

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2013

real-life
farm management
stories

AgriSuccess



A tradition of success: Alberta ranchers Cordel and Justin Griffith honour family ties



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On the cover:

The Griffith brothers own land that's been in the family for over 100 years. Using the lessons their dad taught them, they each run a successful cow-calf operation and count on family for support when business gets hectic. (Page 4)

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from the editor



You'll be a lot smarter than me by the time this edition reaches your mailbox. It's the time of year when a month or even a few weeks can make a big difference in the economic outlook for agriculture.

Due to the necessary lag between writing stories and getting a print magazine distributed, you'll know more about the size of the North American harvest and potential prices for the 2013 crop. You'll also have a better inkling of fall calf prices and what has transpired in the hog market.

As well, you'll know whether there have been any unexpected developments in the world economy. Both positive and negative surprises can quickly ripple through the economy and that typically has an impact on agriculture.

This is one of those editions with a number of predictions, projections and future-gazing stories. Most of this is medium-term in nature, but the medium-term is still affected by the short term.

So, please forgive us if our analysis has missed some late-breaking development.

We also have stories that aren't time sensitive, that make smart business sense, including advice on harvest safety around the yard, dealing with grain contracts, and SMART planning.

We enjoy your feedback and story ideas. Let us know what stories resonate with you and what future stories you'd like us to explore. Just email kevin@hursh.ca.

Here's hoping for a safe and bountiful harvest season.

Cover the basics, but watch the fine print

When it comes time to sign a contract to sell your farm's production, don't lose sight of the forest for the trees. So says Craig Zawada, CEO of WCMZ Lawyers in Saskatoon, Sask. Make sure you understand what you are agreeing to, and keep the focus on your marketing goals. Try to avoid becoming bogged down in the minute details and complex legal terms of the contracts.

Most farmers using production contracts have straightforward goals. They want to have a guaranteed market for a set portion of their production, for a set price, on a set date. Buyers have complementary goals; they are trying to guarantee that farmers will deliver enough of a commodity in time to meet their particular needs for a price that makes them a profit.

It's the producer's responsibility to understand before signing

Since buyers and sellers have corresponding needs, shouldn't it be easy for both parties to reach agreement on the terms and conditions in a contract? Not always, especially when it comes to the details. As Zawada says, it's the producer's responsibility to understand before signing. Don't expect problem areas to be highlighted with a big red X.

Zawada recommends you pay attention to the little things, like what happens if you miss the delivery date for whatever reason or the buyer decides not to accept delivery. Who's going to be responsible for storage costs then?

The best contracts are always the ones that are stuck in a drawer after they are signed and no one ever looks at them again, Zawada says. Knowing where they are and keeping them together by year and commodity is always a good idea, but not having to refer to the details is a sign that the parties know and trust each other and have a long-standing relationship.

"When you go into a contract with somebody new, I always recommend you find somebody who has dealt with that party before," Zawada says. "Do your research and talk to fellow producers who've dealt with them in the past. Ask if they had any problems and if they would deal with them again. If someone is cruising around the neighbourhood offering something much better than everyone else, there's usually a catch."



Words matter

Specific words have precise meanings in legal contracts, Zawada says. For example, if the contract says something “may” happen, it’s optional. If it says “shall,” though, it’s mandatory.

“For example, a contract might use the word ‘guidelines’ when describing crop husbandry practices. While guidelines are not necessarily rules, you have to be careful. Even though the contract says guidelines, if elsewhere in the contract it says the farmer shall follow the guidelines or otherwise will pay a penalty, guidelines become rules.”

Phrases like “the parties intend to” or have “an agreement to agree” aren’t binding clauses, Zawada says. They are

often just inserted into contracts where there has been a lot of inconclusive negotiation around a clause. Phrases like this really mean the parties have agreed to set aside the argument for now and will potentially settle it at a later date.

“If, for example, the contract says both parties agree to agree on a price at some point in the future, that’s not going to be enforceable,” Zawada says. “It’s a completely meaningless clause unless it also includes something like ‘if they can’t come to an agreement, then it will go to arbitration with a single arbitrator.’ That’s hard and fast, and is enforceable as well.”

Watch your indemnities

Lawsuits are increasingly becoming a fact of life in the Canadian food sector. Farmers are being asked to take more responsibility for the quality and the safety of their production. They have to pay close attention to contracts that say they have to indemnify the buyer for any damages their actions incur, Zawada explains.

“A classic indemnity would say, ‘If the producer breaches this contract, the producer promises to indemnify the buyer for all the costs that they suffer because of that.’ That’s really dangerous for producers in particular, because usually buyers intend to flip product over quickly for a profit. So if you – as a producer – don’t deliver and the buyer loses money, gets sued or has to pay damages to their buyers, your indemnity says they can go back and try to collect it from you.”

Indemnity clauses are often written in dense legal language and they aren’t easy to read, Zawada says. Producers have three courses of action: they can accept the risk and sign the contract knowing they are liable for costs in a worst-case scenario; decide it’s too much risk and walk away from the contract; or take the contract to their lawyer, learn exactly what the indemnity clauses mean and try to negotiate so they don’t have quite so much exposure.

While the chosen course of action may vary, Zawada’s advice remains the same: read the fine print and know what you’re signing.



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.



YOUNG FARMER PROFILE

Preserving a legacy

When Del Griffith died of cancer in 2009, he left his sons Cordel and Justin with words they would use as guidance in their ranching career.

“We’ve been taught how to buy cattle, rent land and manage a ranch to make money,” Justin says. “Our dad taught us debt isn’t a bad thing, providing you’re creating assets and growing and building. You try to always spend in a way so your money will come back to you.”

Today, the Griffith brothers – Justin, 26 and Cordel, 28 – each have their own cow-calf company and ranch near Cessford, Alta., a town about 45 minutes north of Brooks. The work they do each day has been built on their father’s legacy.

“Four or five years ago, the (Del Griffith) company had all the land, so I had to use what cattle I had as collateral,” Justin says, noting that the decision was also a step towards independence. “Without the cows as collateral, I would have had to get my mother to co-sign for me.”

Justin and Cordel have put their father’s words into action. They believe the ideal way to grow a cattle operation is by renting land, while at the same time increasing the herd

size to turn a profit, which they in turn use to purchase land.

“We find affordable land to rent, and borrow the money to buy cows,” Cordel explains. “After five years, if the cows are paid for, we use the cows as collateral to borrow more money to buy the land so we no longer have to rent.”

Just as valued as the family lesson is the work done by previous generations on pieces of present-day ranch land that have been in the family for over 100 years. Right after their father’s death, the brothers worked alongside their mother, Lori, to maintain the ranch. Two additional quarters of land were purchased, bringing the total land base to 17 sections. Carrying on the traditions and values established by their forefathers is part of what keeps the brothers motivated today.

“Our ancestors and our father had the stick-to-it attitude and if they hadn’t done, we would be working a job somewhere else,” Justin states. “If the generation before



Running their own ranches came earlier than they expected.



you has put good roots into the ground, it gets easier for every generation.”

The brothers continued to run their father’s company for a few years, but eventually decided they wanted to plant their own roots in the family business. They bought out the original company, Del Griffith Ranching, splitting it into two separate companies: Justin operates Griffith Cattle Company with 450 head, and Cordel runs C&M Ranching with 350 head.

Creating two companies made it easier for the brothers to have purchasing power for their ranches. While the operation was split into separate entities, the family remains closely knit and continues to work together.

Cordel, his wife Mandy and their two daughters live about three kilometres from Justin, his wife Dawn and their son. The boys’ sister Vanessa Roes ranches nearby, as do many other Griffith family members.

Running their own ranches came to the Griffith brothers earlier in their lives than they expected, but by putting their father’s advice to work, Cordel and Justin are well on the way to building their own legacy.

BY ALEXIS KIENLEN / *Alexis is a reporter with Alberta Farmer and a fiction writer. Originally from Saskatoon, she has a degree in international studies from the University of Saskatchewan and studied journalism at Concordia.*



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The mobile farmer

Want to make better use of wireless devices and the technology available today? Peter Gredig is involved in developing mobile apps for agriculture, and shares advice about how to take advantage of mobile technology in your operation.

What are some ways farmers can use smartphones to their advantage?

Almost all smartphones have GPS capability. Think about being able to mark the location of each field you have, or each farm. You can use that to communicate with agronomists, custom applicators, even do traceability and paperwork that require you to identify the location.

All farmers are interested in the weather, and there are all kinds of apps and resources out there that allow you to get a forecast with your smartphone device.

A lot of farmers use their smartphones to monitor prices for their commodities. The next level of power is to use the apps that allow you to set target price. Pick a high or a low value and if the market hits that alert price, you're notified. You can make a decision on whether you should market at that time or not.

Why use a tablet device such as an iPad or Playbook on the farm?

The smartphone has delivered an enormous amount of management power to most producers, but has one glaring weakness: the screen size is small. You can visit websites, consume video and look at images on a smartphone, but it's not optimal.

The opportunity for farmers to complement that smartphone with a tablet device really enhances the ability to access the web and take advantage of tools that use video or involve more complicated websites. It's a perfect mix – smartphone and tablet – both mobile, both delivering a lot of value to producers.

What are some efficient ways farmers can use a tablet in day-to-day business?

Mobile tablet devices allow you to carry a lot of information around in a very compact package. Think about literally having dozens of owner's manuals on a tablet instead of having to carry all of the books around or

have them in your shop. They allow you to view video, so things like an equipment demo on YouTube or the ability to look at equipment or livestock for sale online is really enhanced with the use of a tablet. It also allows you to consume or participate in social media in a much more effective way.

Tablet devices really change your Internet experience. Instead of going to your desktop or sitting at your computer, whenever you need to go to a website to get information, it's with you on your tablet. It's mobile. You use it as you need it. The Internet is now a mobile experience.



VIDEO: View the complete interview.
fcc.ca/AgriSuccessSept2013



PETER GREDIG

Peter Gredig is a corn, soybean and wheat producer based near London, Ont., who has a background in agricultural media and communications. In addition to his work with AgNition, Peter is the president of KettleCreek Communications and is working on strategies and tools that use mobile technologies to help Canadian farmers.

FCC's Ag Knowledge Exchange brings you face-to-face learning opportunities with experts like Peter. Visit fcc.ca/learning or see the pull-out listing in this issue to find an event near you.

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The economy always
takes twists and turns
no one can anticipate.

FEATURE

Predicting the unpredictable agriculture economy

What would it be worth to your business if you knew how the next five to 10 years are going to unfold? It would be huge, right?

While medium to long-term economic forecasts are inherently unreliable, here are my thoughts as a seasoned agricultural observer, combined with perspectives from John DePutter, a highly regarded agriculture analyst based in London, Ont.

Between us, we hear scores of speakers each year and we closely follow agricultural and economic news and opinions.

Worldwide economic problems

Personally, I marvel at the massive American debt and how there seems to be no real plan to substantially cut the annual deficit. This doesn't seem to register as a problem in the psyche of the typical American voter, but with accumulated debt closing in on \$17 trillion and with an annual budget deficit of over \$1 trillion, logically the budget issue will eventually need to be addressed.

We've already seen debt problems lead to a great deal of strife in a number of EU nations.

As John DePutter points out, worldwide economic problems also extend to Japan – which has had a multi-decade economic downturn – and even China's terrific growth rate is slowing.

“We live and work in an interconnected world and factors coming from outside agriculture could have significant ramifications on our businesses,” DePutter says. “With luck, maybe the surprises will be bullish for agriculture, but I think we need to move forward with open minds, recognizing that agricultural prices and profits are cyclical.”

Boom in the crops sector

For the past five years, grain prices have enjoyed a higher trading range. Producers able to harvest decent crops have had profitable years – for some, their best years ever.

You've no doubt heard the reasons why many analysts believe the good times are here to stay. There are the growing populations and economies in China and India. Biofuel has produced a brand new demand for grain. Worldwide production will be hard-pressed to keep up with demand. Let the good times roll.

Not all analysis is so bullish. A recent study by Rockefeller University's Jesse Ausubel and his collaborators concludes that the trajectory of increased agricultural productivity will outpace demand.

They point to American corn yields that can average 180 bushels an acre while the world corn yield is around 82 bushels an acre. Based on this gap, it would seem the rest of the world should be able to modestly increase their productivity. And in the U.S., some producers are achieving non-irrigated corn yields of 300 bushels an acre.

The study concludes we've reached peak farmland – that as technology improves, hundreds of millions of hectares currently being used for agriculture will no longer be needed. Although the study takes a very long-term view, it's a perspective that farmers don't often hear.

DePutter is cautious about the medium-term outlook for grain prices. While we appear to be in a new, higher-trading range for crop prices, this doesn't mean we'll continue to set new price records.

"I don't think wheat futures will get back to their 2008 peak," DePutter says. "I would not bet a lot of money on corn or soybeans getting back to their 2012 peaks."

On the other hand, DePutter doubts we'll drop back to some of the very low prices witnessed pre-2007. Still, profitability could be affected by shifts in input costs.

"I think farmers best be prepared for some years of narrow margins and cost-price squeeze challenges, even within the context of generally higher grain prices."

Farm debt

Canadian farmers carry more debt than ever before, but debt servicing has generally not been a problem – with the hog sector as one notable exception. Farm debt levels don't seem out of line, considering the health of farm balance sheets.

Everyone knows that interest rates will eventually have to increase. They don't have room to drop any lower.

While no significant increases appear imminent, what about two or three or five years from now, particularly if some of the world's economic and debt problems can't be easily resolved? And what about commodity prices, which have always been cyclical?

"Lower average commodity prices for a couple of years would do a lot to cause expansion-minded farmers to pull in their horns," DePutter says.

A boom for cattle and hogs?

The great returns in the grain sector have largely bypassed the country's red meat industries. Of course, high grain prices mean high input costs for feeding livestock. Economic theory would suggest that beef and hog supply would contract, eventually forcing prices higher. It hasn't turned out that way.

"I thought the livestock sectors would have taken their turn at good times by now," DePutter notes. He says North American beef production has contracted, but that's not really the case with hogs.

"The hog industry has been on an unprecedented drive towards efficiency with more pork produced per bushel of grain than ever," DePutter says. Poultry production in the U.S. has hit new record highs, and that competes for the dollars consumers spend on meat.

A lot of economic analysis has focused on the growing demand for meat in developing nations. As income levels improve, people tend to diversify their diet and eat meat dishes more often. To date that hasn't translated into an economic boom for exporting nations, but DePutter is optimistic about the future.

"There is definitely a future in livestock production. I still think it could be a better sector to be in than cash-crop farming in the next few years. And there might even be a period of extreme profits. Historically, this is usually the case in the big cyclic picture of agriculture."

Take-home message

There are worldwide economic storm clouds on the horizon, but no one knows if or when the storm will hit – nor do they know its severity. As the old adage goes, it's better to be safe than sorry. That certainly applies to the assumptions you make for your business plans.

The cure for high prices is high prices, as profitability usually encourages extra production. Hopefully, crop prices will remain reasonable, but it's probably unrealistic to expect new record highs each year.

And finally, expect the unexpected. The economy always takes twists and turns no one can anticipate.

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.*



FEATURE

American ethanol hits blend wall

The price strength in the grains complex over the past half-dozen years is due at least in part to biofuel policies and production. However, in the key American marketplace, ethanol policy appears to be at a crossroads.

The elements of the ethanol debate are well known in the agricultural community. Nearly 40 per cent of the massive American corn crop now goes to ethanol production. For grain producers and those with a stake in ethanol manufacturing plants, grain ethanol is viewed in a positive light. It has created new demand for corn while providing economic opportunities in rural regions.

Livestock producers take a different view, claiming that ethanol incentives and the renewable fuel standard have artificially increased grain prices, dramatically cutting into the bottom lines of cattle and hog producers.

The true price impact on corn and the rest of the grains complex is, however, difficult to quantify. The co-product

of ethanol production is distillers grains that go into the feed industry. Stronger grain prices encourage more production. Thus, the impact of ethanol on grain prices ranges between some and a lot – depending on the analysis.

Undeniably, ethanol plants that were once hugely profitable now see tight margins. Many plants in the U.S. have been shuttered. Others are retrofitting to become more efficient.

Part of the poor economics on both sides of the border is due to higher feedstock prices – corn in the U.S. and Central Canada, wheat and corn in Western Canada. The other factor in the American marketplace is government policy that is mandating more ethanol production than what the industry can use for blending.

“The U.S. has set increasing targets for ethanol blending to support the biofuels industry and they have assumed

that gasoline consumption will continue to increase,” explains Jason Parent, senior associate with MJ Ervin and Associates, a division of The Kent Group based in London, Ont. The company specializes in petroleum consulting. “However, gasoline demand is flat to declining due mainly to improved fuel efficiency.”

In Canada, there’s a federal requirement for a five percent ethanol blend in gasoline, so ethanol requirements vary according to gasoline consumption. In the U.S., the ethanol requirement continues to increase even though gasoline consumption isn’t rising. The industry is hitting what has become known as the blend wall.

Most petroleum producers in the U.S. are at the 10 per cent limit for ethanol inclusion. To make up the difference between how much ethanol they’re supposed to purchase and how much they can actually blend, they have to purchase renewable identification number (RIN) credits.

RIN credits had very little value until the blend wall was hit. Recently, they’ve sold for as much as a dollar per litre.

Renewable fuel supporters would like to see the standard go from E10 to E15, but 15 per cent ethanol isn’t approved for all vehicles and that creates liability issues.

E15 would also require changes at gas stations, the cost of which would be borne by independent owners.

Selling a relatively small amount of E85 would help match ethanol production with use, but Parent says E85 hasn’t really caught on with consumers. One of the issues is that E85 only has two-thirds of the energy content of gasoline and has to be priced accordingly. As well, you need to drive a flex-fuel vehicle.

While there are some calls for the U.S. government to repeal the Renewable Fuel Mandate, Parent believes repeal is unlikely. Instead, there could be revisions to existing regulations, specifically the mechanism by which mandated levels are set. He doesn’t believe the American government will do anything that will be seen as putting the biofuels industry at risk. On the other hand, he doesn’t see significant growth in the sector.

Interestingly, Canada is importing some ethanol from the U.S. and blending above the five per cent requirement. And that’s because ethanol has become cheaper than gas.

BY KEVIN HURSH



Biodiesel

- Canada has plant capacity for about 500 million litres of biodiesel annually, which is close to the amount needed for the federal two per cent biodiesel mandate.
- Another 300 million-litre plant is coming on stream at the ADM canola crushing facility in Lloydminster, Alta., but that’s the only increased production on the horizon.
- When producing biodiesel suitable for cold weather use, canola and soybeans are more expensive feedstock than animal fats and palm oil.
- Most Canadian production of biodiesel is exported to the U.S. because the plants here aren’t producing biodiesel suitable for cold weather use. That’s being imported from the U.S., Singapore and Europe.

Nurture the optimism of youth

Young farmer groups seem to be rapidly expanding across the country. Enthusiastic and motivated, they're anxious to get going in their agriculture careers and make their marks on the industry.

Cedric MacLeod, a beef producer and farm advisor from New Brunswick, often travels to young farmer events to speak about farm management, communications and operations. He points out that with strong commodity prices in most sectors, it's a good time to be in agriculture and the mood among Canada's young farmers is upbeat.

"They're super positive – everybody loves farming right now," he says.

Jill Harvie agrees. She and her husband Cole operate a 300-head purebred Charolais, Hereford and Simmental ranch near Olds, Alta. The 30-something couple work with Cole's parents Ian and Marlene, his brothers Will and Scott, and Scott's wife Kerrie.

Jill thinks young farmers are generating energy in the industry because they see a world of possibilities.

"A lot of people are seeing the opportunity to get into agriculture where many have left, or where the generation before them are thinking about exiting," she says.

Cole and Scott Harvie left the operation after high school and came home to farm about 10 years ago. Since their return, the family has started work on a succession plan, mapping out each individual's strengths, the family goals, lifestyle choices and personal directions.

Setting a direction for the future of the farm and their place in it is a tough but necessary part of business, according to Jill.

"I don't think succession planning is easy by any means," she says. "We're trying to work through things and see

where everyone has strengths, from building fences to building a catalogue."

The farm has diversified over the years. They now hold an annual bull sale in the spring and publish a catalogue in advance of the sale. There's an online sale of female Herefords and embryos each fall. Plus there's the hay, silage, grain and grassland that fill the more than 1,000 acres on the farm.

Strong prices in many sectors may lead young farmers to feel financially comfortable and itching to expand. Whether that means purchasing more land, spending more on inputs or buying new equipment, MacLeod suggests they pause and ask themselves about their end goals.

"Why do you want to risk everything for the sake of expanding? Where's that taking you?"

MacLeod believes a young farmer's assessment of why he or she wants to farm goes hand-in-hand with the overall plan for the farm. He urges farmers of all ages to reflect on, discuss and write down their business vision.

"What's your fundamental goal?" he asks. "Until you have that, you're just floating."

Overall, young farmers need to recognize their personal core values and use that knowledge to plan a career and help craft the farm vision, MacLeod says. "It's easy to get out of bed at seven-dollar corn, but would it be as easy at three-dollar corn?"

For the Harvies, the passion comes from a variety of drivers. "We all enjoy what we're doing and at the end of the day, we have the rural lifestyle that we want," Jill says. "Young farmers have a fire in the belly, and they want to continue the tradition of the family farm."

As for MacLeod, he knows farmers don't start farming because of a love for strategic business planning. But in today's complex agricultural world, it's one of the things that's going to keep them farming.

More experienced operators can help the younger generation be aware of the realities of farming, according to MacLeod. Jill Harvie cites the difficulties faced by operators in the cattle industry after the discovery of BSE in Canada as one example. Ten years later, they're still working to regain their previous footing.

"We've been through hard times, so when we see some optimism, it sure makes us feel good," she says.

MacLeod believes youth are up to the challenge of bottling the enthusiasm generated at workshops and conferences and carrying it with them into their careers. And older generations of farmers can do much to nurture that enthusiasm.

BY ALLISON FINNAMORE / *Allison specializes in cultivating words. Based in New Brunswick, she is an agriculture and business communicator with nearly two decades of experience. She contributes to publications nationwide and works to help industry promote farming and rural living.*



Jill Harvie - proud agvocate

Operating Harvie Ranching with her family in Olds, Alta. and working as both the Cattlemen's Young Leaders Program Manager and Canadian Cattlemen's Association Policy Assistant are just a few of the things that fill Jill Harvie's busy life. But she's never too busy to help share her love of agriculture. "It's really important to tell positive stories about our industry, because we have a great story to tell," Jill says.

Jill is a great example of an agvocate, which is a popular term in ag circles. But what exactly is an agvocate? What does an agvocate do?

Generally, an agvocate:

- uses facts and personal experiences to dispel myths and misperceptions about the ag industry
- acknowledges the challenges in ag, but focuses on the positive side of the industry
- wears their passion for ag on their sleeve and looks for ways to share it with the world

- speaks up, speaks positively and, most importantly, speaks first – an agvocate looks for opportunities to create conversations as opposed to always responding to others

One visit to **HarvieRanching.com** and you'll see all of these agvocate characteristics proudly displayed through videos, posts and more. Jill invites people into the industry she is excited about and shares her story. "I think it's really important that people know that we are the stewards of the land, we love the land our cattle graze, we love the cattle and we are very conscious of the fact that we need to fulfil feeding the world," Jill says.

Being an agvocate is all about being inclusive and creating dialogue in respectful and meaningful ways. And, it doesn't have to be hard. Just take a look at what you love about ag and why ag is important to you, and share it with the world. That's what an agvocate does.

You can learn more about being an agvocate at **AgMoreThanEver.ca** – add your name to the agvocate list and find resources to help you tell the real story of Canadian ag.





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enough grains.



GAME CHANGERS

Keep the gluten (lose the glutton)

Nearly every major commodity now works to promote its health attributes, funded directly or indirectly by producers themselves.

Baby boomers striving for near-immortality are more susceptible than ever to quick-fix diet solutions. With social media and celebrity emulation, foodstuffs can be adopted or vilified more quickly than at any time in history.

Gluten is a prime example of vilification. *Wheat Belly* by William Davis purports that you can “lose the wheat, lose the weight and find your path back to health.” The book has received a great deal of media attention and celebrity endorsement, even though nutritional experts say it is rife with misleading statements. There are even some untruths.

A tiny percentage of people certainly need to avoid gluten in their diet. A minor level of gluten intolerance affects a few percentage points of the population. However, a U.S. survey in early 2013 found that 30 per cent of adults claimed to have cut down on gluten consumption or were avoiding it completely.

In this country, there has been an almost 10 per cent decline in average wheat flour consumption since 2001 and the decline is accelerating, according to the Baking Association of Canada.

There’s no doubt that North America is suffering from an epidemic of obesity, but gluten isn’t the cause. Many of us are simply consuming too many calories.



You can't assume your product's natural goodness is somehow going to be discovered and appreciated.

Tackling the myths about wheat and gluten are the leading scientists and health practitioners of the Healthy Grains Institute. It's an authoritative group providing factual, science-based information to Canadians.

The institute points to the Health Canada recommendation that adults should consume six to eight servings of grains daily with at least half of those servings coming from whole grains.

A 2010 Harris Decima poll found 90 per cent of Canadians think they're getting enough grains in their diet, but only 10 per cent actually are.

Nearly every major commodity now works to promote its health attributes. Whether you're producing milk, pork, poultry, pulse crops, canola or flaxseed, you can't

afford to be complacent. You can't assume your product's natural goodness is somehow going to be discovered and appreciated. And you have to be vigilant to counter the naysayers with facts and education.

Promoting a positive image takes effort and resources. It's more difficult to get positive media attention to offset those who employ sensational negativism. But the effort is necessary and worthwhile.

Most of the promotional resources come directly or indirectly from producers themselves, so this matters to your bottom line.

Producers themselves are often the best face for the product. Just look at how many television ads now feature the raw product producer. And look at how many producers have become ambassadors for their industry.

We're now compelled to participate in public relations and image-making, or we may lose by default.

BY KEVIN HURSH

Make planning a habit

While the devil will eventually arrive in the form of details, when it comes to getting started on a planning exercise, the KISS principle – keep it short and simple – is the way to go. Too much preoccupation with details at the beginning can stall the planning process to the point where it never gets done.

Conversely, while hatching a plan on the back of an envelope in the coffee shop is better than nothing, it risks being a little too simple even for the KISS principle. Where's the happy medium?

Michelle Painchaud of Painchaud Performance Group works with farm businesses on improving their performance and says that planning for success is often viewed as difficult, mainly because most of us don't have much experience in this regard.

"Planning should become a habit for it to become easy. Like anything new, the first few times we do something, it requires effort. If one studies the science of habits, it is proven that habits become behaviours – the trick is to create the habit," she says.

Like any recipe, the key to planning is in the ingredients and they should be SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-sensitive. Essentially, these are code for: what's the goal you're planning for, what level of change are you seeking, when will this be achieved and who is going to do it? If you're missing any of those ingredients, the plan won't be worth much more than the paper it's written on.

Thinking about increasing production? A SMART plan should identify the what (increasing corn yields, for example), by how much (10 per cent), by when (average over the next three years), and who's responsible for doing what (the details).

Four quadrants laid out on a piece of paper, each with one of these titles, and you're on your way. In the "Who's doing



what" square, you can list what needs to be done, and those items become the headings on a second page for the specifics to be attached: how much financing and on what terms, what new varieties, which pieces of equipment, and so on.

The last part is keeping track. Crop yields can easily vary by 10 per cent a year just from circumstances, so was it the plan or was it the weather that achieved the result? If you can't compare the items that influence crop yield year to year – seed, fertilizer, moisture, timing, etc. – you'll never know. Which is why planning should become the rule rather than the exception.

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.*



SAFETY ON THE FARM

Safety rules in the yard during harvest

Farms are dangerous places at the best of times. But they can be downright deadly during harvest, when speed, fatigue and increased traffic in the yard are thrown into the mix.

“Numbers don’t lie,” says Raynald Marchand, general manager with the Canada Safety Council. According to Marchand, the vast majority of the more than 100 deaths and 1,500 serious injuries that occur each year on farms across Canada happen between May and October.

Most fatalities involve machinery, including rollovers, entanglements, bystander run-overs and extra rider run-overs – and most happen during harvesting activities.

Unlike in other inherently dangerous industries like construction, transportation and manufacturing, young children account for approximately 10 per cent of all fatalities on farms.

“Farms are the only workplace where kids are present,” Marchand says. “And that brings a whole new dimension of danger into play.”

In addition to creating fenced areas where young children – particularly toddlers – can play safely, he recommends that producers take time to explain how machinery and machines work to young farm workers, family members and friends who may come to help with harvest.

“They need to be made aware of dangers and what to do or not do when they are in some areas of the yard or when handling different pieces of equipment,” Marchand says. “They need to know, for example, that it takes only a

couple of seconds to be trapped in flowing grain or that unlike school buses, which have mirrors everywhere, farm vehicles have lots of blind spots and the operator might not see them.”

As a child, Marchand lost a six-year-old cousin who fell off the fender of an uncle’s tractor and was crushed to death under a rear wheel. “Children should be absolutely prohibited from riding on tractor fenders or tow bars,” he says.

He recommends producers be just as firm with anyone, including young employees or family members who speed on equipment or handle machinery improperly.

“They may think they’re helping you out by driving a load of grain or hay back to the barn faster,” Marchand says. “But that is exactly how many bad accidents occur.”

He notes that of the \$465 million that accidents cost Canadian producers in physical damages and lost productivity each year, \$91 million is related to equipment mishaps.

“And that doesn’t include the human cost,” Marchand adds. “Every death or serious injury is a tragedy for the victim and their families.”

BY MARK CARDWELL / *Mark 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.*

Be an agvocate

Speak up, speak positively

Those of us involved in agriculture know why ag is important to Canada and the world, and that it provides a lifestyle that can't be beat. But we tend to be a humble group, so others may not hear this message. We need to remember: image matters. What we say about agriculture influences how people view our industry. We need to let our passion and optimism for ag shine through in everything we say and do – being an agvocate is that easy.

Agvocates look for opportunities to talk about what's going well in agriculture. They use facts and personal experiences to fill in information gaps and dispel myths. A positive image of ag will help our industry attract the talent and investment it needs to reach its full potential. Fortunately we have a very positive story to tell. So tell it.

Join the conversation

Agriculture More Than Ever is an industry-driven cause, built on partnerships, to improve perceptions and create positive dialogue about Canadian agriculture. Changing perceptions is a big job. It's going to take all of us – from corporations and associations to farms and individuals.

Visit AgricultureMoreThanEver.ca to get involved:

- Add your name to our agvocate list.
- Find facts and resources to help you be an agvocate.
- Become an Ag More Than Ever partner – 170 plus have already signed on.
- Read and watch stories featuring people who are passionate about our industry. And you can share yours.
- Like us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter, and use #AgMoreThanEver when sharing positive stories, photos or facts.

Canadian agriculture needs your voice. Let's all speak up and speak positively about ag.



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**FCC Drive
Away Hunger**

A decade of fighting hunger, together

Canadian agriculture helps feed the world, yet up to 900,000 of us may need a food bank this month. Over a third will be children. You can help reduce hunger in your community by bringing a food or cash donation to the FCC office nearest you before October 18.

Or, pledge to Give What You Grow. Donate the product or proceeds from one acre, field, barn, bin, cow, hog, heifer, layer or greenhouse this season. All proceeds stay in your local community. Contact us for details.

Call 1-855-427-6207 or visit FCCDriveAwayHunger.ca.



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