



MAY / JUNE 2016

AgriSuccess

COVER
CROPS GAIN
POPULARITY

.....

LEARNING
FROM ONTARIO'S
AVIAN INFLUENZA
RESPONSE

.....

SUCCESSION THROUGH
DIVERSIFICATION

2015
FARMLAND
VALUES
REPORT
P. 21



COVER STORY

YOUNG FARMER PROFILE

Succession through diversification

What was a large dairy farm in central Vancouver Island is now transformed into berries, agri-tourism, a sawmill and a beekeeping operation run by the next generation. For Abel and Amanda O'Brennan, Coastal Black winery brought a value-add opportunity.

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With pride in agriculture and a positive yet realistic outlook, AgriSuccess is dedicated to helping Canadian producers advance their management practices. Each edition aspires to present content that is:

- engaging
- motivational
- innovative
- actionable

Editor, Kevin Hursh

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Ironclad numbers not always available for decision-making

Sometimes there just isn't enough solid information to make number crunching meaningful. One area where I struggle is on equipment upgrades.

I'll be using a different seeding outfit this spring. The old system served us reasonably well until the past year when there was no rain for weeks and weeks after seeding. The upgraded system, while not a new outfit, features on-row seed depth control with nitrogen placement between the seed rows, eliminating germination issues.

While the new outfit should seed a few more acres per day, the primary motivation is more uniform germination and hopefully a better result in the fall.

But how do you measure whether the investment is a good business decision? You can pencil in assumptions about yield increases to justify the purchase, but how do you really know how much yield advantage to assume, particularly when weather conditions can be radically different from one year to the next?

In addition to the cost, a new-to-you machine also means a learning curve. Particularly in the first year, there's an increased risk of seeding errors as you become acquainted with the nuances of a different system.

Moving to disc openers from a hoe drill also means more moving parts, so over time there will be more hours and expense for maintenance.

If you sell the outfit in five or 10 years, what will the resale value be?

These are all important considerations, but any numbers you use for analysis come with a large margin of error. In the end, you have to make a decision based on your best judgment without ironclad numbers to prove the benefit.

I'm interested in hearing about your decision-making process when it comes to equipment and technology upgrades.

In fact, we welcome all your feedback and story ideas. Email kevin@hursh.ca or tweet @kevinhursh1. ■

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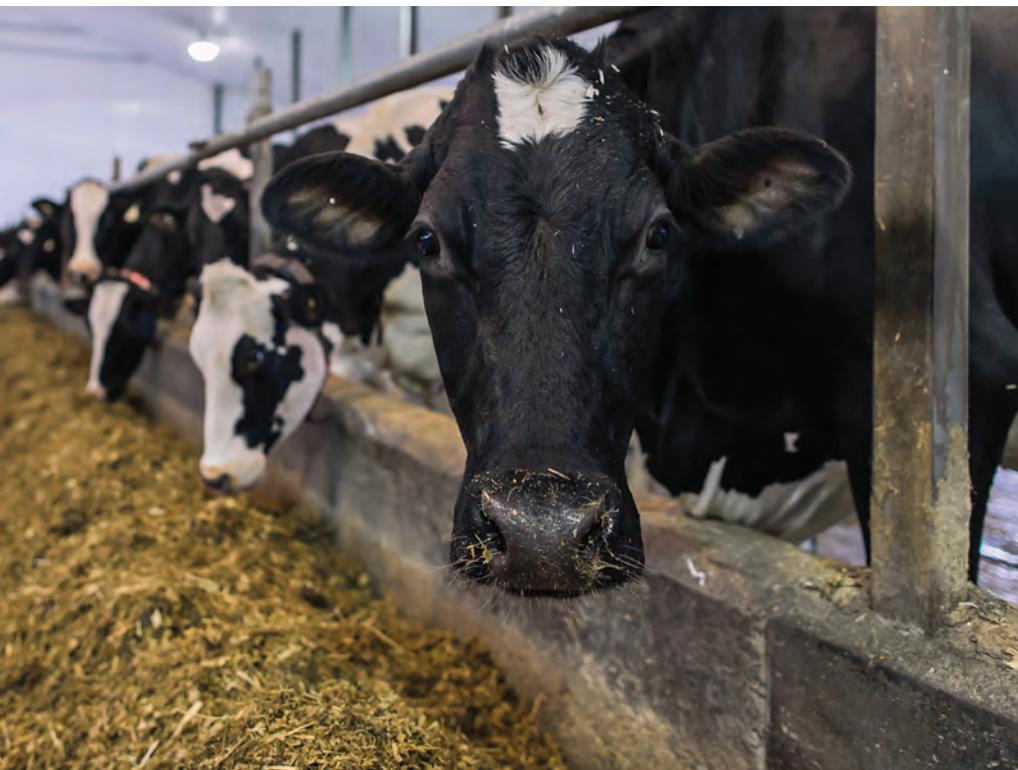
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Skill versus scale

BY LORNE McCLINTON



These numbers reflect a fairly universal trend across the world. John Roche, an international dairy consultant based out of New Zealand, says that at prevailing prices, the average dairy farmer in the United Kingdom would need to milk 413 cows to earn the average national wage. The top quarter of farmers would need to milk only 53.

“When prices drop, only the top 25 per cent are making money,” Roche says. “So do you need skill or do you need scale? Because I can assure you that losing \$1,000 a cow isn’t great when you are milking 1,500 cows. I would prefer to be milking 150 in that scenario.”

A well-managed larger operation benefits from economies of scale by spreading fixed costs over a larger revenue stream, Mills says. However, they need to be very efficient before they consider expanding.

“It doesn’t do you any good to try and get bigger just for the sake of getting bigger,” he says. “If you aren’t efficient at the size you are currently, it doesn’t matter how much bigger you’re going to get, you’re not going to become any more efficient.” The advice is valid no matter the country or sector of agriculture.

Managing debt level is critical to efficiency, Mills says. He’s adamant that the producers he works with devote no more than 30 per cent of total gross revenue to servicing debt. Exceeding this level can put a severe strain on the business.



Podcast:
Hear host Kevin Stewart on the benefits of Vince Lombardi’s back-to-basics approach. fcc.ca/BacktoBasics

Farm size matters when it comes to maximizing profitability, but bigger isn’t always best. Skill and management ability are every bit as important.

Roger Mills, a dairy business consultant from Steinbach, Man., says his benchmark comparisons show the most efficient producers are between 10 and 15 times more profitable than the average. Furthermore, this profitability advantage holds true whether you’re discussing smaller or larger operations.

“If you aren’t efficient at the size you are currently, it doesn’t matter how much bigger you’re going to get, you’re not going to become any more efficient.”

In Canada’s supply-managed dairy sector, producers need to maximize their quota fill if they ever hope to reach optimum efficiency. If you base cash-flow projections on a 98 per cent fill rate, you’ll be in trouble if you operate at only 85.

“Putting up quality forage and balancing the ration with supplements or concentrates helps optimize yield per cow,” Mills says. “Paying attention to details like breeding and heat detection are very important, even when you get busy in the summer. They make a big difference to your operation in the long term.”

Are you an elite producer? Benchmark to find out

“If I stand in a room with a group of farmers and ask, ‘who here is an above-average farmer?’ every hand will go up,” Roche says. “If I ask who is a below-average farmer, every hand will stay down. People don’t like to consider themselves to be average.”

If you work with a financial professional to analyze at least five years of your farm’s financial records, you can generate a financial map of your operation. Then when you compare them against sector benchmarks, you can see how you stack up. If you don’t fare well, you can look for where the anomalies lie and where improvements should be possible.

Being average is no longer good enough, Roche says. Farmers need to strive for improvement until they join the elite, because the best farmers have the required resiliency to remain profitable through financial storms.

A different measure of success

Past generations were prepared to work for the sake of work, Mills says. But when the present generation gets married and has children, they want to take part in family life too.

Last year, Roche met with a group of dairy farmers from the Waikato in New Zealand. The weather was terrible so they spent three hours talking in one producer’s milk shed. His financial information showed he was 30 to 50 per cent more efficient than most farmers and his profits ranked among the top 20 per cent of his benchmarking group, so most of the discussion revolved around why he wasn’t pushing the envelope to produce more milk and potentially make more money. Roche was deeply moved by the answer.

“The farmer said, ‘I want to spend more time on my boat with my wife and my three young children during the summer, rather than on the tractor feeding cattle. I’m making more than enough money doing what I’m doing.’” ■



Measurements for SUCCESS



Generate a five-year financial map of your operation



Compare against benchmarks



Prioritize efficiency over size

Succession through diversification

BY DAVID SCHMIDT

Established farms sometimes head in different directions when the next generation becomes involved, and that has certainly been the case for the Ludwig family farm on Vancouver Island.

In 2004, Terry and Bonnie Ludwig called Abel O'Brennan to help them build two heifer barns on their large dairy farm near Black Creek. Abel and the Ludwig's daughter Amanda were high school sweethearts.

Since the pair had been dating for some time, Abel was well-known to the family. He'd worked in construction after graduation, then went to the northern Alberta oilfields while Amanda attended Trinity Western University at Langley, B.C. But it was his construction experience that had interested the Ludwigs.

Soon after Abel returned to Black Creek, the two married. He began to work on the farm, but discovered he was allergic to cows.

Amanda's two younger brothers, Phillip and Daniel, didn't share their parents' passion for dairy either. All three siblings wanted to stay on the farm, though, which by the mid-2000s included about 1,000 acres and was milking 260 cows three times a day.

Exploring options

"We held family meetings in 2007-08 to determine our interests and options," Abel says. Phillip wanted to work with wood, and Daniel had an interest in beekeeping. Abel thought fruit production might offer opportunities if the family were to get out of livestock.

After meeting a Washington State berry propagator and packer who was looking for additional product, the family decided to plant a trial field of blackberries – despite having no previous experience.

"The fruit was a collective idea. We thought blackberries might be a niche we could exploit," Abel says. "If we knew then what we know now, we probably would have done things differently."

They soon incorporated raspberries and blueberries, and further diversified with a portable sawmill as well as beekeeping and honey extraction equipment.

The new ventures were not without start-up difficulties. Because much of the farm is low-lying land, some berry fields flooded or had high water tables that led to significant issues with root rot in both the raspberries and blackberries.

As a result, all the raspberries were taken out and the farm now grows 65 acres of blackberries and 37 of blueberries. That ratio will change as the family increases the blueberry acreage – they're less susceptible to root rot and it's the more stable berry market.

Because berries alone would not sustain the farm, the boys branched into corn, pumpkins and squash. "In 2015, we shipped 15 semi-loads of produce off the farm," Abel notes.

Come taste the wine

In 2010, Coastal Black Fruit Winery was added to the mix.

"The winery is my baby," Abel says. "I always enjoyed wine and thought it would be a good way to add value to our fruit production."

Abel and Amanda took the plunge despite having no experience or training as winemakers. "I took a couple of wine appreciation courses, then hired a consultant to walk me through the process the first year. I like the winemaking, and it takes up only a fraction of my time," Abel explains.

They produced 6,500 cases of fruit wine in 2015-16, but have the capacity for 10,000 cases a year. Most of the product is sold directly to B.C. consumers either at the farm, online (there's free shipping for case-lot orders) or through about 100 Vancouver Island liquor stores. Thirty-five to 40 per cent is exported to China.





“The winery is my baby. I always enjoyed wine and thought it would be a good way to add value to our fruit production.”





Photo courtesy of Amanda O'Brennan Photography



Their “own thing” has proved very successful for all three. There are now five employees in the milling venture, and one helper for beekeeping and honey extraction through the summer. Abel hires four full-time and up to 30 seasonal workers for the winery, including over a dozen workers from Mexico hired through the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program. Since SAWP workers are housed on-farm, “we hear a lot of Spanish music all summer long,” Abel says.

At the same time, Abel and his brothers-in-law made a major foray into agri-tourism. They built a bistro with a wood-fired pizza oven, open from Mother’s Day to Labour Day, into the winery. In the fall they’re occupied with a highly successful Pumpkin Festival that attracted about 15,000 visitors in 2015, and there are plans to increase pumpkin production and expand the festival further.

December is devoted to a Christmas festival complete with ice carvings, reindeer and camels (actually, they’re alpacas dressed up as camels).

They once hosted weddings too, but stopped that as it involved more late-night management than they were willing to provide.

Separate interests and different entities

The milling venture, honey and beekeeping business, and the winery are all incorporated as separate entities. That creates challenges for the family’s accountant and insurance agent, Abel admits. But it works well for him and his brothers-in-law, “because we all do our own thing.”

Divesting and investing

In order for the next generation to pursue their dreams, the Ludwig parents, Terry and Bonnie, sold their cows and quota and later divested some of their land – bringing the farm down to 430 acres on two properties.

They’ve since decided they’re not only too young to retire, but they missed living out their own dream. So three years ago they bought a dairy farm in Saskatchewan, and now spend most of their time building up that business.

“Their initial idea was to set up the farm, hire a manager, and spend only a week or two a month there,” Abel explains. “It’s turned out to be exactly the opposite. Instead of spending months on the island and weeks there, they are spending months in Saskatchewan and only weeks in B.C. They are now building a new milking parlour and planning to expand the herd (already at well over 150 cows). I don’t think they’ll ever retire.”

As for Abel, he’s just happy the family’s diversification efforts have facilitated succession, keeping everyone’s dreams alive. ■



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Roundtables provide common approach to sustainability

BY KEVIN HURSH

In the context of agriculture, “sustainable” often means different things to different people. Consumers, food processors and producers can have conflicting visions for what constitutes sustainability and everything from greenhouse gas emissions to food safety to animal welfare is involved.

Farmers face new requirements as restaurant chains and major food processors announce updated purchasing standards. Producers often feel they aren’t adequately consulted and that the decisions are not based on solid, factual assessments.

The Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Beef (CRSB) and the more recently formed Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Crops (CRSC) provide hope that future decisions in these sectors will be based on consensus involving the entire value chain.

Many beef producers will have heard the commitment by McDonald’s Canada to source sustainably produced beef. Canada has been chosen as the first country to supply the restaurant chain with sustainable beef and the first purchases from a small number of participating producers are set to occur this year.

McDonald’s Canada is working with the entire beef value chain to determine appropriate sustainability metrics and this work is happening through the CRSB. The process takes time, but everyone from producers through to consumers gets to contribute.



McDonald’s Canada is working with the entire beef value chain to determine appropriate sustainability metrics.

The same approach is occurring with the CRSC, even though it hasn’t garnered as much public attention. The aim is agreement on the important aspects of sustainability, how to measure them and how to communicate to end-use consumers.

As Jeffrey Fitzpatrick-Stilwell, senior manager of sustainability for McDonald’s Canada pointed out in a presentation at Canadian Western Agribition in Regina last November, the goal with the roundtables is to be “pre-competitive.” The sustainable production metrics are not meant to give any player in the industry a competitive advantage.

What’s more, sustainability measurements will be tested with producers before proceeding.

“Sustainability doesn’t belong to any production system, crop or region,” says Fran Burr, the executive director

of CRSC based in Winnipeg. “It’s a holistic, outcome-based approach.”

The CRSC has about 40 members representing the full value chain and is open to participation by any interested organization. The goal is to enhance sustainability across the entire grain sector.

The two roundtable initiatives will hopefully help prevent end users from developing so many of their own sustainability measurements and requirements. ■

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Shown here in his multi-species cover crop mix planted after winter wheat harvest, Blake Vince always carries a shovel to dig up roots. Photo taken mid-September.



Drs. M. Sharifi, B. Deen, D.C. Hooker and L. Van Eerd are evaluating a new drill for sowing cover crops into standing crop, which may be an opportunity in field or silage corn.

Photos courtesy of Dr. Laura Van Eerd, University of Guelph

Cover crops gain popularity

BY GORD GILMOUR

Ontario cash cropper Blake Vince can remember the moment cover crops really piqued his interest.

Vince was in the U.S. for a farm meeting a few years back and started comparing notes with Ohio farmer David Brandt. Brandt was trying to persuade Vince there was a better way to farm, one that reduced tillage and depended more on cover crops.

As a member of a family of farmers noted in their area for being no-till pioneers, Vince was interested, noting that the initial

theoretical foundation of no-till always intended to incorporate the cover crop practice. But it was the bottom line numbers for similar yields that really got his attention.

“He was using a hundred pounds of N on his fields, and for about equal yields, I was using 180 pounds,” Vince says. “At that point I said to myself, ‘Who’s making the money here?’ The answer? ‘Not me.’”

Returning home, Vince looked around the family’s 1,300-acre operation near Merlin,

Ont., where they grow corn, soybeans and wheat, and realized any strategy that could help him reduce fertilizer would be a winner. Not only would it help his bottom line, it would help offset increasing environmental pressure based on issues like surface water quality.

Vince adds diversity to his rotation these days with his cover crop mix, which contains 17 plant species, and he typically sows it in the first or second week of August, after winter wheat harvest.

“There’s a fairly large number of growers that appear to be interested in improving their soil life and overall soil health. They’re looking at cover crops as one way to do this.”

– Adam Hayes

Soil Specialist, Ontario Ministry of Ag, Food and Rural Affairs

The mix not only helps hold down the topsoil and prevent erosion and runoff, it also fosters the soil biota – the living things like beneficial bacteria and mycorrhizal fungi that form mutually beneficial relationships with crop roots and make them more efficient users of fertility – by keeping living plant tissue growing in his fields at all times.

“I’m not interested in the maximum possible yield,” Vince explains. “I’m interested in the most economically and environmentally efficient yield.”

Vince says he sees the numbers every season, and he’s satisfied the strategy is working. Yield is holding its own, fertilizer use is down and the bottom line looks healthier. Even more crucially, overall soil health has improved.

Vince is just one of a growing cohort of innovative growers adopting the technique, says Dr. Laura Van Eerd, a soil scientist based at the University of Guelph’s Ridgetown campus.

“I would say we’re past the early adopter phase now, and it’s begun to creep into the mainstream,” Van Eerd says. “About a year ago I was asked if cover crops were a fad or a trend, and I didn’t really have a good

answer. Now, with another year of experience, I would say they’re definitely more trend than fad.”

The practice has been a long-standing one for vegetable growers in the province. Those crops typically are tillage-intensive, especially during harvest operation for root crops, but in recent years cash-crop growers like Vince have taken the practice into fresh fields.

“Right now, farmers are trying a lot of different things and figuring out the agronomics of cover crops,” Van Eerd says.

The issues under examination include the timing of seeding, whether a crop can be under-sown with another crop, and what cover crops make sense. One technique garnering a lot of interest is sowing into corn and soy fields well before harvest. This technique requires careful timing and there are a few different practices under examination.

Some farmers are using a single species, including legume crops and specialty cover crops like tillage radishes. Others, like Vince, are seeking greater diversity by using multi-species mixes. Those can be more expensive, but they’re also seen to deliver better bang for both the monetary

REASONS COVER CROPS WORK



Help hold down **topsoil**



Reduce fertilizer use



Foster **soil biota**



Good red clover growth due to sunlight penetration in the open crop canopy of seed corn production, sown in mid-July into standing seed corn. Photo taken at harvest in early October.

Photo courtesy of Dr. Laura Van Eerd, University of Guelph

WESTERN PERSPECTIVE

At least one researcher thinks there's a fit for cover crops on the Prairies despite the shorter growing season and colder winter.

Martin Entz, a plant science professor at the University of Manitoba, began looking at cover crops as part of an organic production system, where they were used in fallow years.

"There do appear to be some advantages, but they come with a lost year of production, which might not be attractive to conventional farmers," Entz says. "What we have learned, however, is that grazing these green manure cover crops makes them quite profitable, and this is something organic farmers are considering more seriously."

Few conventional growers are showing interest yet, partially due to concerns that a short growing season and drier climate might not support the practice. Entz says he's convinced these stumbling blocks are just temporary barriers.

"There are definitely opportunities in the longer season parts of the Prairies," Entz says. "We estimate about 10 million acres in the southeast Prairies to be well suited to late-season cover crop – for example legumes after winter cereals or canola."

cost and the investment in time and management.

"What the preferred cover crop species is depends on the goal of the grower. Cover crops were first in the marketplace, so to speak, in Ontario in the late 1980s, and then the goal was primarily erosion control," Van Eerd says. "Now the goals are a lot more varied."

Van Eerd recently led a project that adapted a cover crop decision-making tool you can find at **Decision-Tool.InCoverCrops.ca** for Ontario growers. It acknowledges the many different options and goals, and helps growers refine their thinking and selection.

"It has farmers pick their goals and benefits, and screens the various cover

crops based on this," Van Eerd says. "For example, they might be looking for a weed fighter, and this ranks the cover crops from one to four as weed fighters, and anything below a two will be removed from the list."

Van Eerd began to research cover crops in 2004, when they were largely seen as an oddity. "In 2007-08 we began to look at cover crops in a long-term rotation study on the Ridgetown campus, and we're starting to now see some of the long-term effects in terms of better overall soil health."

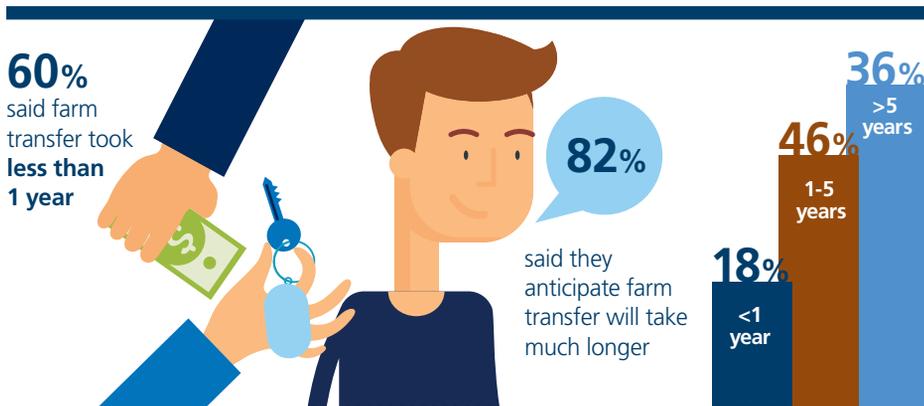
These sorts of long-term studies will help researchers and the farmers who apply the findings better understand the true value of cover crops as part of a production system. ■

Entz's cover crop research is available online at **UManitoba.ca/Outreach/NaturalAgriculture/CoverCrops**.

FCC Vision Panel results

Farm transfer may finish **faster than you think**

The majority of operations sold in the past (60%) did so within a year – from initial planning stages to the legal change of ownership. However, most prospective buyers and sellers (82%) believe it will take much longer. This could represent either a shift in transition preparation or an unrealistic expectation of the time it takes to complete a transition.



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ASK YOURSELF THE TOUGH QUESTIONS

Being a successful entrepreneur requires constant self-examination, motivation and adjustments to keep the enterprise moving in the right direction. It's challenging. To help, Inc. Magazine generated a list of 100 questions that entrepreneurs should ask themselves. Here are a few examples:



What prevents me from making the changes I know will make me a more effective leader?

Marshall Goldsmith, leadership coach and author



Are we changing as fast as the world around us?

Gary Hamel, author and management consultant



What am I trying to prove to myself, and how might it be hijacking my life and business success?

Bob Rosen, executive coach and author

FCC Vision Panel results

TOP 5 RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Here are the top five strategies that the producers and agribusiness operators surveyed report they rely on to manage risk.



Visit fccvision.ca to learn more.

Learning from Ontario's avian influenza response

BY LILIAN SCHAER



Easter Sunday 2015 is not one Ontario's poultry industry will soon forget. That's the day the dreaded phone call came announcing a suspected avian influenza (AI) outbreak. Ingrid DeVisser, Turkey Farmers of Ontario director and chair of the Feather Board Command Centre (FBCC), recalls the sinking feeling of shock and dread as she heard the news.

The poultry industry had been following the growing tally of dead birds in the United States, and memories remained of the toll the 2003 outbreak in British Columbia took on farmers.

As it turned out, Ontario's outbreak was relatively minor as the disease was

contained to only three farms, and there's general agreement that things could have been much worse. Sound biosecurity and good communications helped keep the outbreak in check, which both DeVisser and FBCC manager and incident commander Dr. Tom Baker chalk up to years of preparation by the sector.

The need for centralized response

After the B.C. outbreak, Ontario's feather boards – Egg Farmers of Ontario, Turkey Farmers of Ontario, Chicken Farmers of Ontario and the Ontario Broiler Hatching Egg and Chick Commission – began

informally sharing information on infectious disease situations, and became convinced the industry needed to work more actively with government during outbreaks. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) leads the response to animal disease emergencies.

In 2007, the industry established a stockpile of protective equipment, disinfectants and cleaning supplies for use by farmers during an outbreak, and as the industry began running disease simulation exercises, it became clear a more formal approach was needed for an effective response.

Growing Forward funding led to the creation of FBCC in 2011. It's focused exclusively on emergency preparedness, response and recovery of reportable diseases like AI or Newcastle, but also less significant poultry diseases like ILT (infectious laryngotracheitis).

FBCC developed a single integrated emergency response plan for all four feather organizations, built a secure website to enable internal communications without email and phone, and worked to ensure producer databases and GIS mapping capabilities were in place. It has also taken the lead on establishing and strengthening relationships with both provincial and federal government officials.

When the call comes

“When we're notified of a suspected outbreak, we map a 10-kilometre zone around the farm and notify industry

Lessons learned from Ontario’s AI response are likely useful for other sectors of agriculture.

and producers in the area to implement heightened biosecurity, so we can try to contain the disease to one farm,” Baker says.

All poultry production is regulated through supply management, allowing for detailed geo-spatial mapping of premises. And unlike other jurisdictions, all small-flock owners who buy chicks from brokers and dealers are also registered.

When the AI call came, FBCC quickly established an emergency operations centre and mobilized 33 feather board staff to work out of the Turkey Farmers of Ontario office in Kitchener, near the affected area. The team assisted farmers with information updates and protective equipment and supported CFIA, but its most critical role, Baker believes, was maintaining business continuity with respect to new flock placement and moving birds and eggs to market.

“All movement is frozen in control and quarantine zones, and things only move when government is satisfied,” he explains. “Producers had to monitor and submit their flock health on a twice-weekly basis and no movement permits were issued without that. Because of our database, we were able to help them access those permits so they could move product in and out of the zone.”

FBCC took the lead on media outreach too – sole spokesperson DeVisser fielded countless interviews – and two board members were embedded as liaison officers in the CFIA emergency operations centre, a first for the industry.

Post-outbreak assessment

But despite the successes in managing the outbreak, work remains for next time.

According to DeVisser, there’s always room for improvement when it comes to communications, especially with farmers.

“We thought farmers would sign up to our secure website and check it daily but in reality, that’s not the case,” she says. “So we need to focus on how to do a better job communicating with farmers both inside and outside the zone.”

The availability of human resources over a larger or lengthier outbreak needs to be addressed, with many concerned about burnout of those working on the front lines.

Mapping and information-sharing continue to be challenging, but Baker says a new working group of mapping and technology experts has been established, and FBCC is working on finalizing formal information-sharing agreements with CFIA that will allow information to be shared earlier and faster.

The lessons learned from Ontario’s AI response are likely useful for other sectors of agriculture and other regions of the country. ■

Follow Lilian: @FoodAndFarming

5 actions for a successful response

In the end, the actions taken in five areas helped the outbreak remain relatively small:

Collaboration: “Industry leadership and working with government were keys to success, especially at the CFIA level,” Dr. Tom Baker says. “Government has strict protocols for its response, but we can take additional actions to try to control a situation if we feel there is enough risk. That approach was vindicated.”

Media: Ingrid DeVisser says having a single media spokesperson resulted in consistent and generally accurate coverage, with the media being supportive of the industry and what it was going through.

Control: Mike Petrik, director of technical services with McKinley Hatchery and emergency response co-ordinator for the Ontario Association of Poultry Practitioners, says respect for the control zones was key.

Travel: “Being able to get the industry to stop travelling was huge – that’s why we only had three cases,” Petrik says. “The end result was about as good as anyone could hope for, given how easy it is to spread AI.”

Biosecurity: All on-farm inspections by the feather boards were suspended during the outbreak, and enhanced biosecurity was recommended across the entire province.



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Canada



Writing 'Because I love you' lists

Can you tell me a bit about your personal situation and what happened?

My husband, Brian Van Camp, died two years ago in a farm accident involving a loader while spreading potash. I was 46 years old, had three teenage children and owned a 100-acre farm with a big old farmhouse. We had 23,000 chickens in the barn and shares in my husband's family's dairy and crop farm. Brian worked full-time on his family's farm and had expanded to 1,200 acres of corn, wheat, soybeans and adzuki beans. They also milk about 120 cows. I worked part-time as associate editor with *Country Guide* and had been happily married for 21 years.

Suddenly, I was a widow and all these blessings, all that we had worked so hard to achieve, became overwhelming. One thing I tell people is to not underestimate grief and do not overestimate you or your family's ability to function when someone dies or has an accident.

Preplanning gave us time and choices. Lots of women wouldn't have chosen to keep farming and that's just a personal choice. For me, it would have been harder to move away, to give up on the dream of farming that my husband and I shared.

Did you find that you had to scramble for the necessary information and contacts after your spouse passed?

From the time we bought our farm in 2000, I managed the chicken part of our operation so I already knew many of the professionals and people who serviced this farm.

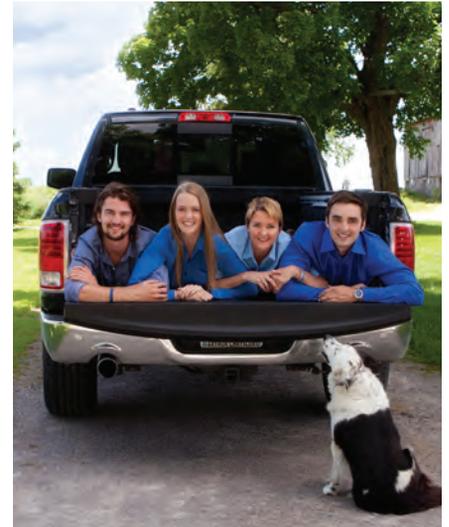
After my husband died, I continued to do chores. It was important for me to keep things as normal as possible and chore time was time by myself and I needed that time alone to cry.

We didn't have standard operating procedures but we do now. Using those SOPs this past spring, I hired and trained a local chicken farmer to manage our barn so I could go back to work for the magazine.

I continue to use Brian's cellphone contact list. Make sure someone on your farm knows the password to your cellphone and computer. When my son went to plant corn for the first time, one of the hardest parts was Brian was the only person who knew the password to the GPS.

In many ways, especially for the businesses, we were well organized. We had a business plan and had gone through some succession planning with his family.

I'm so glad we had the support of our community, our family and our friends. At first, shock made it nearly impossible for me to think clearly.



Since the loss of her husband, Maggie Van Camp has been encouraging others to be sure to have farm and personal plans in order.

MAGGIE VAN CAMP

Maggie Van Camp is CEO of Redcrest Farms, raising about 25,000 broilers, and an 80-acre cropping operation growing corn, wheat and soybeans near Blackstock, Ont. She is associate editor with Country Guide and holds a science degree in agriculture from the University of Guelph.



VIDEO:
Will and Estate
Planning
fcc.ca/EstatePlan

Ask an Expert

“I think many farms still don’t value everyone’s contribution when considering life insurance.”

If it had been the other way around, would your spouse have had all the relevant information in the case of your absence?

I think my husband would have had difficulty going through all the paperwork; it took so much time. Not only was I changing his personal papers (passports, licenses, etc.) but I was also the executor of his will and switching over two businesses.

He would have needed to hire someone to take care of the farm’s paperwork and do daily chores. He would have also needed a cook, cleaner, a bookkeeper, yard maintenance and a taxi driver for our children. Over many years of marriage and business partnership we split the duties to operate as efficiently as possible.

My husband wouldn’t have known the PIN number to some of our bank accounts and my online trading accounts, including our children’s RESP. Like me, he wouldn’t have known our insurance policies off the top of his head.

I think many farms still don’t value everyone’s contribution when considering life insurance. Right from the beginning of our farming career, we had equal amounts of term life insurance on both of us.

What specifically is your advice to farm families?

First, all the owners of the farm, even if they don’t have children, should have a will including a power of attorney. They should review it every five years and someone else should know where a copy is filed.

Second, someone else – a spouse, children, partners – should know the people who service and keep your farm running.

If you can, with sole proprietorships, assets should be in joint ownership and accounts under two names. If someone dies, you shouldn’t change the name on the bank account right away as cheques will come in under one spouse’s name. Everyone should have their own personal bank account and credit card.

Whatever your farm’s business structure, whether it’s a corporation, partnership or joint venture, have a written agreement including what will happen if one of the four Ds occurs – disability, divorce, disagreement or death. Having a specific written pathway to follow after my husband’s death was a gift. I cannot imagine how long and miserable this would have been without a funded, well-written buy-sell agreement.

Complete your “Because I love you” lists and get your businesses in order. And remember that no matter what happens in life, you should never give up on happiness. ■

“Because I love you”

Use these headings as a guide to develop your own list

- ✓ The help: short-term help, longer-term help
- ✓ Standard operating procedures
- ✓ Passwords, location of keys to equipment
- ✓ Documents: RRSPs, TFSAs, and other investments, insurance policies, bank accounts, business agreements, lease agreements, mortgages, vehicle ownership
- ✓ Names of personal trusted advisor and mentor
- ✓ Professionals: accountant, lawyer, banker, doctor, dentist, childcare provider, financial advisor, processors, elevator manager, commodity broker, input suppliers, veterinarian, equipment dealers and repair, vendors
- ✓ Fix-it folks: mechanic, electrician, plumber, furnace, septic, welder, security systems
- ✓ Legal papers: power of attorney, executor, guardian, organ donation, cremation, funeral arrangements

The Internet of Things: implications for agriculture

BY PETER GREDIG

Internet of Things (IoT) refers to an emerging reality where more and more devices are connected to users and other devices via the Internet. The ramifications of IoT will touch us all in the very near future.

Almost any device or product with electronic on-off controls can now be equipped to connect to the Internet. The most obvious benefit is that a user can control the operation of the product online. The smartphone is often the most convenient way to do this and the phone becomes a remote control. But the implications go much further.

IoT enables so-called “smart” device networks. For example, a smart house may have Internet-connected door locks, smoke and CO₂ detectors, furnace and air conditioning thermostat, security cameras, TV and more. The smart part refers to how these devices can network to function together or independently. It may soon be possible to set your GPS-enabled smartphone to activate the furnace or air conditioning when you are within 15 kilometres of home. The appropriate lights would turn on when you are within one kilometre, and the coffee machine could commence brewing the moment the garage door opener kicks on.

On the farm

What could a smart farm look like? Connected field-specific weather stations and soil moisture sensors could alert you when conditions warrant a fungicide application. Controlled tile drainage valves could open or close automatically according to conditions detected by sensors.

Performance and yield data can already be transferred wirelessly from many forms of farm equipment. Where this real time data goes and what it will connect to is open-ended. Drones? Robotic tractors? We'll see.

Bio-monitoring devices that track temperature, heart rate, respiration and movement on sentinel animals in livestock herds will provide an early warning for animal health issues or stressors. Appropriate climate



and feed adjustments could be initiated automatically or remotely. A bio-monitoring and messaging prototype product for horses called SeeHorse already exists.

Farmers and employees may also benefit from bio-monitors that help detect fatigue and stress.

Connected sensors will automatically monitor inventories of all descriptions – fuel, feed, crop protection products. When levels drop below a prescribed level, an order could be generated automatically.

Did I mention data? Every connected device can generate data in real time and retain it via the Cloud. An avalanche of data from the billions of connected devices will come on line in the next few years. The bottom line is, if it can be connected, it will be connected.

Watch for more about the deeper implications of IoT for agriculture, privacy concerns, and strategies for moving into the IoT age in future articles. ■

Follow Peter: @agwag

Common sense rules for farm equipment on Canadian roads

BY MARK CARDWELL

Since driving is a provincial jurisdiction in Canada, no two jurisdictions have the same rules when it comes to moving farm equipment on public roads. But to hear safety expert Raynald Marchand tell it, courtesy and good judgment are two common denominators for every region of the country.

“Car and truck drivers must realize these vehicles are on the road for a reason, which is to put food on our tables,” says Marchand, general manager of programs for the Canada Safety Council. “But operators have an obligation to ensure they are moving in a safe and legal manner on public roadways.”

Though regulations differ between provinces, Marchand says all have rules governing everything from the licensing requirements of machinery and drivers to speed limits and hours of operation of slow-moving vehicles like farm equipment.

In regards to visibility, for example, the use of a triangular red-and-orange slow-moving vehicle

(SMV) sign is mandatory on the rear of any towed equipment or machinery travelling 45 kilometres per hour or less, depending on the province.

“You need to be visible from 150 feet,” says Marchand. “And you need to do a walk-around to make sure your markers aren’t obstructed and aren’t worn out to the point where they no longer reflect.”

At least one rear red light and two front lights are also normally required if driving a half-hour before or after sunset, he adds, as are amber sidelights for vehicles six metres or more in length.

Marchand also emphasizes the need for two separate means of attachments when towing implements behind a tractor.

“In addition to safety chains, you should always use a drawbar or hitch or cable,” he says. “People fool themselves into a false sense of security when they say, ‘No worries, I’m just going down the road to the other field.’”



Whether towing equipment with a tractor or driving self-propelled machinery, Marchand recommends SMV drivers stick to their lane of the road. “Stay right of the centre line,” he says.

He warns operators against driving on the shoulders of roadways in the mistaken belief they are being courteous by letting cars and trucks pass.

“Sometimes the shoulder can’t sustain the load,” Marchand says. “And it isn’t illegal for drivers to cross solid lines to pass slow-moving vehicles if they do it safely. So leave that decision to them.” ■

BASIC SAFETY ON PUBLIC ROADWAYS

Always display a slow-moving vehicle sign if **driving 45 km/h or less**

.....

Check signs for bright and reflective colours, and replace when **faded or defective**

.....

Be visible from 150 feet

.....

Obey all traffic laws, including speed limits, traffic signals and signs

.....

Pull over and **let traffic pass** when it is safe to do so



Strong agriculture sector sustains farmland values

Healthy crop receipts and low interest rates helped sustain increases in farmland values in 2015. While producers should prepare for a possible easing, the latest FCC Farmland Values Report indicates averages in Canada rose 10.1 per cent in 2015, compared to a 14.3 per cent increase in 2014.

Nationally and in many key regions, the average value of farmland increased at a slower pace last year. Manitoba saw the highest increase at 12.4 per cent, and the rate of increase slowed in six provinces.

Overall, there appears to be greater volatility with a higher number of locations where values decreased.

Key factors beginning to change

“We’re now seeing lower commodity prices offset by low interest rates and a weak dollar,” says J.P. Gervais, FCC chief agricultural economist. “The weak loonie not only makes our exports more competitive, but helps producers receive a better price for their commodities that are mainly priced in U.S. dollars. It becomes a real tug-of-war between competing factors that influence farmland values.”

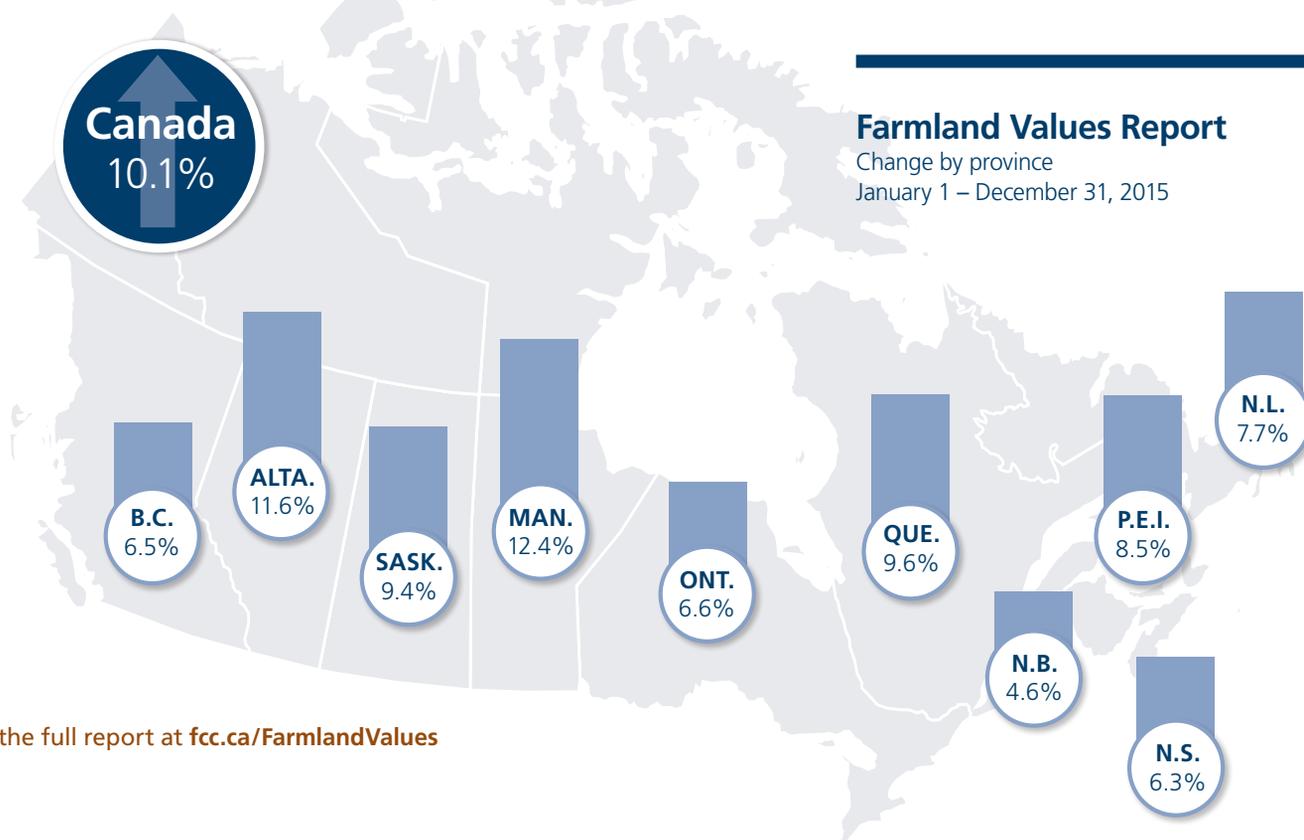
From 2010 to 2013, strong commodity prices generated high profits for crop producers and contributed to record increases in the value of farmland. Profit margins and demand remain strong, mostly due to the low Canadian dollar.

Gervais says the best-case scenario would be for the average value of farmland to reach a point of long-term stability, where any future increases or decreases are modest and incremental.

Adjust risk management plans

Risk management plans should account for a possible “softening” of farmland values and future interest rate increases, according to Corinna Mitchell-Beaudin, FCC executive vice-president and chief risk officer.

“Despite a strong performance in the agriculture sector, agriculture will always be cyclical so producers should be prepared for the ups and downs along the way,” she says.



We all share the same table. Pull up a chair.



“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.

Visit AgMoreThanEver.ca to discover how you can help improve and create realistic perceptions of Canadian ag.



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