

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2013

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Partnership was right move for P.E.I. potato producer Andrew Lawless

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On the cover:

Amalgamating his potato farm with three neighbouring farms helped Andrew Lawless move his business forward while keeping family a priority in his life. (Page 4)

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from the editor



There has always been a fear of “corporate farms” taking over agriculture. While there are notable examples of farms that fit the corporate definition, they certainly don’t dominate primary production. In fact, in the latest census, 98 per cent of Canadian farms met the definition of family farms.

A growing number of those family farms are incorporated, but that’s just a business structure. Families still own and run the vast majority of farms in this country and that isn’t likely to change in the foreseeable future.

The term family farm should no longer conjure up images of quaint little operations. While family farms span the gamut from small to very large, on average, they continue to grow in size and sophistication.

This publication is devoted to farm business management. The family aspect of farm business gets regular attention in our content and this edition is no different. Several stories deal directly with family considerations. Even when stories are not explicitly

about families, you can bet that family dynamics are still in the background.

Want to change some aspects of how you farm to make more money from the same production base? Want to make adjustments in the operation to cope with climate variability? Big decisions often have to be discussed and agreed upon by a number of family members. And there’s no doubt that big decisions affect all family members, even if they aren’t directly involved.

Pass your copy of AgriSuccess around to your business partners and all the family members who have a stake in your operation. It’s not just for the farm managers. You’ll see there are stories for everyone.

We welcome your story ideas and feedback. Just email kevin@hursh.ca.



Know your tax deadlines

It's tax time again! While no one likes paying taxes, setting aside the time you need to get organized will eliminate most, if not all, of the last minute panic.

February 28 is the last day for making RRSP contributions and filing T4, T4A and T5 forms, and is the first major tax date that comes up. After that, it's clear sailing until your personal tax returns are due April 30. Self-employed individuals have until June 1 and corporate tax returns aren't due until six months after their corporate year-end.

While September 30, 2013, is the last day you can enrol in AgriInvest for 2012 without penalty, you could still get into the program up until December 31. But you have to be prepared to take a financial hit. Once you file, you have 90 days from the date you receive your AgriInvest Deposit Notice to make your payment.

An important date to keep in mind is December 31. Unless you're incorporated and have a different designated year-end, the final day of the calendar year is the cut-off day for your fiscal year. That means if you want to have a particular expense used against your income in the current year, it has to be paid by December 31. Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) tax instalment payments are due at the end of the year too.

Procrastination can be costly. Since everyone in Canada shares the same personal tax deadlines, the closer you get to them, the busier your accountant or bookkeeping service will be. Waiting until the last minute to consult a tax accountant can result in paying higher tax bills because there isn't time to sit down together and discuss all the available deductions and tax reduction strategies.

Pre-buying inputs and making capital equipment purchases can be used to reduce your taxes. However, purchases should only be made if they fit into your overall business plan.

Regardless of your annual tax deadlines, it's a good idea to develop a strategic approach to managing your finances. Everyone's situation is different, so consult with a professional to develop a plan that works for you.



Are they contractors or employees?

Farm workers often want to be paid as independent contractors so their taxes, employment insurance and Canada Pension Plan premiums aren't deducted from their pay. However, Kelvin Shultz with Wheatland Accounting Services in Fillmore, Sask., says employers should think long and hard before they agree. If CRA determines an individual is not a contractor, they will assess payroll deductions and penalties to the employer.

"CRA determines whether a worker is an employee or contractor using a number of factors," Shultz says. "One consideration is control; does the worker or the employer control the way the work is done?" If the worker makes decisions on how a job is done, it's an indication of an independent contractor. If the owner calls the tune, the worker is likely an employee.

There are other considerations, such as who owns the tools used to complete a job, Shultz says. For example, it's clear-cut you are hiring a contractor to spray your fields if they show up with their own self-propelled, high-clearance sprayer. If you made arrangements to have your neighbour's son run your sprayer for the season – you hired an employee.

After evaluating the first two criteria, there are additional points to consider, Shultz says. Who has the chance of profit or the risk of loss? Does the worker provide services for more than just your operation? If you determine the worker is a contractor, it's good practice to have an independent contractor agreement signed prior to the engagement.

Little things count

Farmers compete with many industries to attract and retain good workers. While they can't always match the dollars being paid by the resource industries, most workers don't choose where they want to work based only on salary. Often a producer can throw in a few little extras to sweeten the pot.

Many allow workers to use farm vehicles, or let them fuel up a personal vehicle from the farm's tanks. Using a farm or a personal vehicle for farm business, such as running to town for parts, isn't a taxable benefit. But using it for strictly personal purposes such as travel to and from work is.

A simple token of appreciation to say thank you when an employee goes above and beyond the call of duty goes a long way to keep workers happy. If you do it right, you can deduct the money you spend on gifts and tokens of appreciation for your employees without them having to declare the value as income.

"Employers can give a worker up to \$500 in non-cash gifts and awards annually," Shultz says. "Cash and near-cash gifts are always taxable though." For example, taking an employee and spouse out to a nice restaurant for a night on the town is a deductible expense for the employer, but it's not a taxable benefit for the worker. However, if you gave them a gift certificate for a meal at the same restaurant, it is.

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

Potato farm thrives under partnership umbrella

Farmers like their autonomy, the ability to make all their own decisions. However, for Andrew Lawless of Kinkora, P.E.I., creating a joint farm enterprise with his neighbours was the best way to increase efficiency and profitability.

When 36-year-old Andrew Lawless combined his own farm with three other nearby operations, all were growing processing potatoes for Cavendish Farms, each on about 400 to 600 acres. Every farm was its own entity – operating its own equipment, running its own storage, hiring its own staff. Lawless says that creating R and L Farms allowed the group of four farmers to reduce costs and maximize resources.

“You either have to be small and do direct sales or you have to be big and efficient – and I felt that big and efficient was where I had to go,” Lawless says. “Now, we get the maximum efficiency from each piece of equipment. We’re able to spread costs out over the same amount of acres.”

The land mass of the combined operation adds up to about 3,600 acres, where they produce 30-plus million pounds of processing potatoes for Cavendish. An Atlantic Canada-based food processor, Cavendish Farms is North America’s fourth largest producer of frozen potato products and a member of the Irving Group of Companies.

At R and L, the potato crop is on a three-year rotation with grains and forages. Land is also rented or traded with local dairy farms. Lawless says they’ve tried non-traditional crops like soybeans, but the partners found little benefit to their primary crop.



"I felt that big and efficient
was where I had to go."



“We want to have the land in the best shape possible for the potatoes,” he says.

Protection of waterways is high on the list of priorities for the farm. The partners are acutely aware of nearby waterways and take environmental protection steps on the farms. They uphold the 15-metre buffer zones, Lawless says, and keep an eye on weather forecasts. They’ll delay spraying if winds are scheduled to be high or if rain is predicted.

With hindsight as a guide, Lawless says that incorporating with his neighbours was the only way his business could move forward and he could develop the business and lifestyle he wanted – where his family is his main priority.

Working the Island’s famous red dirt runs deep in Lawless’s veins. He and his wife Heidi have three young children who will grow up the same way Andrew did – digging potatoes on the family farm. He and his father Neville continue to farm together at Kinkora, located about 14 kilometres from Borden-Carleton at the base of the Confederation Bridge.

“It’s what I’ve always known,” he says. “I enjoy getting up every day and working on the farm. I enjoy having my boys come with me on the tractor, and I enjoy working with my father.”

The joint venture is a perfect fit for family life. Prior to the amalgamation, when Lawless was working with his father or operating his own farm, he had to stay in the field until every task was finished. With today’s set-up, all four partners have maximum flexibility to build a work-life balance.

“Now, if I want to spend more time with my family, I can do that and one of the other partners can take over.”

Incorporating the four farms under one umbrella was a complicated process. But through it all, the partners maintained the drive to work together and produce an outstanding crop. The true secret to their success, Lawless says, is open-mindedness and enthusiasm.

“One of the biggest benefits is that together, we are all much more stable. And while you can’t predict what the future will bring, we are better positioned for growth and opportunities.”

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.*



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Consider land rental contracts

Thinking about renting land? Check out this advice from
FCC Chief Agricultural Economist J.P. Gervais.

What do landlords look for in a rental contract?

Typically, landlords are retired producers, or investors or developers near cities – what they're looking for in rental contracts, therefore, can be very diverse. An Iowa survey suggested that the three most important things to landlords when choosing a tenant were trust, reputation – and stewardship of the land. In other words, landlords are looking for the same things in their tenants as you would likely look for in your friends.

So get to know your landlords, and find out what they want. Do they want to be updated regularly on crop progress? Are there certain crops to avoid? Are they interested in learning about agriculture and your operation?

Maintaining a positive relationship with your landlords is critical to keeping your rental contracts and the success of your business.

How do I come up with a fair price?

First determine, with the landlord, the type of contract: a straight cash rent contract is the least complex and most popular. Share contracts are another option; landlords with little or no ag experience may prefer cash rentals.

Determining a price depends on a variety of factors, but the most important is the quality of the land. Land used for pasture and hay should not be as expensive as land used for a valuable cash crop like corn, soybeans or canola.

Ask yourself questions like:

- Are some spots too wet in the spring?
- Is there easy access for large equipment?
- Is the land tile-drained?

A good way to determine how much you can afford to pay for land rent is by knowing your cost of production and expected income (this can be based on historical prices). Finally, make sure to pay yourself.

Can we just shake on it?

You could, but it's not a good business choice. Verbal contracts are hard to enforce in case of conflicts.

Try to get all your contracts in writing. This avoids confusion about both how much and when rent is to be paid. As your farm business expands, having written contracts is actually much simpler because you have a record of rates paid, due dates and your relationship with the landlord.

All the information can be kept in one location in a spreadsheet or other appropriate type of software. Having written contracts benefits you and the landlord, because it provides clarity for both parties and helps reduce potential conflicts.

J.P. GERVAIS

J.P. Gervais is Chief Agricultural Economist at Farm Credit Canada. He's been a featured speaker at conferences across the country on the linkages between the economy and agriculture.



VIDEO: See the full interview with J.P. Gervais.
fcc.ca/AgriSuccessJan2013

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A number of minor changes could propel you forward.

FEATURE

Get more profit from what you have

Expansion has always been one of the primary methods for trying to increase farm income. Increase the number of cows, hogs or acres to generate income. Spread some of the fixed costs over more production units. Gain efficiencies from the economies of size.

But expansion is getting ever more difficult. In the supply managed industries, quota is expensive. Even in Ontario, where the value of dairy quota has been capped, observers say the ability to expand remains a big issue.

“With the \$25,000 per kilogram cap, there’s hardly any quota for purchase,” says Thomas Blonde, a partner in the chartered accounting firm Collins Barrow out of Elora, Ont. “Some dairy operations have invested in poultry quota, but that has contributed to those quota values going up.”

Across the country, farmland prices are strong and in most cases have been steadily increasing. Land may not be available for purchase or rent near your existing operation. If there is land available, you may be competing against investors as well as other producers.

So, expansion aside, how do you make more money from the farm? Do you concentrate on production, cost control, marketing, or the deployment of your human resources? The answer is likely to be a little bit different on every farm.

Production choices

Across the country, the cropping mix continues to evolve. For instance, soybeans have become a major crop in Manitoba. The 800,000 acres planted in 2012 is expected to increase to well over a million this year. Soybeans are being grown in southeastern Saskatchewan as well. Corn is another crop with advancing acreage in the Prairie region.

Producers generally embrace new crops as they prove beneficial to the bottom line, but there are producers who for various reasons keep growing the same crops, no matter how much money their neighbours are making with new options. It’s always, of course, advisable to introduce new crops in a measured way to gain experience.

In the drier regions of the Prairies, there are producers who still leave a third or even half of their acreage fallow every year while their neighbours have been continuous cropping for years. Producers with summerfallow argue they are less susceptible to drought.

While there are many successful producers using summerfallow, the acreage of deliberate fallow continues to decline, as more producers decide that it isn’t usually a paying proposition. New cropping options and practices have made continuous cropping more appealing.

Changing production practices often involves some risk. It won't work every year. It may require additional investment and it almost certainly will involve a learning curve, but it holds great potential for increased returns.

Production levels

For intensive livestock operations – hogs, dairy, poultry and even cattle feedlots – it's relatively easy to compare production levels from one operation to the next. Dairy producers, for instance, know how their milk production stacks up against the industry average. Hog producers use metrics such as pigs marketed per sow per year.

For grain and forage production, gauging your production levels compared to the rest of the industry is more difficult because land quality and the weather are variable. However, for Saskatoon accountant Allyn Tastad of Hounjet Tastad Harpham, making money in grain farming comes from agronomy.

"The dollars spent on inputs have never been higher," Tastad says. "You can't afford to miss the upside potential of a good year just because you haven't optimized inputs." He notes that some producers consistently get better yields than most of their neighbours.

Producers are besieged with an ever-increasing array of input choices, all of which are supposed to increase profitability. Obviously, you need to pick and choose the products and services that make sense for your operation. Generally speaking though, you have to spend money to make money.

Cost of production

Aaron Honess, a farm management consultant with MNP in Lethbridge, Alta., is a strong believer in producers knowing their cost of production and their return on investment. "You have to know your strengths and weaknesses in order to determine what you might do differently," Honess says.

MNP was commissioned by Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development to survey the 2009 cost of production on large-scale (over 2,000 acres) grain farms in Alberta. A total of 65 dryland farms were involved in the study.

Machinery investment among the farms varied widely, going from less than \$100 an acre to over \$550. This was on farms generally growing the same crops and getting similar performance. Generally, increasing machinery investment led to increasing cost of production, as any yield increases that may have come as a result of that investment were overcome by the escalating costs of owning and operating the equipment.

A key finding of the study was that increasing farm size did permit gains in the efficiency of machinery use as well as

labour use. However, the wide variance in results showed that mere size is not enough.

"The management of each farm is a critical factor in the exploitation of size with many of the largest farms being outperformed by smaller counterparts in these two areas," says the MNP report available on the Alberta Agriculture website at [www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/econ13638](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/econ13638).

Marketing

Both Aaron Honess from Lethbridge and Thomas Blonde from Elora agree there's a wide range in marketing sophistication among producers. When markets are volatile, there can be a big difference in returns between producers with the same amount of production to sell.

Honess cautions against marketing that's driven by cash flow need – in other words, selling just because you need money to meet commitments.

Producers continue to increase their storage capacity for both grains and fertilizer, so they can market and purchase with greater flexibility.

Similarly, in the cow-calf sector some producers are tied into marketing their calves at about the same time each fall because that's how their operation is structured. Other producers have the ability to hold calves out of the fall run and put some more weight on them before selling, if that appears to be a money-making proposition.

Know your numbers

Of course you want your farm to make more money, but going outside your comfort zone to change how you operate may not be as easy as it sounds. The starting point is to know your numbers so you can do a good analysis of your strengths, weaknesses and options for change.

And it may not be one big bold change that propels your profitability forward. It may be a number of relatively minor adjustments.

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.*

Join Kevin for his Feb. 13 webinar and learn more about increasing the profits from your operation. Visit www.fcc.ca/webinars to register.

Married, with business interests

Family and farming are deeply intertwined in Canada, as evidenced by the fact that the vast majority of farms continue to be operated by families. But working together can be a challenge for a married couple. Home discussions can easily spill over into the work day, or work stresses encroach on the couple's time at home.

"You need to take the time to sit down and listen," says David Irvine, an expert on family business, entrepreneurship and building strong relationships with family and staff. He notes that while one horse is able to pull a heavy load, two horses can handle more than twice as much. "That's because of this thing called synergy," Irvine explains.

That synergy, he says, is a fundamentally important component in a good husband-and-wife team.

Synergy and mutual respect work for Sandi and Mark Brock of Staffa, Ont. They met as summer students doing herbicide trials for DuPont, and have farmed together for 14 years.

"We've been farming since we've been married," Mark says. They purchased their first 100-acre farm in 1997, running his parents' operation at the same time.

Their own farm size has grown to 1,500 acres of corn, wheat, soybeans and white beans. They've just started sheep production and plan to be up to 150 ewes by spring.

Mark also took over his father's Pioneer seed dealership in 1997, and later the couple started their own seed and chemical dealership. Sandi says the process of keeping the doors open for communication can sometimes be difficult, but it's important to work through any differences.

"We're where we want to be, and it was worth the struggles," Sandi says.

Couples find different ways to handle the stress. "We argue all the time," say Art and Jackie Jonasson, who run a cattle operation near Vogan, Man., some 200 kilometres northwest of Winnipeg. The couple has always farmed – Jackie's parents gave the newlyweds 20 head when they were married in 1985, and now they have about 300 head. They may argue, but they also laugh easily and say that everyone who knows them recognizes this as their style.

Behind the bickering is a couple with a shared deep commitment to their farm, their animals and each other. They don't worry about leaving farm issues at the office and family matters at home because according to Jackie, they don't separate their lives that way.

Synergy is a fundamentally important component in a good husband-and-wife team.

"You don't leave the farm, and you don't work at the farm. You just live on the farm. We work together and we do everything together," she says. "We have a common goal," Art adds.

Sharing that common goal keeps the couple focused on their successful marriage and farm business.

"If you're like most farmers, you've probably been to courses on marketing, courses on production and financial planning, but not very often do we get the chance to learn about how to listen to each other . . . how to communicate," says Irvine.

The trick, he says, is identifying common goals and having discussions based on that focus.

BY ALLISON FINNAMORE



David Irvine's

Six tips for building better relationships in your farm family

1

Assess the level of respect and goodwill in your family.

Make building trust your No. 1 relationship priority. Spend time listening, especially to emotions, without fixing. Practise the art of conversation.

2

3 Clarify each person's goals and negotiate a win-win commitment. Sit together and find out what's important to each other.

Identify each person's unique talents and passion.

4

5

Identify your values, individually and as a family.

Bring a "servant's heart." If you want more caring in the relationship, be more caring. If you want more recognition from someone, recognize that other person. Meet the needs of others.

6



FEATURE

Adapting to climate

Weather volatility creates many problems,
but there are ways to fight back.

The sun hardly shone at Lester's Farm Market on the outskirts of St. John's, N.L., in 2011. There was nothing but rain, drizzle, fog and more rain. It was a terrible year for vegetable production.

"We'd been hearing a lot about climate change," Chris Lester says. They were worried that 2011 might be a harbinger of the weather they were going to get in the future. If it was, their operation was going to be in real trouble. The family contacted the weather office to find out what was going on, and were assured the weather was likely a random event. It looks like that was correct. The summer of 2012 was the sunniest anyone in the region could remember.

How to deal with changing weather patterns is a big concern in Newfoundland and Labrador. The province only produces between seven and 10 per cent of the food it consumes every year, Lester says. That wouldn't be so

bad if there were direct road connections to the outside world like other provinces have. However, if a five or six-day weather event disrupts its ferry lifeline, the island will start running out of food.

The province got a wake-up call two years ago when Hurricane Igor damaged a bridge on the Trans-Canada Highway used to transport food from the main ferry terminal in the southwest corner of the island into Avalon Peninsula in the southeast, where much of the population lives. According to Lester, no food could get to the area for three days.

"Within 24 hours, you could see some food items were disappearing from the supermarket shelves," Lester says. "Within 48 hours, they were down to just the bare essentials and products that don't move very much. By the end of it, one of the wholesalers we deal with was telling us there wasn't very much food in St. John's."



Seed companies are hard at work cracking the secret to drought and cold tolerance.

The province is now making a concerted effort to improve its food security. They've put a number of programs in place to foster the growth of the agriculture industry. However, there's not much farmers can do if they don't get enough sunshine for crops to grow.

Agriculture producers depend on relatively stable weather patterns. Some crops thrive in warm, drier climates and others in cool wet regions. It's very hard for anyone to adapt to weather that randomly oscillates between a warm and dry pattern one year and a cool wet one the next.

What can be done?

The Lesters have adopted a wide array of technologies to gain extra heat units. For example, the family grows many crops using plastic mulch to warm the soil in the spring. Row tunnels and greenhouses also let them expand the range of crops they grow, to now include dozens of crops ranging from asparagus to zucchini.

Seed companies are hard at work cracking the secret to drought and cold tolerance. Final results weren't in at time of writing, but there are many anecdotal reports from producers and agronomists that both Monsanto's and Dupont-Pioneer Hybrid's drought-tolerant corn withstood the drought that struck the Corn Belt in 2012 far better than regular varieties.

The heat that withered the corn in southern Ontario was also extremely hard on livestock. Unlike people, many animals can't sweat, says Kevin Weeden with Weeden Environments in Woodstock, Ont. Chickens and other animals pant to cool off when they get overheated.

Poultry barns have used water-fogging systems to help the birds cool off for years, Weeden says. However, this loses its effectiveness when humidity gets really high. While week after week of hot summer weather has been relatively rare in Canada, it's common in warmer climates. That's why Weeden's father went to Israel to check out technology that cools animals by spraying larger water droplets onto them.

The system was originally introduced into Canada for dust control. Recently, though, they've started to promote it for the cooling abilities it was developed for.

"Our droplets are heavier than those used in the high pressure fogging systems," Weeden says. "They are categorized as light rain. They fall onto the chickens, dairy cattle or hogs so when air is blown across the animals it creates evaporative cooling on the animals. The wind chill cools them down. It's like the coolness you feel when you climb out of a swimming pool on a windy day."

American author Mark Twain once quipped, "Everyone talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it." That might be changing. While producers are unlikely to ever be completely immune to the ravages of inclement weather, steadily improving technology is limiting the impact.

BY LORNE McCLINTON



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GAME CHANGERS

Natural gas shakes up the energy market

Game changers sometimes sneak up on you. Such is the case with one major energy source.

Natural gas has become much less expensive in North America, and that is generating a wide range of implications.

Back in 2008, the price of crude oil peaked at nearly \$150 per barrel. Natural gas followed suit with futures

prices reaching more than \$13 per one million BTU during the same time period.

For most of 2012, crude oil was somewhere between \$85 and \$100. That's lower than the peak, but relatively high based on a historical perspective.

By comparison, natural gas was consistently under \$3 in 2012. Prices were extremely volatile, hitting near-record highs all the way from 2001 until 2009. Since then, it's been a much calmer market that has trended lower.

Why the change? Hydraulic fracturing has allowed a big increase in recoverable natural gas from shale



formations. The supply of available natural gas in North America has increased dramatically.

Just a few short years ago, analysts were predicting the end of new nitrogen fertilizer manufacturing capacity on the continent. North American natural gas, the main feedstock for nitrogen, was just too expensive as compared to some other regions of the world for new plants to be built here.

With the new pricing reality for natural gas, new nitrogen plants have recently been announced. Your urea and anhydrous ammonia may not be cheap in the years ahead, but more production capacity should help moderate price increases.

When natural gas prices were high, greenhouse operators were scrambling to find alternate energy sources. That imperative has now diminished and lower heating costs have lowered the cost of production.

There's even discussion about converting large farm equipment to natural gas. The cost of conversion and a distribution network for compressed natural gas are barriers, but natural gas is now a far less expensive energy source than diesel fuel.

Natural gas is also lowering the cost of other energy. Producing electricity from natural gas now has favourable economics as compared to coal. Carbon emissions are much lower too.

Natural gas is lowering the cost of other energy.

Of course, there are various dynamics at play in the marketplace. If natural gas prices go too low, exploration and production slows. And demand changes as quickly as the weather. A cold winter in the U.S. means a big increase in consumption. The state of the economy is also a big factor. The economic slowdown in the U.S. cut their demand for energy.

Overall though, we can expect relatively inexpensive natural gas to continue to have positive implications for agriculture. For individual producers, there may be opportunities to convert more of their energy sources to natural gas.

BY KEVIN HURSH

It pays to get away

The hardest thing for many small business owners to do is get away from work, and farmers are no exception. There's always just one more job that needs to get done at the end of the day, and that vacation without an element of work attached, such as a farm tour or conference, never seems to materialize.

After nine years of running my own communications business, my wife finally said, "Enough – find two weeks to go away together, no work." So I did, and despite the mayhem of getting all those last little things done before going, it was well worth it. Hollywood, the Grand Canyon, the Napa Valley. Time with friends, relatives, strangers – fantastic.

So like Nike says, "Just do it." It's worth the effort, and the payback is just as good as keeping your nose to the grindstone. It helps prove that you can get away; the world will not come to an end when you leave the farm in someone else's good hands.

Time away also gives you some space to think about something other than the next piece of work, and gives you a different perspective on life. Even if you're not one to sit on the beach, there are a million and one interesting things to see and do. All of them can add value once you're home again.

But don't leave vacation time to chance. Put it in the annual plan. That's what companies do for their employees, and for a good reason: those little tasks keep clamouring for attention. And whether you go on vacation or not, they will always be there. So go.

If two weeks seems too big a chunk of time all at once, start with a long weekend. Then extend it into a short week, and so on. But make that commitment and mark off some dates on the calendar as much in advance as possible.



Lastly, even if you insist you don't need a vacation, think about the family. Sure they love living on the farm, but it can't be healthy if that's their only experience in life.

There's lots of payback to a vacation beyond the holiday itself. So just do it.

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.*



VIDEO: View vacation as an investment.
fcc.ca/AgriSuccessJan2013

Fitness: a business bonus for producers

For many producers, the new year means preparation for the upcoming growing season. But making a commitment to personal health should be as high a priority as deciding what crops to plant, says a top Alberta fitness expert with a farming background.

“You have to look at your body as an investment like you would a piece of equipment,” says J. P. Parsonage, an elite trainer with GoodLife Fitness. “If it breaks down, you lose out.”

A former Canadian Army infantryman and pro wrestler (protégé of Calgary’s legendary Hart family; he wrestled under the name Johnny Devine), Parsonage spent summers on his father’s farm in the Cypress Hills. He says mechanization has reduced, but not eliminated, the need for physical labour on farms. And because most modern producers spend more time sitting than doing manual labour, they need to work out to avoid pain and injury.

“It’s all about functional fitness,” he says. “Farmers are always bending over and lifting things, so they need to strengthen the muscles they rely on most.”

Whether joining a gym or training at home, Parsonage says to focus first and foremost on the lower back. He strongly recommends deadlifts using farm-related objects such as steel bars, fence posts or tractor tires, which he calls “perfect to flip.”

For the upper back and shoulders, try the aptly named Farmer’s Walk. “Grab an object in each hand – anything that weighs enough to challenge you but that you feel comfortable with – and walk as far as you can. Keep your back straight, your chest out and your abdomen tight. Your grip, shoulders, core and posture will strengthen.”

Another exercise he recommends is static push-ups. Stopping mid push-up and going onto your finger tips

for five reps “will increase your finger and grip strength exponentially, believe me,” he says. He also recommends crunches to increase core strength.

Exercises should be done in single sessions two or three times a week, with at least one day’s rest in between. Add 20 to 40 minutes of heart-rate elevated exercises on your off days to ensure good cardiovascular health.

Parsonage says the benefits of core strength and endurance apply to both men and women as they do chores and duties around the farm. Yoga, pilates and cross-fitness training are also good options if you’re looking for a challenge with variety.

In addition to consulting a physician beforehand, Parsonage recommends visiting fitness websites to see instructional videos showing proper form. Two of his favourites are www.gymjunkies.com for deadlifts, and www.crossfit.com.

“Learning to live healthier and being able to work longer hours can only be beneficial,” he says.

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.*

Want more health tips? Check out the FitFarmer webinars series. www.fcc.ca/webinars

Thanks for filling plates across Canada

This year's FCC Drive Away Hunger tour rolled to a stop on Friday, October 19. Together we raised 1.4 million pounds of food and over \$760,000 for food banks in Canada. Thanks to the generosity of our partners, customers, schools, businesses and residents, there are fewer empty plates this fall.

"It's sometimes hard to believe there are people in a country as great as Canada who rely on the food bank every year. But the need is real, and it's important that we don't forget about these individuals," says FCC President and CEO Greg Stewart. "That's what Drive Away Hunger is about – it's about showing the best of ourselves and helping others who need it. We truly appreciate the support shown across Canada."

Tractor tours took place in Alberta, New Brunswick, Ontario, Quebec, Saskatchewan and Regina (our corporate office) from October 11 to 19. 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 9.2 million pounds of food and over \$760,000 cash for local food banks in Canada.*

Learn more at www.FCCDriveAwayHunger.ca.

*Cash collected between 2004 and 2011 was converted into the number of pounds of food that could be purchased with that amount.

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- Sabrina Caron, Quebec

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