. Purebred Holstein cattle and many breeds of beef cattle are exported from Canada to many other nations. Canadian production technology often accompanies the cattle, semen and embryos.

Western Canada is a longstanding leader in exporting dryland farming technology, particularly air-seeding technology. Large, one-pass air drills for direct seeding were developed due to the need for efficiency. That equipment is in demand in countries like Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine, where the dryland farming needs are very similar to Western Canada.

## In your experience, what operational efficiencies do larger farms have compared to moderately sized operations?

Economic theory describes the benefits that come from economies of scale. However, there is a lot of good management and good people required to run large farms. Usually, the scarcest factor is good people. Capital and equipment can be acquired in a relatively short period of time, but it takes years to train people and to build up a good team.

Whereas industrial production takes place in specific locations such as the sites of factories, agriculture tends to be spread over a large area. Therefore, it is much more difficult to manage and control some of these big super farms (100,000 hectares) we see in Ukraine, Russia and Kazakhstan. The disadvantages of these really big farms are often greater than their advantages through the economies of scale.

## How can large operations avoid these inefficiencies?

Without that attention, a lot of money can be lost in a very short amount of time.

Large operations need good management on-site. You might call these people middle management. There also needs to be the right organizational structure so everyone knows their role. That's sometimes lacking in an entity that has grown quickly. And you can't forget the people

doing the actual work and executing the top management's strategy. Every operation needs a skilled workforce, and finding those people can be difficult.

Too often, the owner and CEO of a large farming operation still wants to run a tractor or harvester. In moderately sized operations, that may be all right. In fact, it may be necessary. At some point though, an operation becomes so big that doing the day-to-day work is a poor use of the CEO's time.

And remember that even large farms need outside expertise so they can keep up with the latest methods and technology.

## What should smaller operations do to gain efficiencies?

It may be more difficult for smaller operations to be as technologically efficient. In other words, they may not be able to as easily justify the expense of new technology.

However, smaller operations can actually have an advantage in management efficiency. They may have the ability to make the right decisions and to make those decisions quickly. If large operations have the proper business and decision-making structure, they can narrow this gap.

In any size of operation, efficiency is a matter of management capabilities. The best investment is in your own management by attending courses, talking to other producers and visiting other farms at home and around the world.

You can also discover efficiencies by comparing the farm business to other businesses. Many of the solutions can only be seen if you back away from day-to-day operations a bit and really analyze what is going on.



**DR. JOERG ZIMMERMANN**  
*has interned on farms in Canada and France and operates a 5,000-acre farm in Russia together with his business partner. He currently lives and works in Winnipeg.*



FEATURE

# Outsource or do it yourself?

Canadian producers are famous for their self-sufficient attitude. The sector's unofficial motto could easily be: "If you want something done right, do it yourself."

However, as anyone who's struggled with a home improvement project knows, just because you can perform a task yourself doesn't mean you should. Sometimes it makes business sense to outsource.

The hard part is calculating the right choice for the circumstances.

New equipment cost is one of the major considerations when deciding to do a job in-house or hiring it out. Some farms have enough economy of scale to justify buying a big-ticket piece of machinery; others don't. Find out by calculating your break-even acreage or production.

"Let's say you are planning to buy a \$400,000 combine," says Bill Brown, an agricultural economics professor at the University of Saskatchewan. "The combine will cost you around \$60,000 a year in interest and depreciation. The custom combining rate is \$24 an acre and it costs about \$9 an acre to run a combine for fuel and repairs and oil."

**Mathematically, it looks like this:**

$\$60,000 \div (\$24 - \$9 \text{ an acre}) = 4,000 \text{ acres.}$

"This calculation shows that if you've got a farm smaller than 4,000 acres, you can't afford to buy a \$400,000 combine," Brown says. "You'd be better off to pay the \$24 an acre of custom operating rate. If you've got a 5,000-acre farm, you may be better off to buy the combine."

(The figures for this calculation can be found in the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture's Farm Machinery Custom Rate and Rental Guide. Search Saskatchewan Custom Guide in Google.)

Timeliness is another very important point to consider. Can a custom operator perform the job as quickly as you could do it yourself, or can they do it faster and better? Last year, many producers in the northern and eastern prairies had 25 per cent or more of their crop still in the field on Remembrance Day. They had no difficulty justifying the expense of hiring any custom combiner they could find to help finish the harvest before winter set in.

**If you've got a farm  
smaller than 4,000 acres,  
you can't afford to buy a  
\$400,000 combine.**

"We don't have the luxury of time at harvest like they do in Iowa, Oklahoma or Texas," Brown says. "That encourages people to buy their own combine. Down there it doesn't matter if a custom combiner is a week or two late, the crop will still be standing there waiting for them. Here if they're two weeks late, the crop could be under six inches of snow."

The other major cost that many people ignore is their opportunity cost. As the farm manager, you have to calculate if you're more valuable sitting in a tractor or managing your farm. The same considerations apply to your employees. If they're already run off their feet, consider outsourcing. Custom operators bring their labour with them.

"The biggest thing I look at when I'm trying to decide whether I should do a job myself or hire a custom operator is what it will cost to have my human resources doing something new and different," says Warren Kaeding. Warren and his wife Carla own and operate a 6,500-acre grain farm and seed-growing operation near Churchbridge, Sask.

"I look at what it's going to cost to train my staff to do that job. Is it more cost-effective to haul grain ourselves or should we hire a custom grain hauler to do it? We have our own semi so there is little difference in cost. Still, we often hire someone to come in and custom haul it because we don't want to divert our staff away from higher priority tasks."

The same analysis applies to service-sector jobs. For example, while Kaeding has the necessary knowledge and skills to scout his own fields, he



often hires crop consultants. He reasons that if they're on the job, he doesn't have to spend all summer in the field assessing crops. This gives him more time to devote to his other management duties.

It often makes more sense to outsource rare-occasion, specialized jobs than it does to do them yourself. On-farm construction projects are a good example. Kaeding could have put his employees to work renovating his seed plant last fall, but decided to hire a crew of trained professionals.

"I'd like to think that the contractors were doing the work quicker, better and more efficiently than our regular workers could," Kaeding says. "More importantly, I was able to keep our guys out working in the field so we got a number of other jobs done that we wouldn't have if they had been working on the seed plant."

Training costs are starting to play a bigger role too. New equipment typically comes with a whole array of on-board computers, and not all the software is user-friendly. It can take a fair amount of training for an employee to get comfortable operating the new machinery.

"I know we're going to be getting into variable rate applications and mapping," Kaeding explains. "And holy cow when my teenagers leave the farm, I don't know what we're going to do. I'm going to have to spend a lot of time retraining my employees."

Decide the most effective way to allocate your limited financial, management and human resources. Getting your hands dirty and doing a job yourself might give you more personal satisfaction, but it might not be the best use of your time and money.

BY LORNE MCCLINTON

**PHOTO (PAGE 11):**

1-WARREN KAEDING WORKS WITH A CUSTOM GRAIN HAULER AT HIS OPERATION NEAR CHURCHBRIDGE, SASK.





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## Clear the roadblocks to efficiency

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Every day, you're bombarded by offers to make you and your farm more efficient. "We'll save you time." "We'll save you time and money." "We'll increase your profit margins."

Just walk through an ag trade show. Practically every booth is promoting efficiency gains of one sort or another.

A certain level of skepticism is healthy. Not everything that's promoted will actually work on your operation. Still, you know there are many systems, products and procedures that probably fit. What's stopping you?

The most obvious factor is money. What does the new product or idea cost? Can you afford it? What's the likely payback period?

But not all efficiency gains cost money and sometimes money isn't the barrier at all. There are other underlying roadblocks.

### Lack of knowledge

We don't know what we don't know. Back in November, Helge and Candace By, owners of By Livestock in Regina, launched Cowpool.ca, a free trucking forum for purebred cattle producers.

"During the busy bull sale season, I always get calls from producers wondering if they know of anyone hauling cattle one direction or the other," Helge explains. "We try to help guys get loads of cattle together instead of everyone making individual trips, but you always hear of someone who just made the trip and could have taken a few more head."

Producers can simply log onto Cowpool.ca to enter information and read what's already posted. Co-operating to fill a truck or find a backhaul leads to efficiency gains. And the more producers who use it, the better the idea will work.





Here's another example. Most field crop producers use some form of GPS machinery guidance, but they could be missing some handy options.

For instance, it's usually possible to record exact field locations while seeding, spraying or harvesting. Some producers mark the locations of rocks that need to be picked, or small patches of Canada thistle that should be sprayed in the fall.

Instead of running all over a large field to do the job later, they can use the GPS locations and simplify the process. It's also easier to pass the job to someone else – and maybe make the whole exercise a bit of a treasure hunt.

Not knowing about features – or how to use them – is a common problem in today's technology-rich world. There can be significant efficiency gains from taking more time to understand our software programs and technology gadgets.

### Fear of technology

It happens all the time: your cell phone meets an untimely end and you need a new one. You tell the 20-something sales agent that you just want a basic phone to make and receive calls. She smiles and politely tells you that there aren't phones like that anymore.

You might as well go with the flow and try to get over your fear of technology. Maybe you don't need to save 5,000 songs, but the camera could come in

handy. And rather than stepping out of a meeting to make that phone call, maybe you'll be able to send a text message.

It's amazing how many producers have never established message manager on their cell phone, or even their home phone. When you call a business and don't get an answer, you expect to be able to leave a message. Why is a farm business any different?

### Lack of technical support

For computer software problems, you can often trouble-shoot over the phone. For a lot of equipment problems, you need a service technician.

Dairy producers in some parts of the country say they would seriously consider robotic milking systems, but they worry about getting quick service if something goes wrong. This is particularly true in regions with a low concentration of dairy farms.

Being among the first to adopt any new technology can be frustrating. That's why the leading edge is sometimes called the bleeding edge.

### Complete system change

It's relatively easy to make little tweaks to a production system. It takes commitment and planning to alter an entire system.



Moving to a minimum tillage cropping system requires more than just the purchase of a direct-seeding implement. Your weed control measures have to change. Residue management at harvest time becomes critical. Rather than just buying a seeder, you may need a better straw and chaff spreader on the combine, as well as the capacity for more herbicide applications.

The cow-calf sector has also seen revolutionary changes in production systems. Extended grazing can save money on harvesting and transporting feed. Calving later in the spring when the cows are already grazing can make it easier to manage a larger cow herd.

On most operations, labour is in short supply, but complete system changes can shift the work regime. If there's no harrow packing after the seeding operation or there's no need to monitor cows in indoor calving shelters, the people who normally do those jobs might feel unneeded.

Changing entire systems can cause family members and employees to worry about their roles, which can be a barrier to adoption.

### Too many irons in the fire

There are obvious advantages to running a dairy and growing your own forage crops. The same goes for running a grain farm alongside a cattle operation.

However, there can also be disadvantages, as Dan and Marie (not their real names) found out. The two crop about 1,500 acres and calve about 200 head of cows in March and early April.

"We've considered moving to a later calving date," Dan explains, "but the plan has always been to complete calving before we have to start seeding."

While most of their neighbours include profitable specialty crops in their rotations, Dan and Marie have avoided crops that require more time, effort and investment. After all, in the summer, they're busy putting up feed.

The straw from their cereal crops is baled for use in the cattle operation and manure is spread on grain land, which is mostly fenced so the cows can forage the stubble in fall and early spring. But are the gains compensating for what they're missing?

It's possible to capture the gains and avoid the roadblocks, but it takes more management and organization.

Recognizing roadblocks to efficiency is the first step in dealing with them.

BY KEVIN HURSH

## Farm transfers:

# Have your cake and eat it too

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Farm succession and the concept of efficiency might seem like mixing oil and water.

The procedures that have to be followed can take up resources that could be invested into farming operations that make more money. It can also take a lot of time to figure out which grants to apply for, what process or system of farm transfer you're going to adopt, and which professionals should – or shouldn't – be assisting you.

But there is a way to have your cake and eat it too by carefully choosing what you do yourself, and what you hire from outside the farm. And a farm transfer is definitely one of those times when hiring out is an astute decision, since you'll only do it twice in your lifetime – once getting in and once getting out.

Because it's so complex, it's not efficient for a producer to master every technical aspect of a farm transfer process. Instead, make good use of the many professionals available: the mediator, financial planner, accountant, etc., who do this on a daily basis. You wouldn't ask your lawyer to milk your cows. Why would a farmer work out the legal technicalities of farm succession?

Although producers tend to like doing things themselves, relying on professionals allows producers to spend more time developing the farm in the short term. If the succession process is well-planned and handled, this increases the probability that the farm will be better situated for the long term.

### You wouldn't ask your lawyer to milk your cows. Why would you work out the legal technicalities of farm succession?

There aren't many situations on a farm these days where you get to have your cake and eat it too, so a farm succession is a good time to fill up the plate.

If you're looking for a professional, get references from your accountant or lawyer. You can also search at [www.farmcentre.com/farmadvisors](http://www.farmcentre.com/farmadvisors).

**BY HUGH MAYNARD** / *Hugh is a specialist in agricultural communications based in Ormstown, Que. A graduate in farm management from Macdonald College (McGill University), Hugh is a seasoned journalist and broadcaster.*





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# CAUTION

## SAFETY ON THE FARM

### Rollover protective structures can **save your life**

Tractor rollovers are still the leading cause of fatal injuries for Canadian farmers. Studies show that using a rollover protective structure (ROPS) and a seatbelt will almost always prevent fatal injury. In fact, where the use of ROPS is compulsory, rollover fatalities have been virtually eliminated.

Sweden began requiring ROPS on all new tractors in 1959, and since 1981 has required a safety cab on all tractors. From 1960 to 1990, farm fatalities per 100,000 tractors dropped from 17 to just 0.3.

Here in Canada, most provinces required new tractors to be equipped with ROPS beginning in the mid-'80s. However, many older tractors don't have them. Price is often a deterrent, as installing a ROPS on an older model tractor sometimes costs more than the tractor is worth.

The Farm and Ranch Safety and Health Association (FARSHA) recently conducted a research project to install ROPS on 50 tractors throughout B.C. Working in partnership with several other organizations, including the Prairie Agricultural Machinery Institute (PAMI), FARSHA tested ROPS from original equipment manufacturer (OEM) suppliers, after-market suppliers, and several custom-built options to see which models could be installed most effectively and at a reasonable cost.

Vancouver Island dairy farmer Chris Groenendijk installed a ROPS on a tractor from the early '70s. "It's one of those things you know you should have, but you don't really get around to it," he says. "It worked out really well."

### Studies show that using a ROPS and seatbelt will almost always prevent fatal injury.

The average cost of a commercially available ROPS was \$1,570 – but prices ranged from \$425 to more than \$3,200. "A lot of producers would not go to the effort for that price," says Nathan Gregg, project leader at PAMI. On average, freight accounted for 16 per cent of the total cost.

ROPS from OEM suppliers typically had the best fit, and were also the cheapest at an average cost of \$920, but John Deere and Kubota were the only major tractor brands to offer OEM ROPS for older tractors. Some "universal fit" after-market options were relatively cheap and quickly available. However, on-demand built ROPS often took significantly longer – sometimes months – for delivery.

Custom-built ROPS showed promise, with prices ranging from \$600 to \$1,000. Freight costs were also markedly lower because the ROPS could be built locally. PAMI and FARSHA are now exploring the possibility of supplying engineered drawings that producers can take to a local fabricator.

**BY PETER VAN DONGEN** / *Peter is an agricultural journalist and communications consultant based on Vancouver Island. Born and raised on a dairy farm, Peter has work experience with many different types of farm operations.*





FROM FCC

## Young people give agriculture a bright future

### Do you love agriculture? A lot of young people do – with good reason.

Knowing that enthusiasm for agriculture starts early, FCC takes a big-picture approach, supporting future farmers at every stage of their careers with learning opportunities, financing and more.

The partnership between 4-H and FCC spans more than two decades. In Quebec, FCC partners with the Association des jeunes ruraux du Québec and the Fédération de la relève agricole du Québec for rural youth and young adults.

If you're studying agriculture, look for ways FCC can help.

Ag students can get AgExpert Analyst accounting software for free through colleges and universities that use it in a class and are part of FCC on Campus. And to reward budding entrepreneurs, the FCC Business Planning Award offers cash prizes to ag students who develop winning business plans.

Already farming? Look to FCC for choices in customized financing.

Last year, FCC disbursed \$1.6 billion in loans to young farmers. Many of our customized loans, like

Transition and First Step, have flexible options that help young farmers get up and running. FCC Learning farm management training programs on topics like succession planning and farm finances also help them succeed.

It's an exciting time for the industry. The new generation of farmers are innovative, technologically advanced and willing to try new things. Many get their inspiration from FCC publications like Knowledge Insider and AgriSuccess, and their news from FCC Express.

Without a doubt, it's a generation that gives Canadian agriculture an exciting future.

You can learn more about opportunities for young farmers at [www.fcc.ca/youngfarmer](http://www.fcc.ca/youngfarmer).

*FCC is a national sponsor of the Canadian Young Farmers' Forum, and is also a regional sponsor of Canada's Outstanding Young Farmers' Program.*





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