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FEATURES

- **Develop a learning strategy** creating your learning plan.
- Seeds of knowledge pay dividends What's the return on your learning investment?

COLUMNS

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- Young farmer profile Ontario farmers Tom Wilson and Nicole Judge are turning their
- Ask an expert
 Educate yourself about commodity marketing and know when
- Planning to succeed
- Safety on the farm

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2011

On the cover:

Ont., see a big future in their cidery business.

Editor, Kevin Hursh Associate editor, Allison Finnamore

Original photography by Greg Huszar

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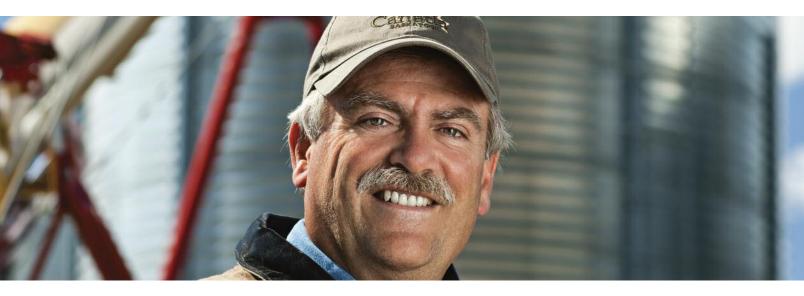
Cette publication est également offerte en

AgriSuccess has been honoured with industry and trade publication awards, including:

- Canadian Farm Writers' Federation award for periodicals; Bronze 2006, 2007, Gold 2008, Bronze 2009
 Canadian Agricultural Marketing Association (CAMA) Awards; Merit 2006, 2007; Excellence 2009, 2010



from the editor



We learn something new every day. Much of this stems from necessity. The world keeps changing. If we want to keep up, we need to learn.

If you update a major piece of farm equipment, you can scarcely avoid new technology. This is either exciting or terrifying, depending upon your aptitude and desire to learn.

There are individuals who draw a line in the sand and refuse to go further. Some producers using manual accounting have decided they won't adopt an accounting software program. They'll continue passing their books to the accountant as they always have. They don't want to invest the necessary time and effort to become proficient on a new system, despite the numerous advantages.

We all know people well into their 80s who have embraced Internet and email. And we all know people in their 60s who don't understand what they're missing and don't want to know.

Learning can happen at any age if you remain curious and adventurous. Like most things in life, you make more progress if you have a plan. That's the theme for this edition. Call it "Planning to Learn" or "Strategic Learning."

Yes, we list some of the training courses, websites and short courses that are available, but mainly we talk to producers and educators about learning approaches and benefits.

There are lots of choices as we chart our learning path. All too often, we follow the default path, learning only the things that seem necessary at the time.

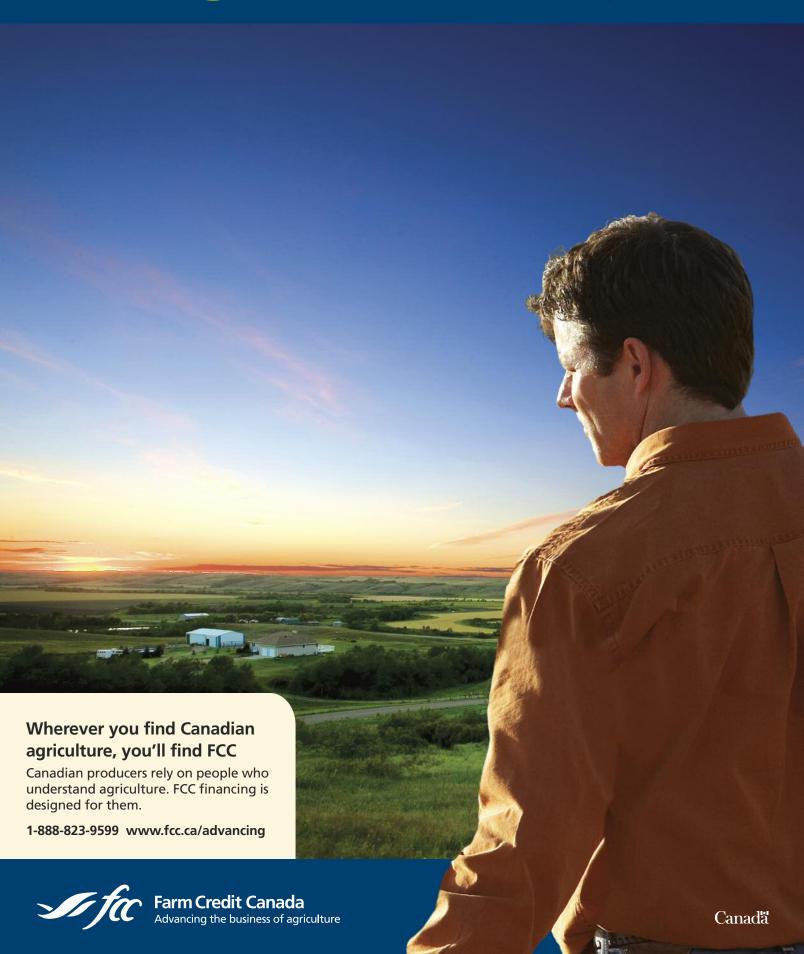
Hopefully, this edition of AgriSuccess will encourage you to take a more strategic approach to your learning pathway (and encourage you to go for it).

Let us know what you think. And don't hesitate to propose theme and story ideas. Just email kevin@hursh.ca.

Them Johns

Agriculture is life 🐙





Seek the advice of eagles

It's hard to soar with the eagles when you're surrounded by turkeys. That's an old saying, but it's highly relevant for a discussion about strategic learning.

You can learn something from almost everyone you encounter, but the best opportunities come from rubbing shoulders with cutting-edge entrepreneurs.

The local coffee shop is often vilified for having too many turkeys and not enough eagles, but there's little doubt that producers like to talk with other producers - whether that's at the local farm input supply depot or at the community water well.

Typically, these conversations revolve around current topics. How is your calving season going? Has the rain made it tough to get the milk truck in? Have you applied any fungicide to your crop yet?

The best opportunities come from rubbing shoulders with cutting-edge farm entrepreneurs.

In many cases, innovative and successful producers in local communities are open to more in-depth conversations about what they're doing in their farm business and why. In other cases, due to competitive issues, it's actually easier to seek out leading producers from other communities and pay them a visit.

These are the sorts of contacts you can make at trade shows, conventions and conferences. If you're interested in a new cropping option, new design of milking parlour or different grazing options, what

better way to learn than to spend some time visiting with someone who has a lot of information to share?

A few producers are taking this a step further. They've set up an advisory board to help them with major decisions. This board might include your accountant and lender, the other major decision-makers on your farm and one or two knowledgeable producers who may be from the local area or who may be from afar.

Imagine the advice this board can provide if you're looking at a farm expansion, a new type of enterprise or even a major purchase of equipment. They may ask some uncomfortable questions. They'll likely come up with issues you haven't thought about. Almost certainly, it will be a great learning experience.

You need enough time and have to set the right ground rules for these sorts of conversations. And you have to let everyone know that you need their honest opinions and advice, even if it might not be what you want to hear.

In a casual conversation, no one is going to tell you that you really can't justify the purchase of that new high clearance sprayer. People on your advisory board might because they get to examine the whole picture and you've already asked for their advice.

There's nothing wrong with keeping the company of turkeys, or even ducks, pigeons and ostriches, but make sure you also make arrangements to spend time talking with eagles. It can be one of your best learning opportunities.

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.

Education is rewarding, but what does it cost?

Many parents from rural Canada are shocked to find that it can cost \$15,000 a year or more to send their son or daughter off to the city for a post-secondary education.

"The cost for a full-time student from Canada in University 1, which is the program high school students enter at the University of Manitoba, is about \$13,300," says Jane Lastra, the university's director of the financial aid and awards office.

Here's Lastra's cost breakdown:

• tuition: \$3,800

books and supplies: \$1,700

• parking pass: \$470

• residence for the year with a meal plan: \$7,000

medical insurance: \$240optional fitness plan: \$112

For second-year agriculture students, tuition jumps to \$4,400; books and supplies go to \$1,600. Any miscellaneous costs are extra.

It's always a good idea for students to apply for every scholarship, bursary and grant available. In many cases, students who fill out just one form by the deadline are eligible for all the scholarships, bursaries and grants administered by the university.

If you do need to borrow money, Lastra says the first place to look is the federal-provincial student aid program.

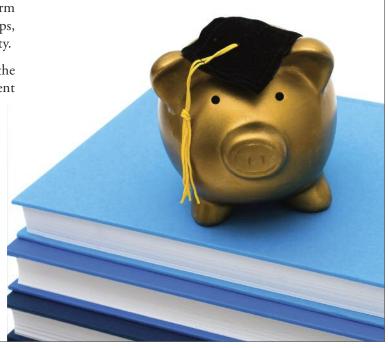
"The province of Manitoba's basic student aid package will give out a maximum of \$350 per week, or \$11,900 per school year in funding to full-time, single students," Lastra explains. Additional grants are available for students who are aboriginal, low and middle-income, have dependents, or have disabilities or special needs.

Using federal-provincial student aid packages has two main advantages. First, the loans are interest-free as long as the student is in school. That means a student who receives a \$12,000 student aid package will pay about \$768 dollars a year less interest than one with a \$12,000 student line of credit.

The second big advantage is that a portion of the student aid package becomes a non-repayable grant. In Manitoba, the goal is to ensure that no student takes on more that \$6,900 of debt per year, with the rest being transformed into a grant.

Like any program, student aid packages come with their own set of rules. Lastra is implementing a new lecture series for graduating U of M students to help them better understand what they'll face when it comes time to pay the money back.

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.



Start RESPs early

For every dollar you invest up to \$2,500 in a Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) each year, the federal government gives you an additional 20 cents as a grant. Annual matching grants cap out at \$500 per year, with a lifetime maximum of \$7,200 per beneficiary.

Depending on your family's income, the government's contribution can increase to 30 or 40 cents on the dollar for the first \$500 of annual RESP contributions.

"The matching grant is the biggest advantage to taking out an RESP," says Craig Spanier, a financial advisor with Edward Jones in Regina.

"While they aren't tax deductible, the interest in them can compound tax-free. The student is taxed on them when they make a withdrawal but since they usually don't have much income, it rarely has an impact at tax time. The type of investments you can buy inside an RESP will vary from institution to institution but, like an RRSP, the rules are the same regardless of where you purchase one."

If your child chooses not to take post-secondary training, the money isn't lost. In this case, the simplest thing to do is to roll the money into your RRSP. It's also possible to cash it in, but restrictions or penalties may apply. LM



Avoid extending your education, if possible

Taking five years to complete a four-year degree or three years to finish a two-year diploma is increasingly common. It does make course loads easier and is great for social life, but it dramatically increases the total cost.

The biggest one is education's opportunity cost, the wages a student forgoes by entering college instead of the workforce.

A person making \$15 per hour for 40 hours a week would gross \$600 a week. Remove 25 per cent for deductions and their take-home pay is \$450. That means a full-time student going to classes for 34 weeks a year should factor in an extra \$15,300 per year (\$450 x 34) in lost wages as the opportunity cost of getting an education.

Since the vast majority of rural students can't live at home while pursuing their education, the other major cost is living expenses. Using the University of Manitoba's costs for staying in residence with a meal plan as an example, and factoring in another \$2,000 for social life incidentals and the other necessities of student life, it adds up to about \$9,000 per academic year.

If both opportunity costs and living expenses are taken into consideration, a year of education costs at least \$24,300 after-tax dollars before tuition and books are factored in. These costs are constant; they don't change whether a student is taking a full or half course load. This means that every extra year a student stays in school costs the equivalent of the price of a new midsize car. LM



Entrepreneurs find the spirit in cider

Tom Wilson and Nicole Judge of Caledon, Ont. are building an authentic experience for their customers at Spirit Tree Estate Cidery.

Tom, a fifth-generation farmer, and Nicole took over Tom's family business, Wilson's Orchards, after their 2002 marriage. Nicole is a veterinarian and chief operating officer for the Ontario Veterinary Group.

The self-professed "foodies" introduced a scratch bakery to the family's retail market. In their travels throughout Europe, Canada and the United States, the young couple enrolled in cordon bleu bread-baking and cider-making classes. They were so inspired by brick oven baking, they decided to offer a more upscale and rustic experience.

But to take their business to that next level, Tom and Nicole made the difficult decision to sell the family's former property.

They purchased a picturesque parcel of land nestled on the edge of the Niagara Escarpment with a stunning view of the distant Toronto horizon and access for hikers on the Bruce Trail.

Exale Reserve

750



Today, patrons at Spirit Tree Estate Cidery find unique and innovative products, including an assortment of artisan breads made in the couple's wood-fired, Alan Scott-style brick oven. An onsite cidery turns the harvest of the family's orchards into sweet cider.

The couple launched their hard apple ciders in English pub style (about five per cent alcohol) and French bistro style (about eight per cent alcohol) in June 2010 to an enthusiastic audience.

"It's hard to find hard cider in Ontario and the anticipation for its arrival was really high," Tom says. Reviews for the product have been overwhelmingly positive.

At the same time, they also introduced a tied house, a term somewhat unfamiliar in North America but popular in Britain, where patrons can enjoy light and local food with their beverage. The menu offerings are limited and local, meant to complement the cider. "More to add to the experience for our customers," Nicole says.

But it's not just the products that make this fledgling operation one-of-a-kind.

Spirit Tree Estate Cidery buildings use post and beam construction with straw bale infill to provide an insulating value of R50+, nearly twice the current building code minimum. It's the first winery production facility and agricultural building in Ontario to use straw bale construction.

"The passion people have for our place is almost breathtaking."

Tom and Nicole also invested in the environment, including:

- geothermal heating and cooling systems
- integrated pest control methods to reduce the need for chemical controls
- the use of wildflowers and legumes as ground cover composition to aid in pollination, enrich the soil and reduce erosion
- an energy-saving fermentation cellar that uses an ultraviolet process instead of heat processing, which eliminates pathogens and preserves flavour

But like all trail-blazing entrepreneurs, the couple has had to overcome numerous regulatory challenges along the way. While they admit there were times when they could have crumbled in the face of obstacles and capital requirements, they were buoyed by the overwhelming support of the community.

Today, the enthusiastic response of their customers, including chefs and restaurateurs, helps keep them on track. "The passion people have for our place is almost breathtaking," Tom says.

BY ANNE HOWDEN THOMPSON / Anne is a professional freelance journalist specializing in agriculture. Raised on her family's dairy farm in Ontario, she has always maintained an active involvement in many facets of agriculture.

PHOTO (PREVIOUS PAGE)

1 - TOM AND NICOLE SERVE PATRONS OF THE CIDERY







Unexpected challenges delayed the opening of Spirit Tree Estate Cidery by three years.

Tom and Nicole share some lessons learned.

Bring in a professional to help you develop a solid business plan.

"Having that other person helped to formalize all our ideas and keep us focused and disciplined," Nicole says.

Hire a consultant to be the point person during the entire project.

Get everything in writing.

"It may seem cold and businesslike, but it has to be done that way to cover you," Nicole maintains. As the delays dragged on, Tom and Nicole found some of the staff who started on the project moved on as it neared completion. Different staff may have different expectations.

Budget for contingency funds.

"I knew we had to have it there, and with all of the delays, we were forced to use it," Tom explains. "If we hadn't had that, we would have had to sell the farm even before our dream was realized."

Embrace your community.

Some neighbours were initially concerned that the couple's proposal would create traffic congestion. "Embrace your community and provide value and in return, they will embrace you back," Nicole says.

PHOTO (ABOVE)

2 - L TO R: NICOLE, SON KIERNAN, TOM



ASK AN EXPERT

Commodity Marketing 101:

how much knowledge is enough?

Victor Aideyan specializes in marketing and price risk for pork, corn and soybean producers.

What advantages are there for a producer to take formal commodity marketing training versus what can be picked up with market reports and commentaries?

Informal training and formal learning complement each other.

When you learn by experience, you learn a little bit at a time. Your informal learning is what you've picked up from your grandad, your dad or others, and it's never gone beyond that. For example, many people in this group have never actually sat down and done a detailed calculation of their cost of production – they just have a rough idea in their head.

What you get from a workshop are the fundamentals. You'll be able to learn all the jargon and have the opportunity to learn structure. You also learn the whole decision process and the theory of what should be behind your decisions. You get broad exposure to the commodity marketing process: planning, organizing, directing and measuring.

There are some who have done a bit of commodity marketing. They've gone through the process of cost of production and they try to sell to achieve some kind of target. There's some level of exposure, but it's limited. And there's a group who have gone even further - they're relatively comfortable with the actual selling mechanisms.

Unless people are very confident and have a good grasp of the marketing tools and selling mechanisms futures, options and forward contracts and the differences in how they operate - I would suggest they start their formal learning with fundamentals of commodity marketing training.

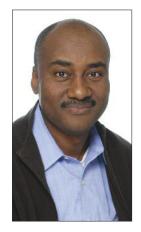
What's the best way for producers to start using their commodity marketing knowledge after they've received formal training?

Each producer should get training and then go out and start using it as soon as possible. Slowly build in to it. You might decide that this year, you're only going to try and forward book 10 per cent or 20 per cent of your crop. Get comfortable, then go through the cost of production process and try to use that in selling some of your crop and see how that goes. My advice to producers is to use the advice you get at formal training gradually and as you get more comfortable, adopt more and more.

The challenge is using what you've learned as you are taught to use it. The biggest problem I see is people try to be marketers and instead become speculators. A marketer uses these instruments to sell a crop that he has, or to hedge against price increases. A marketer turns into a speculator when he buys or sells, using futures or options that don't reflect the actual volume of commodities he produces or uses. Straight out speculators don't ever take possession of the actual commodity.

When is it time to bring in a professional for commodity marketing?

It comes to comfort level. If you're a producer who has some informal experience and you understand the planning process and the mechanisms for pricing, you probably can slowly move into it. If you've never really gone through the whole process, never really formally worked out your cost of production, never really had a planning process, you probably want to think about tapping into an advisor.



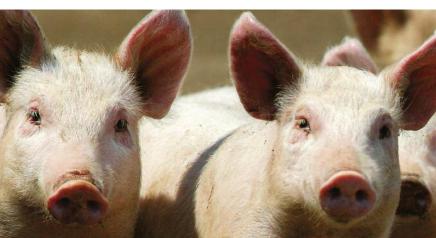
has a master's degree in business administration from the Richard Ivey School of Business at the University of Western Ontario. He is the senior risk management consultant and head of strategic planning at

VICTOR AIDEYAN

HISGRAIIN Commodities Inc. Victor has worked with clients across North America in swine and grain marketing.

See Victor at one of FCC's management workshops this winter. www.fcc.ca/workshops







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FEATURE

Develop a learning strategy

If you had the time and money to take any training course you wanted, what would you choose? What sort of learning would you find the most engaging? What sort of learning would carry the most value for your farm operation?

In the real world, time and money are limiting factors. However, in many cases, they aren't the barriers we make them out to be. If you really want to learn about something, you don't necessarily have to spend long periods of time away from the farm to attend expensive training courses hundreds or thousands of kilometres away.

You can get a start with books, webinars, online training and local short courses that are typically available. The cost is reasonable and it's relatively easy to schedule.

So what's actually stopping us? Maybe it's the bewildering array of choices. Do you upgrade your farm financial skills or work on marketing? Or maybe production-related information should be the priority.

> You can start with books, webinars, online training and local short courses.

As producers, we typically need some level of proficiency in a large number of disciplines. We're learning new stuff all the time out of necessity, but most of us don't have a learning plan.

We read articles that interest us. We attend meetings to learn about new products or to hear the latest market analysis. Those are all good, but we could be doing a lot more. We could develop a strategic learning plan tailored to our own personal needs and interests.

Different producers, different needs

Even producers in the same type of enterprise can have great variations in learning interests and needs.

With no outside employees, Brian Trueblood of Dapp, Alta. produces grains, oilseeds and some pedigreed seed. "It's just my wife and me, and our kids on weekends," Trueblood explains.

This limits opportunity for dividing up the learning needs of the operation, but it also decreases the need for learning about human resource management.

Trueblood has had many learning experiences as a director of local and provincial organizations. Attending local seminars and conventions helps him stay current on many issues. He's also learning a lot from being part of the local marketing club.

At one point, he considered pursuing an MBA at the University of Guelph. The price tag and the time commitment during the busy growing season soon dissuaded him.

Although producing many of the same crops and facing many of the same challenges, Warren Pridham of Carrot River, Sask. is in a different situation. With a larger operation, Pridham has three full-time employees and his partner Sharon has taken over some of the administration. He's also a chartered accountant with a keen interest in farm financial management issues.

"I was brought up to do it all yourself," Pridham says. Now, though, he relies on his team members for their expertise in key areas and has an agronomy service under contract.

Pridham has taken some of the top farm management courses. He was invited to Syngenta's Grower University and he's gone through The Executive Program for Agricultural Producers (TEPAP), which is administered by Texas A&M University and held in Austin.

He didn't have much in common with other producers at the course as far as crop types and production practices, but training in financial and human resource management is universal. He particularly enjoyed the training on assessing personalities.

One of the biggest benefits was rubbing shoulders with leading producers and the continuing contacts that have been fostered.

Work on weaknesses or strengths?

Pridham believes in hiring or contracting for areas of personal weakness, while concentrating learning activities in the areas where he's strong. That

Where to look

Check the website of your provincial agriculture department for additional learning opportunities.



The Canadian Farm Business Management Council

(www.farmcentre.com) has a wide range or resources available. Some are free and others are for sale.



Farm Credit Canada (www.fcc.ca) holds learning events on a wide range of topics at locations across the country.

approach may not be as viable in a smaller operation without outside employees.

It should also be recognized that most producers like to be "hands-on" managers. They couldn't imagine not spending some time on the combine or working with their livestock.

Concentrate your energy

When developing a learning plan, it may be helpful to break all the learning opportunities into broad categories so it's easier to decide where to concentrate your energy.

Production Management: This goes beyond balanced livestock rations and crop agronomy. While those are vital, it's about managing production and costs to maximize profits.

Financial Management: What is your rate of return on assets? What about the rate of return on equity? Can or should your farm take on more debt? Are you employing all the proper tax management strategies?

Buying and Selling: Every farm needs to buy inputs. If you run a feeder cattle or feeder hog operation, the buying side of the equation is particularly important. On the sales side, there are learning opportunities in everything from marketing strategies to futures and options trading.

People Management: If you have employees or even if you're working with other family members, managing these human resources is important. This comes naturally for some people, not so for others. Even if this is a weak area for you, it's not something you can ignore.

Visioning: Is there a vision and mission statement for your farm? Is there a strategy for how the farm will evolve and adapt to change? What about risk management? Are you effectively motivating the people in your operation?

While you could add even more categories, most learning needs fit into one of the above. If, however, you're contemplating or already in the process of a major change, your learning needs may be more focused.

Let's say you decide to transition into organic farming. Or maybe you decide to fully embrace holistic grazing management. Or maybe you're adding an agritourism side to the farm. You obviously need to research all facets of the new business opportunity and that research is likely to cut across all or most of the categories.

When you're in the midst of a major structural change, you're hungry for information and it's amazing how much learning you can pack into a short period of time. Even when we aren't going through major changes, we're well served by being hungry to learn.

BY KEVIN HURSH



The George Morris Centre

(www.georgemorris.org) at Guelph offers CTEAM, Canadian Total Excellence in Agricultural Management. CTEAM modules are held at locations across the country. The centre also offers an Executive Development Program.



The Executive Program for **Agricultural Producers**

(http://tepap.tamu.edu) is offered by Texas A&M University in Austin.



FEATURE

Seeds of knowledge pay dividends

Quebec dairy producer Martin Lavallée considers his cows to be high-calibre athletes. So when he hears about an information seminar that deals with the latest techniques in dairy production, he's eager to attend.

"It's never a waste of time to get pertinent information about things like feed and reproduction," Lavallée says from his young family's farm in St-Marc-sur-Richelieu, a 20-minute drive east of Montreal. "You never know when you might learn a new trick or two that will help you get the best possible performance from your animals."

He's not alone. Across Canada, producers of all size and stripe are spending record amounts of time and money on an ever-widening array of conferences, courses and workshops. Offered in person or online by suppliers, governments, schools and agencies, these learning opportunities provide information on almost every imaginable facet of farm life.

Proponents of continuing agricultural education say producers get a good return on investments in learning. And one of the biggest bangs producers get for their bucks is to learn or sharpen the management skills needed to run a modern farm.

"Farming has become a very complex business," says Heather Watson, general manager of the Canadian Farm Business Management Council, a federally funded group that develops and distributes farm management information. "Everything is linked together and there are many pieces in the puzzle. Many people want to learn more."

That need for knowledge, she adds, is fuelling interest in the conferences, books and DVDs that her organization offers on a wide range of management topics, from marketing and succession to financial and human resources. She adds that producer interest in online tools, documents and resources like the CFBMC's weekly agriwebinars – free, one-hour online seminars that feature national and international experts on different subjects – is "growing exponentially."

The same trend is changing the nature of courses that Alberta's oldest and best-known agricultural school has been offering to producers for the past 97 years.

"We forsee accessible learning, with the use of technology, as a huge growth area," says Mary Jane Block, program manager of continuing education at Olds College. Demand is so strong, all agriculture courses are being reviewed to see if they can be delivered online or with some form of technology to increase accessibility.

One constant, however, is the types of continuing education courses or seminars that are most popular among producers. "They mostly deal with information pertaining to specific areas like livestock or farm business and management," Block says. "They won't take something because it looks like fun. It needs to be practical."

Despite being a notoriously hard group to reach and attract, Block says producers make good and attentive students. "They are usually very engaged in the discussion at hand. That's because they want to be here, so they are highly motivated."

That is certainly the case with Brandon MacPhail, third-generation potato farmer in Prince Edward Island. A graduate (along with his wife, Rochelle and cousin Adam) of Nova Scotia Agricultural College, he regularly attends industry seminars that deal mostly with accounting and cost of production.

"I think it's pretty important in this day and age to stay on top of things," says MacPhail, who jointly owns and operates a 550-acre farm near the famous Cavendish Beach area. Adam serves as foreman of the operation.

"I like to benchmark myself against others to see if I'm as productive as they are. For example, if my fuel bill is 10 per cent more than everyone else, I must be doing something wrong."

For MacPhail, learning that kind of information is as important as the nuggets of knowledge he gleans from fence-top chats with farming neighbours or talking to industry suppliers and buyers. "I'm a young guy trying to make my cut in this business and I enjoy growing potatoes," he says. "It's important to never stop learning. It keeps you sharp."

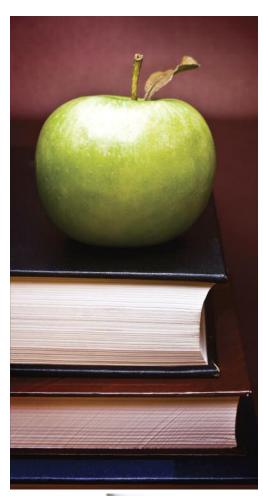
Lavallée agrees. Thanks to the efforts of his wife, Isabelle, who regularly takes farm management courses during the winter months at Quebec's largest agricultural college (the nearby Institut de technologie agroalimentaire in St-Hyacinthe) and handles much of the farm's paperwork, he focuses most of his time on production.

"It's important to never stop learning. It keeps vou sharp."

In addition to managing one full-time employee and a half-dozen seasonal ones, Lavallée says he's always concerned with getting the most out of his 85 head of Holstein cattle. And he's found that one of the best ways to do that is by attending seminars and conferences on the dairy industry.

"I like ones that are two or three hours long - short and sweet," Lavallée explains. "Sometimes you learn some amazing little thing like a way to increase the comfort of your animals, which boosts production. The trick is to adapt that knowledge to fit your own needs. Every farm is different."

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.





The time to learn is now -

and always

Lifelong learning. Sure it's a cliché, but change today isn't just faster, it's continuous. (The 3G becomes 4G before you've even figured it out the first time round.) Think about the course you took five years ago. If it already seems out of date, imagine one from 30 years ago.

Learning has to be integrated into your farm's annual development activities, even the daily ones. It's amazing the number of questions Google can answer (another cliché) over lunch with a wireless connection and a notebook computer on the kitchen table.

The old excuse of learning institutions being too far away no longer holds. A lot of educational programs are available online. It could be a webinar from the Canadian Farm Business Management Council (www.agriwebinar.com), a certificate course from any agriculture college across the country, or even a PhD from Athabasca University if you're so inclined.

In response to the growing interest for online learning, FCC is launching new e-learning this year, in addition to its popular face-to-face learning events. The new online resource is a management tool kit for Canadian producers, including videos, audio clips and webinars. You can get a sneak peek at www.fcc.ca/learning.

For those who don't have high-speed Internet, telephone companies offer pretty good rates on wireless access through the cellular network, and there's always the good old DVD delivered by snail mail. Community learning centres are beginning to sprout up to provide local access to

continuing education courses from the big city by video conference.

There's even the trusty speaker phone. Organize a kitchen meeting and invite a top speaker from far away to speak for an hour or so. You'll be surprised at who will accept for the price of a phone call, and the peer learning in post-call discussions over coffee can't be matched.

Experience now counts for a lot when being accepted into a formal educational program. Just because you don't have a diploma of some kind doesn't mean you don't qualify for a program. Many educational institutions now offer prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR), enabling mature students to enter formal learning programs based on an assessment.

Most professionals are being required to be certified in some respect or participate in continuing education or professional development time, and farmers and their employees are no exception. Proof of competence and compliance is an added legal protection when things go wrong and an excellent marketing tool to promote your farm and the profession.

So, get online and get learning!

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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Plan for safety

like you do production

Monkey see, monkey do.

That's the approach many Canadian producers seem to take when training people to operate machinery or handle livestock and chemicals on their farms.

"Their attitude is, 'You've seen me do it so you should know how to do it, too,'" says safety professional Glen Blahey. "But chances are they don't."

Improper training, he adds, is just one reason why agriculture is the Canadian occupation with the highest rate of disabling injuries.

According to statistics from the Canadian Agricultural Injury Reporting program, 115 people are killed and another 1,500 are hospitalized each year from farm-related incidents.

But Blahey believes it doesn't have to be that way – and it wouldn't if producers put as much thought and resources into safety as they do into their crops and animals.

"Every farm needs a safety plan," says Blahey, who was raised on a mixed farm in central Manitoba. For 29 years, he was the province's only agricultural safety and health specialist. But last summer, he joined the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (CASA).

"It's critically important that people who work there are aware and trained to deal with the dangers they face and have a strategy to react should an unanticipated event occur."

And Blahey's not talking about a simple safety checklist – though he does note the importance of daily precautions, such as always ensuring that machinery guards are in place, and chemicals and medication are properly stored.

He and other safety experts say that producers need a comprehensive safety plan that is tailor-made for their operation.

"Like a cropping plan or with livestock, you need to consider input and output. And it is cyclical. It needs to be updated and revised regularly to keep up with changes in commodities and equipment and employees."

The starting point is identifying the hazards and risks associated with the type of production on any given farm – everything from the physical dangers of machinery and animals to hazardous materials like mould in damp grain.

Producers need to put as much thought and resources into safety as they do into their crops and animals.

Employees then need to be trained to recognize and report dangers and to take cautionary measures like the use of goggles, masks or other safety equipment. They also need to know what to do when spills, accidental injections or other injuries occur.

"If producers rely on just showing how things work to a new employee or a young family member who comes of age, the risk of forgetting an important safety point is very high," Blahey warns.

"Documentation is an important training tool that lends credibility to what is trying to be achieved."

Visit CASA at www.casa-acsa.ca for more information.

BY MARK CARDWELL



Thanks a million Canada

(1.7 million, actually)

FROM FCC

This year's FCC Drive Away Hunger tour rolled to a stop on Friday, October 15. The result? Together we raised 1.7 million pounds of much needed food for food banks across the country. Thanks to the generosity of our partners, customers, schools, businesses and residents, there are fewer empty plates this fall.

"This year's FCC Drive Away Hunger program was a great success. People from across Canada stepped up in a big way to help bring food to those who need it – the generosity we've seen has been truly overwhelming," says FCC President and CEO Greg Stewart. "FCC would like to thank FCC Drive Away

Hunger partners and all Canadians who continue to rally together to support this program."
Six tractor tours took place in Alberta, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan and Regina (our corporate office) from October 12 to 15. As well, every FCC office across Canada collected food and cash donations to help local food banks.

Since 2004, FCC Drive Away Hunger has collected more than five million pounds of food for Canadian food banks. Watch for FCC Drive Away Hunger in your community each October.

Learn more at www.fccdriveawayhunger.ca.

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