



NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2015

AgriSuccess

ANDREW AND KEVIN VEURINK
**BRINGING LAND
RENTAL INTO THE
ELECTRONIC AGE**

.....

**WHEN STAKES ARE HIGH:
MANAGING RISK IN THE
LIVESTOCK SECTOR**

.....

**WHAT ARE YOUR
BIG ROCKS?**
3 TIPS FOR GETTING THE
IMPORTANT STUFF DONE





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Bringing land rental into the electronic age

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Editor, Kevin Hursh

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Manage your emotions to deal with setbacks



“Just let it go,” my wife and business partner advises. “You’ve done everything you can. You can’t control the weather.”

Great advice, but it’s hard to watch crops struggle and wither from lack of rain. Yields are going to be well below average and some fields are very poor.

Producers across Canada face the possibility of crop failure each year.

The growing season started with such promise. Seeding conditions were great and the job was completed in early May. By the end of seeding, the soil surface was getting dry, but one little rain and everything would be away to the races.

The first rain of any significance didn’t come until well into June and it was less than 15 mm. After that, only lesser amounts in a few scattered showers.

While crops are poor, considering the lack of rain, they actually look amazing. Without good subsoil moisture, it would have been a complete failure.

Some specialty crop prices have been rallying, but that isn’t improving my attitude very much.

Back in March and April, I locked in new crop prices for several commodities. At the time, it seemed like a sound decision. The contracts have act of God clauses, so I won’t have to buy them out if there isn’t adequate production. However, most – if not all – of what those crops yield will need to be sold at a price lower than what the market is currently offering.

Locking in profitable prices is still a sound strategy, but it isn’t a guarantee of the highest prices.

Fortunately, we’re also growing some crops that aren’t contracted. And we’re enrolled in Global Ag Risk Solutions (private gross revenue insurance) and have some coverage under Saskatchewan Crop Insurance, so that should help soften the revenue shortfall.

But it’s taking a while to turn the page and look forward to next year.

A big part of farm management is preparing for inevitable setbacks and recognizing the cyclical nature of the business. It’s also important to manage your emotions. I’m still working on that one.

We welcome your feedback and story ideas. Email kevin@hursh.ca or tweet @kevinhursh1. ■

This FCC publication is dedicated to helping producers advance their management practices. Here, you’ll find practical information, real-life examples and innovative ideas for your operation.

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

CONTRIBUTORS

MARK CARDWELL / Mark is a freelance journalist and writer in the Quebec City region. markcardwell.ca

PETER GREDIG / Peter has a background in agricultural communications and is a partner in mobile app development company AgNition Inc. He farms near London, Ont.

TRISH HENDERSON / Trish is a freelance writer and farm business consultant based in Central Alberta. She is also a beef producer.

LORNE McCLINTON / A writer, journalist and photographer, Lorne divides his time between his office in Quebec and his Saskatchewan grain farm.

OWEN ROBERTS / Owen teaches agricultural communications at the Ontario Agricultural College, University of Guelph, where he’s director of research communications. He’s also a freelance journalist.

KEVIN STEWART / Podcast host Kevin Stewart produces award-winning programming for AgVision Media, and is an active keynote speaker on success and thought leadership issues in ag.

Landlord management basics

BY LORNE McCLINTON

Canadian farmers increasingly rely on rented land. According to the 2011 Census of Agriculture, just over 40 per cent of all farmland is rented or leased. This means that for many producers, prosperity and future growth potential hinge on healthy relationships with landlords.

Few people are more familiar with negotiating rental arrangements than Bryce Thompson, president of Regina-based farmland management company groPartners. His company negotiates rental arrangements with farmers on behalf of the individuals and families who own farmland across Western Canada, but don't farm it themselves.

"If you want to keep your landlord happy, treat them the way they want to be treated," Thompson says. At one extreme, this is as simple as making sure they receive their annual rent cheque on time. Other landlords, especially retired farmers, want to hear from their renters regularly and be kept informed, he explains.

Even if your landlord acts as though only the rent cheque matters, Thompson believes it's still a good idea to make a point of contacting them once a year. This gives them an opportunity to open up to you and let you know if they're satisfied.

"One of the things I really like about our landlords is that they're retired farmers," says Lance Stockbrugger, a farmer and chartered accountant from Leroy, Sask. "They like to be kept in the loop, so I keep them up to date on what progress there has been on their land. If we're having a good year, we don't try to hide it. And if we're running out of moisture, we share that too. It goes a long way to establish a trusting relationship."

Stockbrugger develops long-term relationships with his landlords through rental arrangements that work for both parties. He isn't interested in paying the highest cash rents in their area; Stockbrugger and his brother have cultivated a reputation for being great tenants and top-notch farmers.

"It has to be a two-way street," he says. "It's not a landlord-tenant type relationship. It's more of a partnership where both of us win."

Just because a landowner has rented to you for years doesn't mean you should feel entitled to it, Thompson cautions. Guard against complacency, because if your landlord isn't satisfied, another renter may start to look more attractive.

Differentiate yourself

Many producers face a lot of competition when they try to rent more land. Sometimes you have to differentiate yourself to stand out from the crowd.

"Farmers have to be prepared to meet basic table stakes when they want to rent land," Thompson says. "Follow good agronomic practices, have an economically sustainable operation and have a reputation for being ethical and treating your business partners fairly."

"A farmer's reputation in the community is a really big thing," Stockbrugger says. "My premise is if you have a great reputation in the community, you don't need to look for land – landlords will look for you."

Being flexible in the types of rental agreements you're willing to accept is a way to differentiate your farm and increases your odds of renting land, Thompson says. While fixed cash rents are most



LIVE EVENT:
What You
Should Know
Before You Buy
or Rent Farmland
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"If you have a great reputation in the community, you don't need to look for land – landlords will look for you."



common, there is a growing trend toward variable cash rents and joint venture agreements. Thompson calls joint ventures a fancy way of saying a crop share arrangement, where the landlord contributes to input costs. These agreements more fairly share farming's ups and downs, which helps align everyone's goals and can improve relationships.

"When you start out negotiating with a landlord, listen to what types of arrangements they would like to have. But also bring up ideas that work for you," Thompson says. "I've certainly seen situations where the landowner thought they wanted one thing, but then chose something different when exposed to a few choices."

Get it in writing

You need a written rental agreement whether you're renting from family members, neighbours or an investment company, according to Stockbrugger.

"People remember conversations differently, so having a written contract allows both sides to look back and see what was agreed to," Thompson says. "This can keep relationships on track and really protect both sides if there's a disagreement."

"I've used my own contract for the last few years," Stockbrugger explains. "It's simple but it covers all the key points. It outlines their rights; it outlines our rights and it has renewal options. I also like to include a right of first refusal clause too. Landlords don't always like this one, but it protects us if they decide to suddenly sell. This can significantly affect our operation so I like having the option to buy it."

Rental contracts now come in all shapes and sizes that reflect various wants and needs. Stockbrugger, for example, includes an act of God clause that defines what happens if the land can't be seeded due to weather events outside his control.

The important thing is to ensure an agreement will work for both parties: that's the path to a long-term relationship. ■



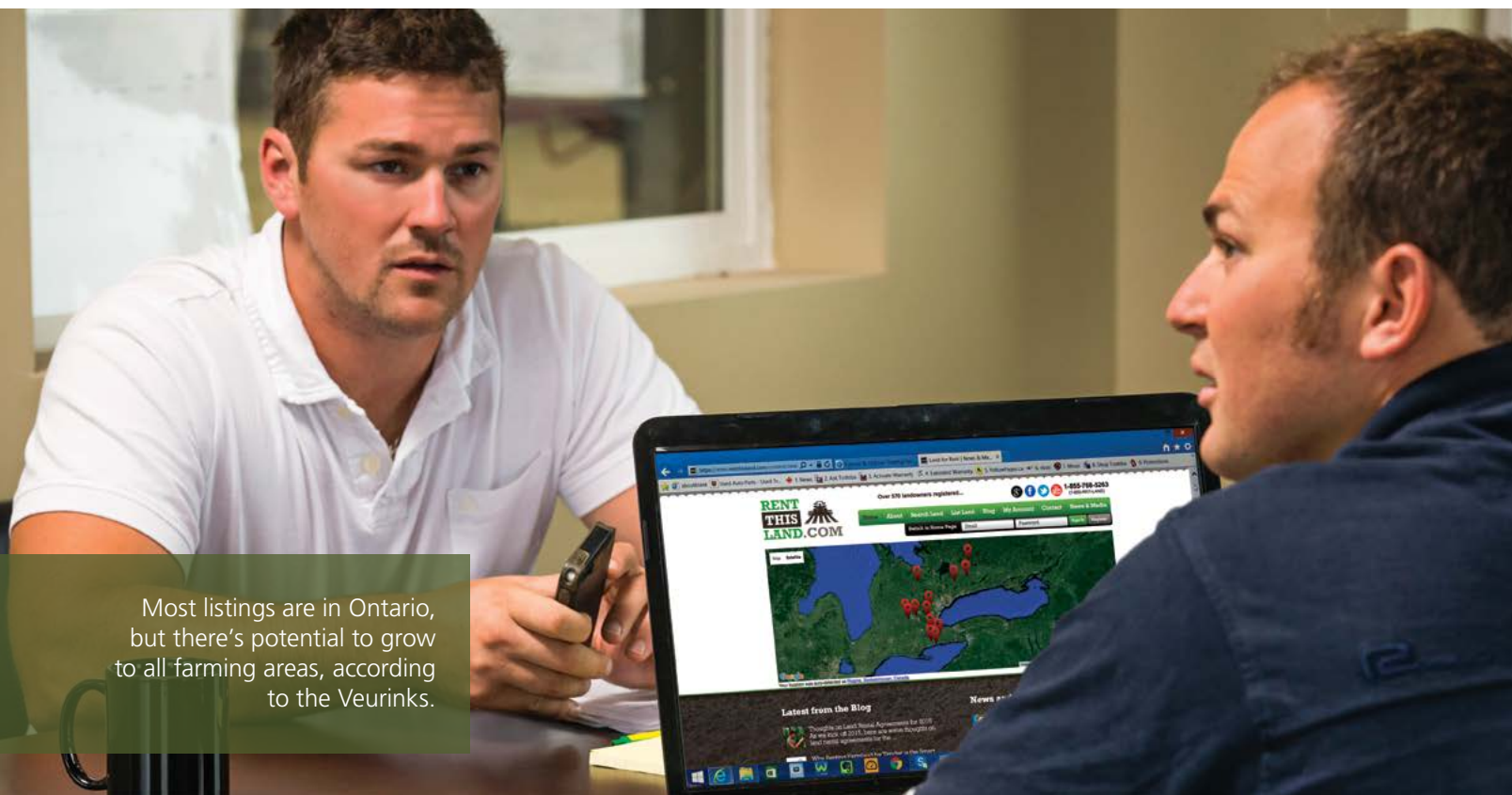
Writing your rental agreement

Must-haves

- cost of rent
- rent calculation
- payment due dates
- contract duration

Nice-to-haves

- farming practices to be used
- an act of God clause
- right of first refusal
- risk-sharing options



Bringing land rental into the electronic age

BY OWEN ROBERTS

Since the late 1970s, the proportion of Canadian farmland rented versus owned by those farming it has steadily risen, making questions about price and availability extremely pertinent to producers.

Price varies depending greatly on factors such as productivity and location. But for the most part, guideposts exist to help you figure out if someone's asking price is right for you. Try comparing the cost of your inputs to your anticipated returns and your profitability target. That should help clear up whether the rental price is in your comfort zone.

But availability is another matter. Before you even start thinking about price, how do you find out what land is out there for rent? Common sense dictates you keep your ear to the ground, and pay extra attention to coffee shop talk about land rental – a hit-and-miss proposition. Another approach is to make a direct appeal to neighbours who might be in the market to rent. But sometimes those advances are unwelcome.

About three years ago, brothers Andrew and Kevin Veurink found themselves in this precarious position as they scouted for rental land around their family farm near Hagersville, Ont. The Veurinks were well established in

the area with their father Hank having been a successful chicken producer for more than 14 years (he ventured into cash cropping, as well).

But still, like other farmers, the Veurinks were stumped when it came to methodically finding rental land. And there was nowhere they could turn for help. Eventually, as word spread that they were in the market for rental land, neighbours started coming to them.

“We were glad about that,” says Andrew, 30.

“We haven’t knocked on anyone’s door; we want to keep good relations in the area and not step on anyone’s toes.”

It was the old-fashioned approach, but their patience paid off – they have amassed 1,400 acres of rented land (including 450 acres from their father, and some of his rental properties once he retired) within a 20-kilometre radius. That complemented the 750 acres they own, almost exclusively clay soil, on which they grow corn, soybeans and wheat.

Growth potential realized

Together with custom work on about 1,000 acres for other farmers – mainly planting, spraying and combining – which they figure accounts for about 30 per cent of their business, they’ve developed a thriving operation. Most recently, they added an impressive 20,000-square-foot shop on a well-groomed corner of land near the farmstead. The shop doubles as a clean-energy project for them, with a 250-kilowatt rooftop solar system that serves as a diversified income source for their operation.

As well, they purchased a self-propelled, high clearance sprayer with a 120-foot front-mount boom. The versatility of this machine allows them to do late application nitrogen and fungicide on their corn.

New approach to land expansion

But even though the Veurinks are committed to farming for the long haul, the traditional wait-and-hope approach to land rental left them thinking there must be a more efficient way to connect landowners and renters. That’s when they came up with a web-based concept called RentThisLand.com.

Here’s how it works: landowners register online, create a listing, monitor offers during the listing period, then



They attribute their success to having a good working relationship... and not being risk-averse.



pick one they like. Likewise, farmers register online, customize their preferences for location, acres and soil type, make offers on land they want to rent, and ultimately finalize the lease. The Veurinks get a \$20 fee when farmers submit an offer, and 1.5 per cent of the lease value paid by the selected tenant once the transaction is complete. “We try to make the process as fair as possible for buyers and sellers,” says Kevin, 32.

RentThisLand.com garnered attention across a broad spectrum of agriculture. As of this summer, 2,650 Canadian farmers had registered, along with 520 landowners. It also drew accolades from the Ontario government, earning the Veurinks the prestigious Premier’s Award for Agri-food Innovation Excellence in 2013. And finally, outside agriculture, RentThisLand.com was featured on the popular CBC show *Dragons’ Den*, attracting investment from Bruce Croxon of Round 13 Capital.

“These guys really know land rental, and every website feature enhances the leasing process ... it’s really a no-brainer choice for landowners and farmers,” Croxon says.

Indeed, the Veurinks work hard to help others find rental land and to be good renters themselves. For example, five years ago they rented a 147-acre parcel of hilly clay land near their home farm, and immediately began improving it. They planted it to soybeans, and watched yields improve from about 40 bushels an acre the first year to 54 last year. “We see advantages over the long term,” Kevin says.

Buy and improve

They’re also buying land when it’s available. In the past three years they’ve bought four farms, and again immediately started improvements with lime, manure and in some cases tiling. The latest purchase, a 94-acre parcel last summer, won’t see a crop until next year as the brothers continue to get it up to their standards.

They attribute their success to having a good working relationship – regarded by some as one of the best they’ve ever seen in a farming partnership – and not being risk-averse. They may make mistakes, but they’re young and committed to



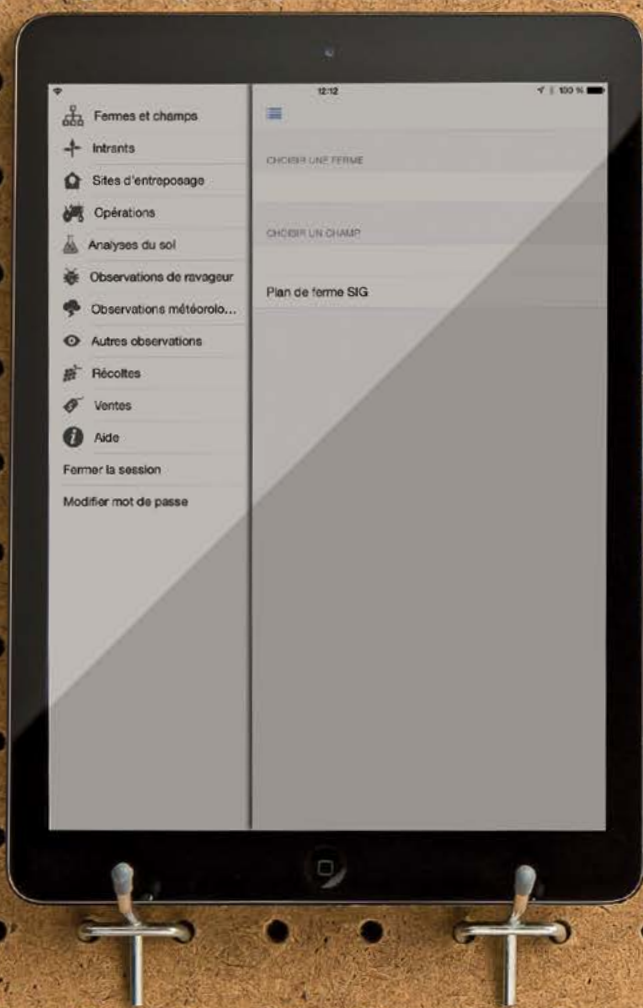
the profession, so they’ll have time to bounce back if they hit a snag.

“Efficiency is the key,” says Kevin, who does the farm’s bookwork. “We both handle decision-making and maintenance, and divide up other duties like combining and spraying, and planting and trucking. You see your strengths, use professional help where necessary, and don’t be afraid to take chances.”

And whether you rent or own land, that’s sound advice. ■



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Gene editing spawns new wave of crop development

BY KEVIN HURSH

Chances are you've never heard of CRISPR, but the technology has the potential to reinvent genetic research. The scientists who deal with it all the time pronounce the acronym as "crisper" – a lot simpler than saying what it stands for: clustered, regularly interspaced, short palindromic repeat.

In a nutshell, CRISPR technology is a new way to allow targeted gene editing. This has huge ramifications ranging all the way from human health to new plant and animal traits.

Much of the excitement, as well as ethical debate, is centred on the treatment of human disease. By precisely changing a DNA sequence at exact locations on a chromosome, scientists have new hope for curing diseases with a genetic disposition.

The first possibilities are ailments like sickle-cell anemia, a debilitating disease that's widely studied and understood to be a simple error in a single gene. It may soon be possible to collect stem cells from a patient, edit the DNA and then return the cells to enact a cure.

Already there's excitement over tackling diseases caused by multiple genes, including heart disease, diabetes, Parkinson's, ALS and Alzheimer's. And perhaps it will someday be possible to edit normal genes so that humans are better able to resist diseases.

Within agriculture we're all aware of GM crops, but according to molecular biologist Rob Wager of Vancouver Island University, this type of genetic modification is quite crude compared to what CRISPR can accomplish.

To date, most GM crops have been produced by inserting foreign DNA, thus the term transgenic. With CRISPR,

specific genes are edited or silenced. It's also faster and much less expensive.

"There are broad implications in agriculture when you can manipulate positive and negative traits without causing undesirable collateral changes," Wager says.

In human medicine, there is an ethical debate particularly when you contemplate editing the DNA of a developing embryo. In agriculture, CRISPR is less invasive than current biotech methods.

"This may be viewed differently than transgenic technology, because no foreign DNA has been introduced," Wager notes. However, it still isn't known whether CRISPR technology can avoid some of the heavy regulations placed on GM crop development.

GM crop development has been largely restricted to multinational companies with huge research and development budgets. Wager says CRISPR technology is within the realm of what can be accomplished by smaller companies or even farmer organizations.

Wager points to the papaya developed in Hawaii to resist the devastating ringspot virus, and the Arctic Apple that doesn't brown when its flesh is exposed to the air, as two early examples of what can be accomplished with gene editing or silencing.

CRISPR will make it much easier to accomplish those sorts of advancements. ■

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When stakes are high: managing risk in the livestock sector

BY TRISH HENDERSON

Everyone in agriculture likely knows circumstances, not people, can sometimes determine what happens. From weather risk to market risk – for both outputs and inputs – the stakes are high in this business. Luckily, there's a growing range of options available to help Canadian livestock producers cope with price uncertainty.

“(Having) a clear marketing strategy and risk management plan provides focus for a business. It helps producers analyze what they're doing and why, enabling measurement for review and continual improvement. A good strategy simplifies production decisions and provides protection, especially when things don't go as planned,” says Brian Perillat, manager and market analyst at Canfax.

Marketing versus risk management

In exploring the tools for risk management, it's important to differentiate between it and marketing.

“A risk management plan is part of a good marketing strategy,” says Alberta Agriculture pork specialist Ron Gietz. “The marketing strategy is about revenue maximization, while the risk management plan is about reducing the variability of returns and providing greater stability of cash flow.”

Understanding your product, your customers and market seasonality, along with collaborating with other players along the value chain, are key components of a marketing plan.

“To create a solid marketing strategy, find preferred and alternate customers for what you produce. Fine-tune production practices to mesh with those customers' needs; this allows you to extract the

maximum value for your products,” Gietz recommends.

“Even with a commodity such as slaughter hogs, there is a wide range in what producers are getting paid for the end product, depending on quality, distance to market and other factors.”

The first step for creating a good risk management strategy is to understand your operation's cost of production.

“In difficult market conditions, you may be looking for opportunities just to cover cash costs so the operation stays solvent. In more upbeat markets, you want to protect strong margins that rebuild equity, yet still limit downside risk,” Gietz explains.

Planning pays

With recent record high cattle prices, fourth-generation Alberta rancher and finance expert Ryan Copithorne is working to help cow-calf producers capitalize on market upswings. His Cows in Control Marketing Group builds customized marketing strategies and risk management plans that often include forward selling calves and setting up hedge accounts.

“It's important to know the market value of your animals, and the dollars lost by a 10, 20 or even 50 per cent price drop. Cattle markets move up and down by 10 to 20 per cent in an average year, so know your risk tolerance,” he advises.

“Create a marketing plan a year in advance, and review it every year. Then, know your market price ahead of time by having a solid risk management



plan. Set a desired rate of return, and try to hedge that rate of return as much as possible through the course of the year. This allows you to confidently show your lender – and yourself – that you have locked in a profit or minimized losses.”

A multi-faceted approach to risk management is recommended. By exploring all available tools, cattle and hog producers can determine the best solution, or combination of solutions, to match their marketing plan and risk tolerance.

Futures markets

The use of futures contracts can effectively protect against major swings in agricultural commodity prices. However, capital requirements for hedging activities can be high. Margin calls may require large amounts of cash to maintain effective coverage, which is one reason most producers tend to employ other options.

“It’s a complicated business,” Copithorne says. While futures and options can be useful, he suggests investing in an advisor and a good broker.

Livestock producers should also explore the correlation between their local market and the futures market they’re trading in.

“The Canadian dollar can have a much bigger impact on calf prices than the Chicago futures price: a one-cent decrease in the value of our dollar increases calf prices by five cents,” Perillat says.

For hogs, the correlation between Canadian prices and U.S.-based futures prices is stronger, but you still have exchange rate risk to deal with.

“To manage all your price risk, you must be active in both the Canadian dollar and hog futures markets,” says Gietz.

And what about feed? Minimizing volatility in prices for major inputs should certainly be considered. While feed grain prices can be hedged using futures markets, thin trade on the western barley futures contract and a low correlation between corn futures and Prairie feed grain values can mean less than ideal hedging opportunities.

Instead, Gietz sees some livestock producers forward pricing their inputs through a grain broker.

Alternative strategies to manage feed costs include running a mixed grain and livestock operation, or purchasing large volumes of grain off the combine at harvest.

Forward contracts

Fewer than 10 per cent of hog producers are active in futures markets, Gietz estimates. The use of forward pricing contracts with packers, or their marketing agents, is much more common. Forward pricing contracts can be negotiated a few months or even a year before delivery, and long-term supply contracts can be up to five years in duration.

For cattle, forward contracts for fed animals are also prevalent between feedlots and packers.

“Forward contracting has become a Canadian feedlot’s most common risk management practice, because the Canadian cattle market isn’t directly linked to the U.S. futures market. Over half of all calves purchased by Canadian feedlots are forward contracted to packers, up to 12 months out,” Perillat says.

Cow-calf producers are also beginning to explore forward contract options. The number of calves offered via electronic auction for forward delivery is growing, and with record-high prices, feedlots may be more interested in purchasing animals in advance to secure supply and margins.

Price insurance

After launching in Alberta in 2009, the Western Livestock Price Insurance Program (WLPIP) and Western Hog Price Insurance Program (WHPIP) have been extended to cattle and hog producers in British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. WLPIP and WHPIP offer the ability to lock in floor prices for calves, feeder cattle, fed cattle and slaughter hogs.

While premiums for WLPIP and WHPIP policies have given some producers pause, Copithorne believes price insurance can be an important tool in today’s volatile commodity markets.

“The price you can guarantee is more important than the cost of the premiums. The floor price is the insurable price minus the cost of the premium. If the market goes up, the rise in the price of the livestock covers the premium. If the market goes down, you’re

locked in at the insured price minus the cost of the premium, saving potentially costly losses.”

Copithorne also points out that WLPIP and WHPIP allow producers to lock in prices in Canadian dollars, thereby eliminating basis and currency risk. In addition, there are no margin calls, and anyone with cattle or hogs can sign up.

The biggest downside to price insurance is that insurable prices are often lower than the cash market.

Where to go for help

“Many producers are intimidated by all the information and numbers, but it’s no different than the production side of the farm: some things you do yourself and others you are more comfortable having someone else handle for you,” Gietz says.

“The primary cost of implementing a marketing and risk management strategy is time: do you want to use your time, the time of an employee, or the time of a hired professional?”

Livestock producers looking for help creating marketing and risk management plans can contact their provincial agriculture department.

While peace of mind doesn’t come without a price tag, it can be bought. Livestock producers can’t control the weather or the markets, but they can seize opportunities to secure desirable profit levels or minimize losses. A good risk management plan – crafted on your own or with the help of a qualified professional – is worth the investment in the long run. ■



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**Ready to
make a
plan?**

**Ryan Copithorne advises producers
invest in two key tools:**

1. A subscription for regular market data
2. Analysis software or a good spreadsheet to test the impacts of price fluctuations on your bottom line



Crop rotation

Good agronomics, sound economics

Crop rotation is important in managing disease and pests. But did you know it's also an important part of a strong marketing plan?

Grain prices are often driven by global factors over which you have very little control, so a good crop rotation that captures different market trends will diversify risk and leverage different market opportunities. For example, wheat is driven by U.S. markets while peas are strongly influenced by the India market. Minimizing large swings in cash flow lets farms protect working capital and meet various financial obligations.

J.P. Gervais
FCC Chief Ag Economist
@jpgervais

Check out the fcc.ca/AgEconomist blog for more posts like this.



A berry Canadian fruit

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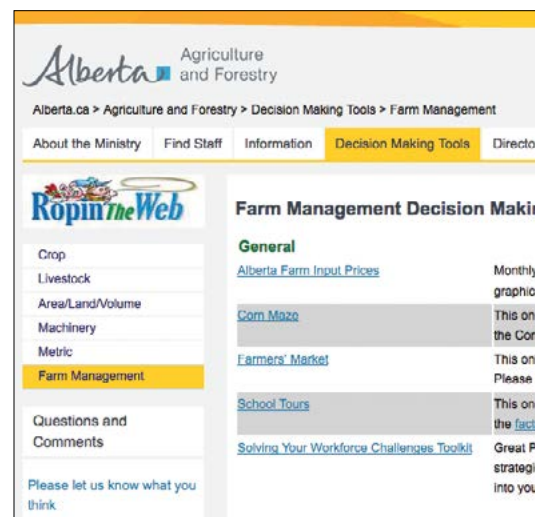
Start with year-end in mind

Ever wonder where to start when it comes to year-end? Check out the FCC Management Software online community. You'll find a blog there featuring 10 things you can do that could make your next year-end a breeze.

fccsoftware.ca/10Tips


Get help deciding on year-end purchases with these calculators from Alberta Agriculture & Forestry. They're listed under Decision Making Tools at

agric.gov.ab.ca.



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Canada exported
1,574,847
Christmas trees
in 2013

Source: StatsCan



When you put first things first, you ensure a life and business that's under your control because you're actually following the priorities you establish.

What are your big rocks?

THIS ARTICLE IS ADAPTED FROM AN [FCC EDGE PODCAST WITH KEVIN STEWART](#)

Spring on the farm is exciting. Ever since I was a kid, I've looked forward to the many tasks required to have the seeders ready when it was finally "go time." However, I recall one job that my dad insisted had to be done before the seeders could roll. This job isn't necessary for every farm but for our operation, this most boring of tasks always had to be done before anything else. I'm talking about picking stones.

Each spring, the crop of new stones the frost had heaved to the surface was nothing short of inconceivable. We all agreed

picking stones was boring and often backbreaking work. But Dad understood the concept of doing first things first. I think most people understand it, but it takes great discipline to actually follow the principle. The picking-stones-first rule on our farm has turned out to be an excellent foundation for life.

Stephen Covey, author of the book *First Things First*, identifies what he calls the Big Rocks that help us make the most of each day. The Big Rocks principle works this way: choose a few big rocks each day to work on first, so you're sure to get the

important stuff done. The rest of your time can be carved up with smaller tasks. Just like picking stones before seeding, however, the Big Rocks approach sounds good but in reality it takes discipline to make it happen.

Running a farm can be like taking care of a toddler. Some days it seems like you're not in control of anything as you respond to one near crisis after another. While we may get used to working in this constant state of distraction, you're only working at a fraction of your potential. During these times, the best you can hope for is to complete some of the urgent tasks and simply put off the important items to another day.

According to Covey, when you put first things first you ensure a life and business that's under your control because you're actually following the priorities you establish. Makes sense, but how does one do this? Is there a way to choose a few big rocks each day so you actually get the important stuff done? Let me offer three tactics I developed on our farm.

Rethink

In order to do first things first, it may require that you rethink what the big rocks are. Try creating two lists, one highlighting the big rocks, those things that are important. The second list should include those things that typically seem urgent. This distinction is crucial because important issues keep your life and your business on track. Things that appear urgent typically steal your control of the day. As you make your lists, here are two considerations:

- it's OK to include profit, health and family as big rocks
- anything that is the result of pressure from people or obligation is often a small rock

Timing

The next trick in doing first things first is timing. The National Institutes of Health reveals that our brains are at their best right after we wake up. If you rise early, this is typically the quietest time of the day as well. This first hour is your golden opportunity, so use it wisely. I know many farmers who reserve this hour solely for their big rock issues. These producers view the first hour as being so important that they guard it with boundaries to ensure they don't get distracted by the little rocks first.

When you wake up tomorrow, try an experiment. See if you can avoid little rocks in that first hour – things like returning calls, going online, looking at emails or responding to texts. If you want your business to remain grounded, turn your smartphone to airplane mode for the first hour.

When a small stone goes through the combine, it can make a big racket but typically doesn't create too many problems. When a big stone goes through the combine, it can cost you! So try to focus your first hour each day on the big rocks.

Say no

The final piece that ensures I do first things first each day is that I've learned to say no. If you're like me, you're a people pleaser. There is something in you that's uncomfortable seeing people disappointed. Saying no can be tough. For your own sanity, it's important – so give yourself permission to say no.

If you need to attend every meeting, or be part of every decision on the farm, then you have some trust issues. Learn to delegate responsibility and let your people show you what they can do. Pick your big rocks – the charities you support, the places you volunteer, the jobs you do on the farm – then delegate or say no to the rest. ■




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Advocacy through social media

Tell us how your music video parodies have propelled you into a voice for farmers.

In June 2012, we posted our first music video parody on YouTube called *I'm Farming and I Grow It*. It's a parody of the song *I'm Sexy and I Know It* by the musical group LMFAO. We just wanted to show our friends what we actually do on the farm. It turned out a lot better than we expected. It went viral, as they say on the Internet, and we got over five million views in a couple of weeks. Since then, we've continued to make music videos to show people what agriculture is like through music and video – and just having fun.

How do you measure the effectiveness of your videos?

Most of our viewership comes from farmers and those interested in farming. We enjoy providing entertainment and giving youth something to be excited about, but at the same time we reach a lot of people outside agriculture. From the beginning, that was our goal. We measure that from the feedback we get. We get a lot of comments from people who say they've never thought about some of these things before.

What do you say to farmers who don't really buy into social media because they're too busy or don't want to engage?

When you first start with social media, it feels like work. You kind of have to force yourself to post something. It takes some time to be comfortable. But for me, I do it so much it's a habit. If I'm working on something, in my mind I'm thinking of something I can post, something people would like to see. You just have to relate to your audience. Find something they'd be interested in and represent yourself as a farmer the best you can.

Social media, if you're doing it right, can be something to enjoy. It doesn't have to be a chore. We still get lots of farming done.

One of your parodies is based on Katy Perry's *Roar*, but you say *Chore*. Do you think people want to see you chore? Is the average person interested in what farmers do?

I think people are starting to come around and be more interested in where food comes from, and if they're not, I think they should be. As an American, I think



The Peterson Farm Bros parody videos have become an Internet sensation with millions of views by people all over the world. The Peterson Farm Bros are made up of Greg (24), Nathan (21), Kendal (19) and honorary "bro" Laura (15) Peterson.

GREG PETERSON

Greg Peterson is a fifth-generation farmer from Kansas producing corn, soybeans, wheat, alfalfa and beef. A 2013 agricultural communications graduate from Kansas State University, Greg is now a leading social media advocate for agriculture.

Ask an Expert

Americans take things for granted all the time. I don't know whether it's the same in Canada, but in my opinion we should be more thankful as a society for the people behind the scenes. Everyone needs to eat.

If farmers aren't out there telling their story, someone else may tell it for them and they don't always tell it accurately. Especially on the Internet – we've seen a lot of misinformation about farmers that simply isn't true. I'm a big believer in farmers reaching out to their circles, the people you already have an influence over. If every farmer were doing that, we'd be reaching a lot more people.

You have t-shirts and bumper stickers and you even have a blog. What role does your blog serve and do you as a farmer feel a need to defend yourself?

When we started doing our videos, we were getting all sorts of questions and comments in social media, and many of them I didn't know how to answer. And I thought that was crazy. I should be able to answer these questions. So we started the blog with the intent of not being afraid to tackle an issue, including GMOs, animal welfare, chemical usage and some things that are a bit touchy. And it's useful for other farmers to read so they can think about their practices and how to answer questions.

It's fine for people to disagree with what we think, but we want people to be informed and get accurate information, because on the Internet I feel that it's often very one-sided against farmers.

What's the best way for people to check you out?

We have a Facebook page, and that's the most constant information source. We try to post twice a day. We're also on Twitter. Probably the easiest way to link up and get all our contact info is through our website, petersonfarmbros.com, which acts as a hub and has links to everything. ■



VIDEO:

See the full interview with Greg Peterson. fcc.ca/Petersons



@gregpeterson33



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Farm security options abound

BY PETER GREDIG

Farms can be easy targets for thieves, but there are now many affordable technologies that allow farmers to monitor their yards, equipment, grain and livestock. Of course, these gadgets should be considered complementary to the common sense anti-theft strategies most producers already employ.

It's hard to find a farmer who hasn't had at least one experience with theft. Fuel and ATVs represent quick, easy, high value grabs that can be converted to cash. In the past, security systems were expensive, hard to install and difficult to monitor.

If you do an online search for "smart home security products," you will find a wide assortment of cameras, motion sensors and alarms that can interact with your smartphone. Many of these products are truly wireless (battery powered) but require Wi-Fi, which must be taken into consideration if you want to use them in the shop or barn.

For a few hundred dollars, you can buy an infrared motion-detecting camera that will generate high resolution video day or night you can view on your smartphone. These systems have obvious benefits as security devices, but they also let livestock producers keep an eye on their animals.

For more remote locations, wireless, motion-detecting hunting or trail cameras are weatherproof and can transmit images directly to your smartphone or tablet. A SIM card and data plan might be required.

Grain can be stolen from remote bin yards not monitored regularly. Bin-Sense is a wireless grain monitoring system used primarily to monitor temperature and quality, but it also monitors levels and sends an alert to your smartphone if someone

is attempting to steal your grain.

For ATVs, farm trucks and larger equipment, there are anti-theft and GPS tracking technologies. EZ-Lock offers a module you plug into a relay slot at the fuse panel on large equipment so it will only start if you have the appropriate key fob. Trimble's Connected Farm software lets the user create geo-fences and curfews for an entire fleet of farm equipment. If a machine travels outside pre-determined areas or working hours, an alert is sent to the Connected Farm smartphone app.

A growing number of inexpensive GPS tracking devices help police retrieve stolen equipment – some, such as EasyTracGPS, are designed specifically for ATVs or motorcycles.

On the low-tech side, a company called California Immobilizer has designed a wheel-locking donut device for John Deere Gators that makes it very difficult to move the unit.

Agriculture isn't the primary target audience for many of these wireless security tools, but there is a growing selection of mainstream products that will work for us. ■



Grain handling poses year-round danger

BY MARK CARDWELL

It's one of the worst calls that rural volunteer fire departments receive: farmer trapped in grain bin. Despite having tools to create a protective barrier around the trapped person and the ability to cut open bins to let grain move away, these calls often end tragically. There just isn't enough time.

Grain bin safety is an issue that hits close to home for Peter Gredig, a grain grower from St. Thomas, Ont., and a contributor to this publication. "A good friend, neighbour and community leader lost his life when he entered a bin while loading out corn this past March. This happened to one of the most safety-conscious farmers I know. He was a father of four and his loss was devastating for his family and the community," Gredig says.

"Anyone who works with on-farm stored crops has a feel for the dangers of flowing grain. But we just keep losing people because we don't want to make truckers wait, or we underestimate the risk of going into a grain bin in certain scenarios. It has to stop."

According to the most recent data from Canadian Agricultural Injury Reporting, 40 of the nearly 1,000 work-related fatalities that occurred on Canadian farms between 1990 and 2000 happened in silos and grain bins.

Despite improvements in grain storage safety design and equipment, as well as rescue training and techniques, grain entrapment or engulfment continues to be a major cause of preventable deaths on farms.

In fact, the danger seems to be growing.

"The volumes of grain now being moved are huge (and) bins are becoming massive," says Glen Blahey, a health and safety specialist with the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association (CASA).

Whether it's corn, wheat, canola or soy, Blahey says there are three common scenarios for entrapment: entering a bin while grain is being unloaded, walking on stable-looking grain-top surfaces that are in fact fragile "grain bridges" that collapse underfoot, and the collapse of grain that is caked on bin walls.

All three cases, he noted, can lead to death within minutes, if not seconds.

"There's not much a person can do to resist the suction-like action of flowing grain," Blahey says. "Once you're caught in it, the result is usually fatal."

In addition to using safety equipment like harnesses and lifelines, which are now available with many grain bin models, Blahey recommends producers implement and enforce prevention policies and practices on their farms to help avoid a catastrophe.

They include never entering or working alone in grain bins when augers are in operation, and never allowing the young, the untrained or the unaware to enter bins at any time.

"There is a widespread public perception of grain as an innocuous substance," Blahey says. Instead, it has to be recognized as a potential danger. ■



5 tips for Grain Bin Safety

Don't work alone. If you must work alone, make arrangements for someone to check on you regularly – the more hazardous the task, the more often they should check.

Use a shutdown/lockout procedure. Any time you work near powered equipment, shut it down and lock it out to prevent entanglement or injury.

If you become trapped, keep moving. Try to move to the outside wall and keep walking until the bin is empty or grain flow stops.

Keep children out of grain bins at all times. Make sure your children understand that grain piles and bins are not play areas.

Properly secure a safety harness. Whenever you are working more than three metres high, or when you could be engulfed or drawn in, wear fall arrest equipment and have a second person present.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

While we were preparing this issue for print, two tragic incidents involving grain engulfment occurred on the Prairies. Our condolences go out to all Canadian families who lost loved ones this fall.

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"We take pride in knowing we would feel safe consuming any of the crops we sell. If we would not use it ourselves, it does not go to market."

– Katelyn Duncan, Saskatchewan

"The natural environment is critical to farmers – we depend on soil and water for the production of food. But we also live on our farms, so it's essential that we act as responsible stewards."

– Doug Chorney, Manitoba



"The welfare of my animals is one of my highest priorities. If I don't give my cows a high quality of life they won't grow up to be great cows."

– Andrew Campbell, Ontario



Safe food; animal welfare; sustainability; people care deeply about these things when they make food choices. And all of us in the agriculture industry care deeply about them too. But sometimes the general public doesn't see it that way. Why? Because, for the most part, we're not telling them our story and, too often, someone outside the industry is.

The journey from farm to table is a conversation we need to make sure we're a part of. So let's talk about it, together.

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