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BRANT COUNTY - SIMPLY GRAND

ISSUE 8 / FALL 2024



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Did you know that most potatoes are grown from seed potatoes, which is a small piece of potato with at least one growing eye, which will in turn grow a new plant.

Did you know?

Did you know that strawberries are the only fruit with their seeds on the outside? This means that according to botanists, each seed is considered to be its own separate fruit.

Did you know?

Did you know that while it is true that apple seeds contain cyanide (one gram of apple seeds has around 0.6 milligrams of cyanide), you don't have to panic if you accidentally swallow a seed, since a lethal dose starts at over 50 mg.

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Black Swallow Living Soils seeks to expand symbiotic growing relationships

Humanity knows more about the stars above their heads than the soil beneath their feet says Nathan Knechtel of Black Swallow Living Soils.

"Numerically, there's more biology in a spoonful of dirt than humans on the planet," said Knechtel, whose compost, soil amendment and mixtures business is based around delving deeper into the microbial relationships and growth potential illustrated within even that small sample size.

In basic terms, soil can be quantified within percentages of triangular boundaries defined by sand, silt and clay at its points. Those elements could be compared to the dimensional lumber which frames a house, its identifiable structural integrity.

It's the finishes, design elements and decorations which bring the house to life however, or in this illustrative example, enhanced understanding of the fungal pathways and bacterial counts which put the 'living' into soil.

To be clear, Knechtel's target market is the organic sector, but he understands the vital role conventional agriculture plays in feeding the world's growing population.

"We need big ag, we need to produce corn at the levels we have to, no ifs ands or buts. And you're not going to do that with hopes and dreams."

However, he supports the concept of a hybrid model, a symbiotic relationship where even larger production practices can benefit from greater understanding of soil biology. For instance, Knechtel points to the increased use of no-till practices and cover crops, as well as a study indicating incorporation of essential microbes with commercial urea-based fertilizer can reduce application rates of the latter by 50 per cent.

"That's not a hippy-dippy altruistic sort of thing - that's good business."

His own business model evolved from a family background in a pair of health food stores founded and operated by his parents, eventually sold during a transition into the importation of fireplace components from China. What amounted to an apprenticeship in business practices as well as access to top-notch granola combined with available infrastructure dovetailed with Knechtel's own belief in the value of medicinal cannabis, and the clear sense legalization was a matter of when, not if.

"I wanted to be a part of it in some capacity."

That tumultuous period has been nicknamed 'the green gold rush', an allusion Knechtel advances by saying the people who had the best potential for financial return weren't the prospectors, but those selling picks and shovels.

"We decided to focus on picks and shovels," he smiled.

Knechtel avoids being pigeonholed into that market sector, and emphasizes Black Swallow Living Soils caters toward the organic growing of a diverse range, be that a cou-



Black Swallow Living Soils (blackswallowsoil.com) founder Nathan Knechtel's background in family business, access to infrastructure and belief in the positive benefits of medical cannabis resulted in the creation of a compost, soil amendment and mixtures company targeting the organic sector.

ple of tomato - or other - plants on a condo balcony, a greenhouse full of cucumbers or a large commercial microgreens operation.

"Everything, right across the board."

However, a significant majority of his market is what could be termed 'craft cannabis' producers of various sizes. As in any form of agriculture, there are a variety of approaches, including rooting plants in a synthetic substrate in order to strictly control a water-based fertigation recipe which speaks to the goal of consistent, ongoing and potentially larger-scale production.

Alternatively, those seeking what they believe is a more natural expression of the plant including development of terpene profiles - unique strain characteristics including flavour notes and undertones - which are believed to contribute significantly to the entourage - overall, if not precisely defined - effect.

Carefully-curated or created soil mixtures and 'teas' (blends of fertilizer equivalents including a variety of organic ingredients) may be integral components to this approach. Black Swallow inventory includes these elements or ingredients, as well as those used in, for example, creating organic sprays for fruit trees.

The company tries to focus on uncommon things says Knechtel, avoiding competition in saturated spaces. For example, they offer Blumat watering systems, import Grass Roots fabric pots and have secured registration for kelp, oyster and pumice.

Black Swallow has three locations, two farm properties where product is either stored or stored and mixed, and the 137 Nelson St., Brantford warehousing, packaging and retail outlet which is open to the public.

Beyond a focus on organic products and helping provide access to them, Knechtel strives to be open and transparent with test results.

"Which are posted online (blackswallowsoil.com), which a lot of other companies don't do."

Although living in a real world where things have to 'pencil out' or make economic sense, Knechtel does carry an element of altruism, that good business can also include sustainable practices that benefit the environment and society in general.

He admits so-called 'new practices' are often based or inspired by very old practices. The Aztecs used to enrich soil by proscribed burns which added charcoal, First Nations people gained inter-cropping benefits from combining 'the three sisters' (squash, beans and corn) in plantations, Newfoundlanders caught and put capelin into their gardens, and Korean natural farming seeks to take advantage of microorganisms to create rich, highly-producing soils.

"They didn't necessarily understand everything, but they knew it helped."

His own journey toward broader understanding does not include formalized education, but is the product of an inquisitive, analytical mind, research, networking and attendance at related conventions or events.

"The school of hard knocks," he smiled. "It's learning by osmosis."

And while his 'education' thus far only underlines how much there still is to learn, Knechtel's open, approachable Black Swallow approach is one which has resonated with clients.

"It's worked out very well," Knechtel concluded. 🌱

—“
“That's not a hippy-dippy altruistic sort of thing - that's good business.”
”—

Now is the time for soybean harvest preparation

The dog days of summer may be a time when soybean growers aren't as busy, but summer and the early days of fall are a time when harvest preparation can start.

Some of the harvest activities for growers, both with food-grade and GMO beans, were highlighted during a grower day held by Sevita International. The Canadian-owned soybean company highlighted its new varieties and provided growing tips during the event.

Removing volunteer corn is especially important for food grade beans. Natalie Hazeleger, Sevita production and quality manager, said if volunteer corn wasn't dealt with already, growers should be removing the plants now. She said volunteer corn is rounder and similar in shape and size to soybeans, which causes an issue if it is harvested with soybeans as it's difficult to remove it.

"We recommend walking in the field and pulling the cobs off," she said.

She also suggested growers should look at the burn-down depth if spraying will be used to eliminate weeds. The weeds can cause staining.

On the equipment side, Hazeleger suggested now is the time to clean equipment, ensuring any stray beans or other grains are removed. With food grain beans, she sug-



Soybean growers received insight into the latest varieties developed by Sevita International during the annual grower day at the company's facility north of Woodstock. Information on the use of soybeans for soy milk and commodity price predictions were also provided.

gested when harvest starts, still to flush the combine, driving in a couple of feet and then emptying in a separate wagon. These beans will be used for crushing.

She also suggested not to combine too early in the morning or late in the day as moisture can stain the beans. The combine should be set to ensure the auger is as full as possible to help minimize damage. 🌿

ADVERTORIAL

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We've got some big news on the horizon that we're thrilled to share with you! Starting October 1, 2024, we're merging our five independent stores into one unified brand: **Country Mills Feed & Farm Store**. This means Elgin Feeds in Aylmer, Thorndale Farm Supplies, Oxford Feed Supply in Ingersoll, and Norwich Feeds in both Norwich and Burford will all come together under one roof.

While our name and branding will be changing, what matters most to us remains the same. As a family-owned and locally operated business, our commitment to delivering top-notch products and services for all your animal care needs is as strong as ever. Our community has always been our foundation, and

we're excited to take this next step together with you.

This transition brings together our years of experience and dedication, allowing us to serve you more efficiently. With our strong milling capabilities in Thorndale and Aylmer, we'll continue offering a wide range of premium feed products, including Shur-Gain's trusted, research-backed formulas. You'll find our Country Mills branded products alongside other leading offerings in the agricultural world—all in one convenient spot!

One thing that won't change: Our fantastic team! Many of the friendly faces you know and trust will still be here, ready to lend a hand. Whether you're a seasoned farmer or a loving pet owner, our

staff is passionate about helping you find the right products to meet your needs.

We're so grateful for your support over the years, and we can't wait to serve our community with even more enthusiasm and efficiency. On behalf of the Saarloos family and all of our team, thank you for your continued trust and loyalty.

As we embark on this exciting journey with **Country Mills**, we look forward to growing together with you for many years to come. Stop by or give us a call soon to discover the enhanced offerings and personalized service that await you at your local feed and farm store!

*Warm regards,
The Country Mills Team*



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Norfolk Farms founder retires

In a time when print publications were falling like rows of dominoes, Dave Douglas accomplished what many would have called impossible by starting Norfolk and Brant Farms from the ground up.

Seven years later, with Douglas retiring and selling the publications, both are successful.

The first issue of Norfolk Farms was published in spring 2017. Douglas was formerly the advertising manager for specialty agriculture publications with Cash Crop Farming and then Annex Publishing. He lost his job due to restructuring and realized there was a void with no publication serving Norfolk's horticulture industry.

"There are agricultural publications - there are national ones, there are provincial ones, but none focus on the horticulture that's in Norfolk County," he said.

Douglas started thinking there was an opportunity.

"I did a lot of thinking about it," he said. "I started to research who would be interested in advertising."

Douglas reached out to Herb Sherwood, a friend who used to work for The Grower. He agreed to help with advertising sales. Douglas lined up writers to contribute, tapping Bobbi Ann Brady, Jeff Helsdon, Jeff Tribe, Chris Thomas, and Diane Baltaz in the early days. The Aylmer Express looked after layout and printing.



→ Dave Douglas looks at the first edition of Norfolk Farms with the tobacco plants outside the Delhi Tobacco Museum as a backdrop. The founder of Norfolk and Brant Farms will retire after this issue.

An advertisement for KOOLJET refrigeration systems. The background is a field of young plants under a blue sky. Large, bold text reads 'FREE COOLING EXPERTS'. Below this, a red graphic with a plug symbol contains the text 'PLUG AND PLAY'. Two large, industrial-looking refrigeration units are shown floating in the air. At the bottom, a long row of smaller units is displayed. In the bottom left corner is the KOOLJET logo with the tagline 'RELIABLE REFRIGERATION SYSTEMS'. In the bottom right corner is a thermometer graphic showing a temperature of -76° and the text 'OUR COMFORT ZONE'. At the bottom center, the text reads 'RELIABLE PACKAGED REFRIGERATION' followed by the phone number '(866) 748-7786' and the website 'www.kooljet.com'.

The resulting publication caters to what Douglas calls the row crops—the horticulture crops in Norfolk—plus stories that include general interest rural stories, cash crop farming, horses, and livestock. It is delivered by mail to more than 2,300 farm addresses.

Douglas took his idea on the road, attending farm shows in Alliston, Chatham, Niagara, and even Michigan. He said manufacturers were impressed.

“It was the design and pictures of people that captured their interest,” he said. “The ad agencies can be cold sometimes, but they saw the local content.”

Then two years after Norfolk Farms was launched, Douglas got Brant Farms off the ground.

“It just seemed to be a bit of a natural,” he said. “There should be some spillover of row crop vegetables in Burford and Scotland. I thought I had some time so I would give it a try. I talked to the federation folks, and they thought I should give it a try. It’s more agriculture than horticulture in Brant.”

Douglas found himself busy with a list of 2,000 potential advertisers at the local, national, and international level. He decided to retire to spend more time with his family.

“It became basically a full-time job,” he said. “Even in June and July, when there weren’t issues, there was always something to do. My wife and I want to spend some time to enjoy life. I decided to list it and it was bought and sold.”

Grant Haven Media purchased Norfolk and Brant Farms, effective Jan. 2, 2024. Douglas stayed for a transition period, which will end

with the publication of the fall issues of Norfolk and Brant Farms.

“David started Norfolk Farms in 2017, which was about the time that the broader newspaper industry began to really suffer, with closures of many small-town newspapers across the province,” said Grant Haven Media owner and publisher Stewart Grant. “Despite the industry downturn, David was able to achieve remark-

quality, all-local product celebrating the diverse range of agricultural expertise and success throughout this region,” said Tribe, who is also a farmer. “Farming is never easy nor is creating a publication of its calibre and longevity, essentially out of nothing more than an idea and the experience and drive to see it through. Dave should be congratulated for what he founded and proud of the lasting impact of what he has achieved.”

Baltaz worked with Douglas years ago with Cash Crop Farming before starting to write for Norfolk Farms.

“Dave consistently impressed me through these decades with his humour, seeing the best in his co-workers and in retaining his deep roots in the Haldimand-Norfolk community,” she said. “Bravo to Dave as he moves on to his future ventures with his wife, Melanie.”

Helsdon, who will be the editor of Norfolk and Brant Farms, also had best wishes for Douglas in his retirement.

“What Dave accomplished should not be underestimated,” he said. “The stories of Norfolk and Brant Farms will become an integral part of the agriculture history of Brant and Norfolk Counties.”

Grant vowed to continue to tell the stories of the face of agriculture in the publications.

“Everyone has a story, and the pages of Norfolk Farms and Brant Farms have been telling these interesting local stories for the past number of years, and in doing so have helped bring the community closer together,” he said. “This is a tradition we look forward to continuing.”

“Seven years later, with Douglas retiring and selling the publications, both are successful.”

able success because he continually filled his papers with interesting local stories.”

The editorial staff who have been there for the long haul were also impressed with Douglas’ efforts.

“Dave Douglas’ vision and full-on commitment to Norfolk Farms made it what it was: a

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Beekeeper Roy Allemann takes labour-intensive approach to hive health, honey production



Construction of an on-farm extraction/packaging facility is underway at Cool Creek Honey's rural Mt. Pleasant/Burtch farm.



The Little Brown Cow's Deb Anstey-Gurney shows off a jar of Cool Creek honey.

Beekeeper Roy Allemann and partner Robin Goliboski's approach is to meet millennial bees 'where they are.'

And where they are says Allemann, is facing an unprecedented level of interconnected challenges requiring corresponding hive monitoring and response.

"In my opinion, they are the most complicated creatures to manage," he said. "And if you love problem-solving as I do, you've found the right kind of farming."

Allemann's family moved to the 35-acre farm near Mt. Pleasant and Burtch they currently reside on when he was three, a rolling bucolic property complete with creek running through it. He was happy to leave for college, leading to a career in purchasing and project management, however after turning 30, began to miss his former

lifestyle. Allemann fastened on beekeeping as a productive hobby, in part because he and his roommate were going through a kilogram of honey weekly in their tea, and secondly because it reflected his Swiss ancestors' own history.

He began what would evolve into Cool Creek Honey with two hives, upped that to ten by his second season and reached 17 at year three.

"By year four, I think I was at 35."

He surprised friends with a decision to semi-retire at age 42, leaving Oakville to return fulltime to the farm they thought he'd left for good.

"I missed the property, open air, working outside... which is now my office," smiled Allemann, who is up to 120 honey-producing

hives at this point, plus a queen-breeding yard.

He looks to produce a unique small batch, pure, strained product reflecting diverse terroir. Cool Creek Honey's approach translates into ten carefully-selected geographical locations and weekly hive inspections and note-taking for future reference which closely monitor production and health. Two-fold benefits allow Allemann to better maintain healthy populations while also extracting honey four to six times a season.

In order and his opinion, Allemann lists contemporary honey bee challenges as chemical load, unusual weather, over-reliance on imported bees, and finally, loss of habitat - although not an issue for his operation. The issues may be interconnected given a wetter year may also encourage greater fungicide use, and secondly, higher mortality rates from other factors also results in greater reliance on imported replacement bees.

"It's death by a thousand cuts," Allemann said, cumulative damage which ratchets up overall loss percentage. "Every stressor increases the chance of them not making it through the winter."

Beekeepers may say they lost hives during 'a bad winter', Allemann often counters they may instead have been lost during the 'bad summer' that preceded it. He believes bees are able to withstand cold winters better than damp ones with a wide range of temperature shifts, and also that Varroa mites double in population through an unseasonably warm spring month. By example, 2022 was a great year for bees, the 'closest to normal season we've had in a decade.'

Hives benefitted from a beautiful spring and sunny dry summer with rain when necessary. Allemann's winter loss stood at eight per cent, the best in a decade.

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Cool Creek Honey 'B.Guy' Roy Allemann (left) and partner Robin Goliboski take a labour-intensive, weekly approach to monitoring hive health, striving to produce a unique, quality product.

His hives came into 2023 'really strong', but suffered from widespread mid-July wildfire smoke, along with rainy, overcast days preventing optimal sugar production in the flowers they depend on.

"The bees were miserable, we were miserable," said Allemann.

Hives that are vibrant and healthy have a better chance of surviving the winter. In a perfect world, he and Goliboski counter risk factors by inspecting each of their 120 hives and brood chambers 20-24 times a season, weekly from spring through Labour Day, checking for eggs in a good pattern and without disease. Queens are the most important factor in hive health, and if not performing, can be replaced.

Hives are also checked for additional signs of disease and Varroa mites, the latter the number one issue beekeepers have control over, says Allemann.

Mites may not kill bees outright adds Goliboski, but weaken their immune systems.

"It opens the door to other infections."

Allemann runs on organic principles, but when required, will treat hives to both protect their overall health and also prevent the spread of communicable factors.

"We respond appropriately, depending on the severity," said Allemann, for example, utilizing a natural mite treatment approved for in-season use.

He does not supplement hives with sugar during the summer, refusing to take the chance honey might be adulterated. During the winter, hives are checked less frequently, once or twice a month, and if short of available food stores, may be supplemented either by extra honey from other hives, sugar or a variant of fondant.

Their heightened summer hive-checking frequency combines four to six honey harvests annually, significantly above the industry standard. Production is also elevated - an estimated 150 pounds per hive - as well as flavour diversity.

"You have a better chance of taking slices of the season, and not only of the season, but the local geography, which

makes honey more interesting," said Allemann.

Honey harvested from different locations or more frequently may reflect unique or seasonal nectars, rather than a full-season blend. A simplistic example would be the distinctions between stronger, darker buckwheat honey, and the lighter, fruity profile produced from lavender blooms. More specifically says Allemann, 'thistle honey' will have notes or undertones of cinnamon and black licorice, cherry blossoms can produce an intense flavour profile aligned with cherry Jolly Ranchers, dandelion blooms a bitter astringent he quite enjoys, and golden rod an 'earthy' component.

Taking things further, every two or three years, they may harvest 'basswood honey', with a minty profile consumers tend to enjoy - or not. And every eight years or so, when bees don't have access to clover or other blossoms, their resultant reliance on sumac results in citrus undertones.

"And that's what makes a unique product and not a commodity."

The Cool Creek Honey marketing plan has always featured a local, sustainable approach, around ten personal relationships with retailers including The Little Brown Cow, Bun Shoppe in Brantford, Fenwood Farms, Townsend Butchers and The Windmill, outlets that says Allemann, understand their 'why' and treat their product appropriately.

They have not adopted online sales, avoiding associated packaging waste and an elevated shipping-related carbon footprint.

"That doesn't fit our business model," said Goliboski.

That model, along with their labour-intensive approach to hive monitoring may not be for every beekeeper, Allemann concedes. But it is a unified approach dovetailing with his goals upon returning to the farm, right through to today.

"What you get out of it is what you put into it," Allemann concluded. "The more you put in, the better results you're going to have." 🌿

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Glenridge Hazelnuts 'the real deal' in terms of Ontario production



Glenridge Hazelnuts is truly a family farming operation, featuring (from left), James, Stephanie, Martha, Chelsie, Owen, Bill, Adam and Chelsie Sharp.



Glenridge Hazelnuts has extended into a third generation, with here, Rorie checking out a tree with the help of her mom, Chelsie.

In the world of Ontario hazelnuts, Glenridge Hazelnuts are the unquestioned real deal.

In a fledgling industry featuring many test and hobby plots and some farms with 10 or 20 acres of trees, the Sharp family operation stands alone with a 70-acre orchard backed up by a full range of harvesting, drying and processing equipment.

"We're still learning, that's for sure," said Adam Sharp, reiterating his father Bill's

open-doors policy when it comes to provincial hazelnut development, illustrated with an Ontario Hazelnut Association (OHA) Farm Tour Saturday, September 28th at the family's St. George-area properties.

Bill, Martha and their three children: Adam, his wife Chelsie and children Owen and Rorie; Stephanie, and James were all on hand to welcome industry guests for a comprehensive tour and equipment demonstration.

The Sharp family's entry into hazelnut production was encouraged by seeking a niche crop for a rocky piece of property featuring particularly sharp knolls.

"We farm hills, but every time you pulled in there you knew you were going to break something," said Adam.

Their interest was piqued and developed over years of research at OHA symposiums,



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along with the fact equipment used in their cash-cropping operation as well as farming experience in general could be sourced for hazelnuts.

"A lot of it crosses over."

In addition, hazelnuts represented a low-labour option compared to, for example, fruit trees or ginseng.

"I don't care what industry you are in, you struggle to find people," said Adam.

During the busier times, planting, pruning and harvest, the family comes together to work collaboratively says Adam, but regular maintenance - drip irrigation and grass cutting - can be handled by 'one or two guys' during summer months. Hazelnut harvest also lines up with corn, the former finishing roughly by the end of October so the family can focus on the latter through November.

The Sharps began planting hazelnuts seriously in 2018, gradually moving forward to their current acreage. Of the 70, roughly half are approaching maturity in terms of production says Adam, with the remainder a combination of whips through trees approaching production age.

The orchard is split roughly between 35 acres of what James Sharp calls 'Oregon varieties', Jefferson, Yamhill, Gamma and Gene which were propagated there, and 'Rutgers University varieties', more eastern-based trees developed through a breeding program there, including Sommerset and Raritan.

Hazelnut orchards tend to have a combination of nut-production trees and pollinators - such as 'The Beast' from Rutgers, so named for how much pollen it produces. Nut size, shape and flavour are also considerations for picking varieties, as is Eastern Filbert Blight (EFB) resistance.

"That's the big part too," says James.

Compared to annuals like corn and soybeans, there is 'quite a wait' between planting trees and producing nuts. Adam says there was little apparent difference in the trees through their first two years, with a few clusters of nuts forming by year four. In year five, the family went out together and hand-harvested a few hundred pounds, getting to the point the year after where a mechanical harvester was required for around 8,500 pounds off 25-30 acres.

No matter what the crop, it's rewarding to both have a decent growing season and harvest, said Adam, particularly so after an extended waiting period.

"That was quite exciting."

If growing production is the biggest satisfaction, EFB, a disease which can devastate both individual trees and orchards, is the biggest challenge. Risk is mitigated through the introduction of new blight-resistant varieties along with a spraying schedule incorporating farming practices from the farms' other crops.

Regular inspections have not discovered EFB in the Glenridge orchards says Adam, a status they are striving to keep at 'quo.'

"I hope we can keep on top of it."

The transition from getting trees in the ground and moving them forward to age of production was 'exciting', but also re-

quired a corresponding addition in harvesting and production equipment.

Their harvester was sourced from Italy, essentially a series of rotating rubber paddles which sweep nuts into a row where they are vacuumed into a hopper. There are many different models and approaches says Adam, but they all seem to feature some form of vacuum.

"There's really only one way to get stuff off the ground."

Given the indiscriminate nature of the suction, the second stage in harvest is cleaning, which removes the great majority of 'bi-catch' twigs and debris, as well application of a food-grade solution which ensures nuts will be safe for human consumption.

Initially, the Sharp family figured their nuts would be sold in the shell.

"We're finding that is not the case," said Adam, noting Ontario and Quebec buyers want them cracked. As a result, cleaned Glenridge nuts are then dried in-shell, before being sorted for size, a crucial stage given they must be as uniform as possible for the cracker to work effectively and efficiently. If there is too great a disparity in shell size, you'll end up with the hazelnut equivalent of 'mashed potatoes' says Adam, rather than the desired full, intact nuts.

The cracker removes 98 per cent of the shells, meaning that last year, summer students employed in a variety of duties on the farms, also assisted in hand-sorting 22,000 pounds of cracked nuts. It is a vital step in ensuring Glenridge Hazelnuts are a premium product, however tedious and time-consuming.

"It was like watching paint dry," said Adam.

As a result, the farm has invested in an optical sorter which will employ AI technology and infrared lights to remove any final bits of debris along with any sub-standard product.

Hazelnuts were always considered some form of 'value add' crop says Adam. Stephanie Sharp is in charge of Glenridge Hazel-

nuts product development, branding and marketing.

As Adam stated and she echoed, farmers tend to like to farm and ultimately, wholesale is seen as a significant part of their business. However, the Sharp family is also exploring the opportunity presented through creating, branding and marketing in-house products.

"That part is a learning curve for a lot of us," Stephanie admitted.

Glenridge Hazelnuts began with plain roasted nuts, adding cinnamon-sugar, espresso and maple-flavoured options, along with high-quality milk or dark Belgian chocolate-covered nuts.

"It's pretty fair to say hazelnuts and chocolate go together really well," she said.

Stephanie also hopes to have all-natural hazelnut butter ready for sale by Christmas, 2024, an option she prefers to peanut, almond or cashew butters.

"I may be biased, but hazelnut butter is by far my favourite."

They are available for sale online through the website <https://glenridgehazelnuts.com>, at local farmer's markets and the St. George Apple Fest, or other area on-farm retail outlets. Ultimately, Stephanie would like to see some form of on-farm market, in conjunction with farm tours and agri-tourism highlighting the value of producing and purchasing locally.

There are a lot of moving parts to that vision, however no form of farming is without challenge.

"But in a good way," Stephanie emphasized. "It's good to have a challenge."

Her succinct summary could be applied to Ontario's hazelnut industry, a work full of promise, but also arguably in progress, requiring contributions from all players, believes Adam.

"We're here to share, to move the industry forward," he concluded. "We're still so small we do need each other and will need each other forever." 🌿

River Dog Farm hosts Paris's first Garlic Gallop and Music Festival

On July 21, people walking through the Lions' Park in Paris around 8 a.m. heard bagpipes. It was the Brantford Pipes and Drums piping in the town's first Garlic Gallop.

Officially called the Garlic Gallop and Music Festival, it was the creation of local market gardener and garlic aficionado Sam Lynne-Davies. He described it as a means of getting Paris to celebrate health and wellness – and to launch his market enterprise – River Dog Farm.

Approximately 25 runners paid a \$5 registration fee to run three to five kilometers through the nearby Barker's Bush, followed by a yoga session. Several vendors plied local health products and services such as yoga, a swim school, a coffee roaster, home products and rock climbing. Additional musical acts – Cuban musician David Triana and the Trysted Sisters-- serenaded attendees, while the Paris Optimist Club and a popular, cook-from-scratch eatery served lunch to hungry onlookers.

This event also raised around \$600 for the Brant Community Health Care System Foundation (BCHSF) through donations and a silent auction.

River Dog Farm, the official host, is a two-acre garden plot located on an existing 120-acre farm on Governor's Road West near Falkland – West Roland Farm. Lynne-Davies' aunt, Tricia Nunan, currently runs the farm, living in the original farmhouse with her mother, Jo.

Lynne-Davies' main product to date is garlic – which is why the festival got "Garlic" in its name.

"It was not just the Sam Show but a community event," explained Lynne-Davies, while sitting with "river dogs" Birdie and Archie outside his aunt's farmhouse. "It was a publicity stunt to engage with the



Sam Lynne-Davies with "River Dogs" Birdie and Archie.

community on a grander scale to explore exercise, health and to raise money for the emergency ward of the BCHSF. I chose to do a run as a fundraiser as it is exercise in practice."

Lynne-Davis, 33, recently surrendered a career in technology sales for a Greater Toronto Area firm in order to grow vegetables

and herbs – and to explore the local food–health link with the Paris community.

Shaping his outlook is West Roland Farm itself –his parents live across the road from it. His grandparents, John and Jo Nunan, raised sheep and beef and added a two-acre apple orchard in 2004.

"I grew up on this farm," Lynne-Davies said.

Lynne-Davies even worked briefly for another Paris–area beef farmer in his youth.

"It (the farm) is in a pristine condition," he said, pointing at the surrounding rolling pastures and fields, which his aunt transitioned to certified organic after John's death in 2014. Nunan maintained her father's orchard and sheep, and direct-sells lambs from her 70 ewes (mainly Cheviot, Southdown and North Country breeds). Additional cropland rents out to an organic grain grower. Nunan also acquired land along the Nith River to encourage native species habitat.

"I also grew up with a passive interest in farming, not understanding how to make money on a large commercial operation, but on a more small-scale organic operation with the possibility of feeding the family and running a small business."

This interest niggled at him even after leaving Brant for his career and marrying his wife, Rachelle.



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So Lynne-Davies tilled his first garden in 2020 “during the height of the pandemic lockdown.” He discovered that garlic fared the best amongst that first crop’s weeds. Most of that garlic went back into the garden.

Intent upon returning to the country, the couple moved to Paris, settling in a neighbourhood where many of their closest friends live. He became fascinated with agriculture’s link with community and health.

“I began to wonder, how can I design my daily activities to service these people?”

By 2023, Lynne-Davies concluded that he couldn’t focus on both market gardening and tech sales. Moreover, Rachelle earned a good income working as a chemical engineer in the renewable energy field. They also had a child by this time.

“It didn’t make sense,” said Lynne-Davies.

Therefore, Lynne-Davies re-planted last year’s garlic yield of 80 pounds, increasing its production by 30 percent. He also grew tomatoes, peppers, beets and other heritage vegetables, and herbs such as basil and dill; he maintains a small flock of egg-laying hens. He uses drip irrigation taking water from a “hydrant” 1,000 feet away. Lynne-Davies saves blight-resistant tomato seeds and is investigating the possibility of adding flowers, notably dahlias.

River Dog Farm dropped a trial sideline of raising meat birds due to unsatisfactory profit margins. The chickens were Rustic

Rangers, a heritage breed that graze well on the land without requiring “chicken tractors” (portable chicken cages that require frequent moving), but they took 12 weeks to mature instead of the usual eight weeks. “People didn’t want to pay the premium.”

Between these labours, he set a post-harvest date for the Garlic Gallop, created tee-shirts and negotiated festival details with Brant County, community groups and businesses and issued publicity.

Lynne-Davies got some assistance from a friend, but he did most of the work. “There were definitely points where I wished that I could off load’, he said. “Then I was up at 4 am on July 21 to pick garlic and basil to sell.”

He considers this year’s Gallop a success: “I didn’t get sued!” Lynne-Davies laughed. He admitted that he “learned lessons about insurance requirements” as well as organizing vendors. “But I have a sense of humour.”

While River Dog farm is a new enterprise, West Roland Farm has always been in some branch of Lynne-Davies’ family since 1847, when an ancestral cousin, John Conworth, purchased it. Named after the West Roland sheep that a predecessor imported from England, the farm passed on maternally, first to the Tews, before being inherited by Lynne-Davies’ great-grandmother, who had married into the Nunan clan.

These ancestors lay in the farm’s cemetery-- the Conworth Cemetery -- located near the River Dog gardens.

The Garlic Gallop wasn’t the family’s first community action. The farm is on the original Governors’ Road – a previous Indian trail and Ontario’s first constructed road. Upper Canada’s first Lieutenant-Governor, Lord Simcoe ordered its construction in the 1790s to create a military road to connect the St. Lawrence River, York (now Toronto) to the Thames River at London. But the farm’s stretch got cut off and re-named decades ago, when the road was re-routed through Falkland. Jo Nunan lobbied to restore the Governor’s Road designation.

Also, Lynne-Davies’ grandfather, John, participated in the Brant Federation of Agriculture at a time when tracts of Brant County farmland got sold for development and gravel pits.

Lynne-Davies believes that he’ll regard this year fondly. “I eat lots of chicken and garlic... I networked with the town --they know me now -- compared with calling or emailing people as I did in my sales job.”

“I found an opportunity to entertain people... in the community while promoting a health and wellness theme,” said Lynne Davies.

He hopes to have a better Garlic Gallop in 2025, with plans to promote the known benefits of garlic along with more vendors to cover costs. 🌿

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52nd Central Ontario Angus Preview: Angus defeat other breeds as Agribition Qualifiers at Paris Fair



This bull is going to the Regina Agridome. Clarke Family Farms & Breezyknoll Livestock had the Agribition Beef Supreme Qualifier, Clarke's Stunner, at this year's Paris Fair. With Stunner are (left to right): judges Adam Smith and Dwayne Martin, Bridon /coulter (showman), Paris beef committee chair, Amy Reinhart and Hugh Ross (herdsman, Clarke Family Farms)



Morgan Macintyre of Russell won the Female Agribition Beef Supreme Qualifier at the Paris Fair Beef show with Sara's Dream and her calf at side. Left to right: Jackson Corner (showman), Macintyre, and Kara Sickle, Paris Fair Ambassador.

After witnessing declining entries at a fair-ground located in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), the Central Ontario Angus Club moved its 52nd Central Ontario Preview Show to the Paris Fair's annual beef show, held on August 31.

The move resulted in greater overall cattle registrations at the Paris Fair – with three Black Angus defeating five-plus other breeds to become the Supreme Male and Females.

Clarke Family Farms & Breezyknoll Livestock of Blenheim had the winning Angus bull, with Clarke's Stunner 16L.

Morgan Macintyre of Russell displayed the winning Angus female, EF Sara's Dream 942, with calf Xcel Sara's Dream 103M at side.

Breed winners from all six categories at the Paris Fair Beef Show become Supreme Super Qualifiers at the 2024 Royal Agricultural Winter Fair.

Both Clarke and Macintyre went on to become the Agribition Beef Supreme Qualifiers for exhibition in Regina later this year. They also went home with \$1,000 cheques from Master Feeds.

The Central Ontario Angus Club covers nine different areas from Halton and Peel to the east and Brant-Haldimand and most of Niagara to the south and west. It ran these "preview" or qualifier shows to the Royal Agricultural Fair at the Brampton Fair for many years only to experience declining en-

rollments as GTA area traffic became more congested.

Paris Beef Committee chairperson Amy Reinhart said that the club moved the Preview to the Paris Fair with the hope that the show's more accessible location would attract exhibitors.

The Paris Agricultural Society beef committee incorporated the Preview as part of its existing all-breeds show as a "double ringer", with two rotating rings of breeds and a total of six breeds, including its "Other Breeds" class, Reinhart added.

Reinhart estimated that the move from Brampton to Paris resulted in 15 more head in this year's registrations. Approximately 243 head of all beef breeds were exhibited on August 31, including those shown by 4-H, she said.

Dwayne Martin of Stettler, Alberta and Adam Smith of Mt. Hope judged the double ringers.

Winners of the other classes were as follows: Simmental Male: Todd Campbell, Female: Walkerbrae Farms & Earley Livestock; Speckle Park Male and Female: Watson Land & Livestock Inc; Hereford Male: Concordia Herefords, Female: Hill's Herefords; Shorthorn Male: Martin and Liz Mason, Female: Blenview Farms; Any Other Breed/Charolais Male: Southview Farms. 🌱

—“—
The move resulted in greater overall cattle registrations at the Paris Fair
—”

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Paris Agricultural Society debuts the “Ag-Mazing Race” at the Paris Fair

Visitors attending this year’s Paris Fair during the Labour Day weekend participated in the first known “Ag-Mazing Race” challenge presented by an agricultural society.

Created by the Ag Awareness Committee of the Paris Agricultural Society (PAS), the Ag-Mazing Race is the rural version of the popular reality show, the Amazing Race Canada. In the TV series, teams of competitors race to designated “pit stops” where they execute challenges and discern clues to the location of the next stop in order to reach the finish line.

The inaugural Ag-Mazing Race required contestants to complete 10 challenges or questions all of which highlighted aspects of Paris Fair culture. The Ag Awareness Committee placed the questions and the clues to the next pit stop in labeled mail boxes at sites throughout the fairgrounds.

The race began inside the Ag Awareness Building, where contestants’ first task was to calculate the total number of animals within that building before venturing to the next location.

Other questions included the name of the fair’s first ambassador, details about two midway rides, the fair’s age, the total number of breeds at the cattle show, the first-place winner of the hanging Christmas ornament in the crafts exhibit, where to eat homemade sit-down meals and the site to enjoy musicians and demolition derbies.

Unlike the Amazing Race, no one got eliminated, said Ag Awareness committee member Darleen Ilett of St. George. “You don’t need to fill out all 10 questions before



PAS Junior Director Holden Vanderhoek (centre) with Ag-Mazing Race daily winners who are identified as Jack and Nolan.

you put them in the entry box. Some entry forms only had seven completed answers. We hadn’t had any 100 per cent entries yet.”

“We had four entries on Friday, seven on Saturday and 14 on Sunday,” said Ilett.

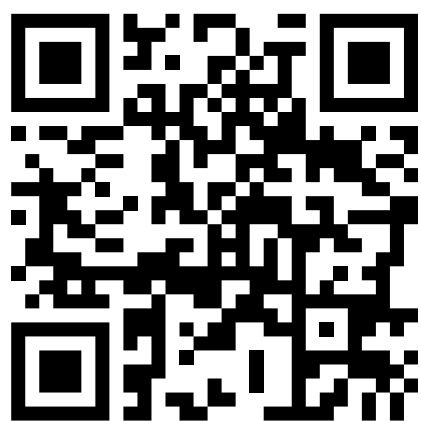
Individuals or groups of competitors took the challenge at their own pace. Moreover, the contest had fewer losers than its original TV counterpart, with three daily winners as well as a grand prize winner announced at the end of the final day.

Prizes consisted of donated agricultural products and crafts, which were presented

to the winners at the committee’s daily 4 p.m. milking demonstration. The grand prize booty bag contained additional rewards, including a VIP pass to the midway and a 2025 Paris Fair Family Pass.

PAS organizers credit the race’s creation to Ilett and her two children, Holden and Kylie Vanderhoek, both of whom are PAS Junior Directors. Ilett said that the entire Ag Awareness Committee brainstormed the questions and the clues. “It was pretty challenging to come up with some of them,” she added. 🌱

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AgRobotics Demo Day gives look at future of farming



VitiRover

The latest adaptations to help farmers were on display at the AgRobotics Demo Day at the Ontario Crops Research Station, Simcoe, in July.

Kristin Obeid, group co-chair, said she was approached by Chatham-Kent farmer Chuck Baresich, saying he had two robots he wanted to experiment with.

"I jumped in with two feet since everybody should have a chance to participate," she said.

Baresich, who has since started Haggerty Robotics, pointed to the labour shortages in the agriculture sector and the growing number of herbicide-resistant weeds as problems facing the industry.

"I didn't want to wake up in 20 years and have a problem," he said.

Many of the robots are currently built in Europe and the United States, but Baresich questioned why they couldn't be built in Ontario.

"There are times it makes sense to take existing technologies and adapt them," he said. "There are also times we can take a brainchild from Ontario and make a new product."

After Baresich approached the ministry in 2021, the group was formed and began to look into the possibility of using robots

and artificial intelligence (A.I.) to solve many problems growers are facing. At the end of the first year, the group was working with five different robots. That number has now grown to 20 different robot models working in the province, some on farms and others in research trials, with a goal of reaching 30 by the end of the year. The group's membership has expanded to over 180 people from all over the world.

The group now includes representation from: OMAFRA, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Municipal Governments, Haggerty AgRobotics, University of Guelph, McMaster University, University of Waterloo, Conestoga College, Ontario Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association (OFVGA), Fresh Vegetable Growers of Ontario (FVGO), Holland Marsh Growers Association (HMGA), Ontario Processing Vegetable Growers (OPVG), Innovative Farmers Association of Ontario (IFAO), Nortera, Korechi Innovations (Oshawa, Ontario), Nexus Robotics (Montreal Quebec), FarmDroid (Denmark), Naio Technologies (France) and Raven Industries (Canada and U.S) and many more.

The group's purpose is not to sell robots, but to provide input on how to improve the machines to work better in Ontario production

systems. The group has been really successful at building cross functional teams and finding the right partners to solve important problems growers are facing.

The AgRobotics Demo Day attracted a lot of attention, with more than 170 people registered.

Here are the products displayed.

AgXeed AgBot 2-055W3

This Netherlands-built tractor is an autonomous diesel that will spray, mow and flail. At the Simcoe day it was set up to work in an orchard, but has many other uses.

The Agbot will mow and spray at the same time. Not only will it spray, but it will spray intelligently. It can read chlorophyll levels to aid with spot spraying, judging where spray is needed and where it isn't.

"We are using this technology to be more efficient with our spraying," said Sean Bartlett of Provide Agro.

Intelligent spraying also comes into play with spraying apple trees. The ag bot can spray different volumes for individual trees, dependent on the development stage of the apples.

The tractor has a camera on it so the operator can remotely see what it is doing. For instance, if there was a bin left in the row, the operator could access the camera to see what stopped the machine. This works in conjunction with Lidar that will scan what's in front of the unit.

If there are problems, the company can access the unit over GPS for diagnostics.

A 100 horsepower tractor plus a sprayer unit is \$375,000 (CDN). Bartlett said the uses are much broader, and it can be used for many things a tractor can.

"The idea is to utilize it for as many things as you can for that payback," he said.

Crop Tracker App

This neat smart phone app will use Lidar on an iPhone Pro to measure apple size and count. It will give an average size and count per tree.

The app is free to members of the Ontario Apple Growers or Ontario Tender Fruit Association.

Launched in February by a Kingston company, the app is constantly being improved and is already on version 9.



Harvest Corp Technologies asparagus harvester



The Burro





Naio Technologies Oz

Augean Robotics Burro

The Burro reflects well on its namesake, which was a pack animal. This robot is basically a flat platform used for harvest assistance; with the addition it can mow. Security cameras can also be put on it and a bird banger added.

The Burro is available in three sizes, with the cost varying from \$21,000 CDN for the smallest and \$33,000 CDN for the largest.

The main function is fruit pickers can have the unit trail them as they harvest to hold the fruit. When the bins or baskets are full, the operator presses a button and the unit travels to the staging location for unloading.

This unit uses GPS for navigation and is battery powered. The battery life is eight to 10 hours, and the unit can be programmed to go to the charging unit at night.

VitiRover

The VitiRover is a robotic lawnmower that can cut 10 acres over a two-week period. It will recognize areas with longer grass that grows faster and will cut those areas more often.

This \$12,000 robot is solar powered. The battery lasts eight hours and then the unit returns to the docking station to charge.

Harvest Corp Technologies asparagus harvester

This unit, built in Tillsonburg, will harvest asparagus by height or girth. It uses cameras to judge the spears, making instant decisions if an individual spear will be harvested, cut and dropped if it's deformed or left to grow.

A powerful vision system and AI learning are at the centre of deciding what spears are

cut. An oscillating cutter is used to cut, then a gripper puts the spears on a conveyor to a bin.

Company president Steve Spanjers estimated the robot to be 95 per cent accurate of what it picked and left. He suggested one person could go behind the machine to get what the machine missed.

Currently, the harvester is powered by a Yamaha generator. A battery and solar system are being examined for the future.

Cost is about \$400,000 for a four-row machine. It's estimated the payback on the machine will be 3.5 years based on a production cost of 26 cents per pound, and this may be able to be lowered through ACI grants.

Vivid Machines Vivid X Vision System

This is ultimate crop load management system for thinning, farm management, and yield. The Vivid X Vision System mounts onto any farm equipment and provides real time data and predictions for every plant. It will improve orchard management with up-to-date maps detailing precise tree counts, varieties, and rootstocks, while monitoring blossoms, fruit development, and yield at the block and section level.

Picketa Systems

This company's tissue sample analyzer takes a job that required mailing in samples and turns it into instant plant tissue data in the field. This information is vital in assessing the plant health and if more nutrients are needed to be applied.



AgXeed AgBot 2-055W3

The analysis is performed using the LENS system and provides immediate results. The software will track the results and provide trends that can be assessed.

Naio Technologies Oz

Targeted at market gardeners, this French-made electric tractor is versatile and can perform a variety of functions, including hoeing, weeding, seeding, spraying and transporting plants or end product for a base area.

It costs \$60,000, and is completely automatic.

Korchi Innovations

This Ontario company is in the process of developing this tractor with the working group. Its stage of development is early enough that the company does not want photos released of it.

Working with the University of Guelph, it can identify weeds in the field. For example, if a grower identified a problem with lima beans that were contaminating a portion of the field, the tractor can identify the weed density with cameras and a decision can be made about how much herbicide is applied in different sections of the field. If the weed problem becomes too severe, a decision can be made to avoid harvesting an area with too much weed contamination.

Obeid explained where humans typically only scout 10 per cent of the acreage previously for weeds, this technology makes it possible to scout 100 per cent of the fields.

"That's what this is about is doing the farming process better," Haggerty said. 🌱

Local mushroom industry pioneers bringing farming to people's home

An Interview with Andrew Langevin who is working to make the world more sustainable one mushroom kit at a time



When food scarcity became a first-time reality for many Canadians during the beginning of the pandemic, Andrew Langevin and Nicole Dipietro began growing mushrooms in their basement. Fascinated with the tens of thousands of varieties of mushrooms, and enamored with the improvements like immune and gut health when consuming certain kinds of mushrooms, they began to realize a passion not just for growing mushrooms but for helping others becoming inspired by the food they eat. From these 'spores' of inspiration grew the company Nature Lion which now employs two full-time staff in Brantford selling both their gourmet mushroom home grow kits, their in-demand mushroom coffees, mushroom tinctures, liquid cultures, grain spawn, and more.

Their grow kits especially came out of a passion for sustainable farming: "The beauty of producing your own food at home is that you get to control your narrative which makes the world a much more sustainable place as a whole. People who grow their own crops see more health benefits from using fresher ingredients. The waste from their kitchens goes right back into the soil. It's really a lovely circle of life to be producing your own sustenance." The kits promise an experience of "the freshest mushrooms

you've ever had" after just two weeks of care.

Their mushroom coffee was birthed out of Nicole's desire to develop better tasting mushroom coffees than what was currently on the market. As family and friends sampled Nicole's organic "coffee" packed with cashew or coconut milk powder, maple sugar and mushroom extract, they demanded she begin to produce the product for sale. "The drink possesses all the qualities that people love from coffee" explains Langevin, "with the additional benefits that the mushrooms provide. We have three different blends, with unique effects and flavours."

Langevin believes that mushrooms are "an ideal crop" based on their qualities as decomposers, and the ease of access to materials needed to grow the fungi. He adds that they "can be grown quickly, cheaply and produce a lot of food. Producing enough to feed a family can be done without investing a ton of time and money", adding, of course, that they are "highly nutritious".

NatureLion doesn't just serve home-growers and consumers, but provides consultant services to commercial growers, as well as offer the inputs that farmers need to get started without having to exhaust their time

and resources to start up their own mushroom laboratory. They provide farmers with spawn that can be used to propagate a bulk material "to grow a larger bounty of edible mushrooms."

Although most of their products are "mushroom-centric", they are looking to expand into more natural food categories because they care about people, and therefore about their health. "With the natural foods, and products that we carry you can help to better the systems within your body and in turn this will improve your quality of life. Even if you aren't buying from us, our goal is to educate and teach people about the benefits of natural foods."

Business is booming; as well as online (<https://naturelion.ca>), in markets and in stores, you will find Nature Lion at the Stratford Garlic Festival on October 7th and 8th and also at the Planted Expo in May of 2025.

Langevin, as CEO and Co-founder, believes that mushrooms "deserve more attention and research and we are doing our part to spread the message like the mushrooms spread their spores." 🍄



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The County of Brant has updated its land-use policies to allow for on-farm diversified uses including on-farm processing, retail, and other home occupations that support rural areas. By diversifying land use, farms can branch out and add to their income potential, creating jobs and promoting valuable services.



ENHANCE BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY

The County of Brant Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with the County of Brant and County of Brant Public Library has produced a guide to internet connectivity. The Brant Connectivity Guide provides information to residents and businesses on internet connection options and internet service providers. The guide can be found at brant.ca/connection.



AGRI-TOURISM

Through Agri-Tourism, the County of Brant and our agriculture partners look to close the rural/urban divide by providing on-farm agriculture awareness, while allowing farmers to diversify their revenue.



RURAL WATER QUALITY PROGRAM

Financial assistance is available to qualified landowners to share in the cost of selected projects that improve and protect water quality. Cost-share rates are available from 50% - 100% for a variety of projects. This program is operated by the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) and funded by the County of Brant.



Contact the County of Brant Economic Development team today for more information.



Brant Economic Development & Tourism

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Rachel Duncan enjoys turning woolly sheep into “naked” animals

Rachel Duncan of Paris started her fulfilling, 12-year career as a sheep shearer by refusing to shear sheep.

It happened 12 years ago at the century farm of her grandparents, Don and Wilma Duncan of Drumbo. The grandparents had recently downsized their flock of Clun Forest sheep to 30 animals. This smaller herd size resulted in difficulty finding a sheep shearer, as most professionals prefer shaving larger flocks of 100-200 sheep, rather than travel to smaller flocks per day to earn the same money.

Presently, the grandparents found a retired sheep shearer who was willing to teach the craft to Rachel, who was then in her early 20s, and her father.

But Clun Forest is a hardy, adaptable British breed which produces males that may weigh in at 91 kg and females at 68 kg. Duncan, nervous about handling such large beasts, refused.

“When she heard that, my grandmother said, ‘You’re doing it.’” said Duncan. “Grandmother was always a forced to be reckoned with – you don’t refuse my grandmother!”

After shearing her first animal, Duncan realized that she liked doing it. “It’s very satisfying to see a woolly sheep turned into a naked sheep.”

Therefore during the following spring she took a four-day shearing course offered by



Rachel Duncan shears her family’s sheep as well as across much of Southern Ontario.

“
The job gets done within three minutes per animal.
”

the-Canadian Co-operative Wool Growers (CCWG), the farmer-owned cop that was established in 1918 to handle, grade and sell wool clip. It has wool depots across Canada, trains, licenses and lists professional sheep shearers.

The course, which was offered in Holstein, teaches the pattern used to shear sheep, starting with the chest bone, belly, the “crutch” (anal and back leg area), the tail and then up toward their neck.

After course completion, Duncan placed an ad on Kijiji and became one of the approximately 30 professional sheep shearers in Ontario.

Duncan currently travels as far as Belleville to the east, Windsor and as far north as Gravenhurst to practise her craft. She prefers to focus on smaller flocks and pets, shearing up to 50 sheep per day with the ability to visit a maximum of eight farms.

This Brant resident also shears llamas and “the odd alpaca or two”, mainly at zoos. She added that alpaca fur lacks the elasticity of sheep wool and is usually combined with other fibers. Duncan also does public sheep shearing demonstrations at events such as the Fergus Scottish Highland Games, Milton’s Chudleigh’s Farm and regional fairs, including the Drumbo Fair.

The job uses power clippers similar to, but larger than barber clippers. She uses simple, battery-powered shears while demonstrating sheep shearing; at farms, Duncan uses a machine with an overhead shaft and a cord that connects to the hand shear. These clippers use 13 pairs of “scissors” which cut simultaneously.

“It’s similar to a barber’s buzzer going through human hair. It enables the job to be done faster, although you cannot go too fast!”

The job gets done within three minutes per animal. The fleece rolls off in one piece with an average of five pounds of wool and lanolin. This weight drops by half once the lanolin and dirt are washed off, said Duncan.

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Sometimes cuts happen during the work. Duncan stated that lanolin is a natural antiseptic and cuts tend to be skin deep, although she witnessed a deeper cut caused by another shearer that self-healed.

When necessary, Duncan trims excess growth on hooves; the amount of trim depends upon the breed and what type of surface the sheep commonly walk upon.

Sheep get stressed about being pulled from the flock and dragged over to a stranger bearing shears, said Duncan. "They are not friendly then, even if the owner says they are. But they run off to rejoin the flock upon completion."

Shearing generally happens between March to July, especially before lambing; however, it can be done throughout the year provided that they have a dry shelter, said Duncan. "They huddle together. Sheep are really tough – as long as it's a dry shelter they can be shorn at any time."

Duncan charges mileage, a \$100 minimum fee, and aims to earn \$50 an hour. She cannot make a year-round living as winter cuts seldom happen. But she chooses her own hours and farms to travel to. She also keeps her own flock of mixed breeds at her grandparents' farm, which delight her two children: Elizabeth, 8 and Jason, 6, and husband Tory.

She added that while lamb prices are currently good, wool prices are not; the latter ranges from five cents per pound for difficult to wash wool, with a one dollar per pound premium for clean wool. "Shorn wool goes on the manure pile if it's too dirty to wash," she said.

The work pleases Duncan. Her public demonstrations educate people about providing well-being to sheep: "Some people don't understand that sheep need to be shorn and I must explain the need to them. Sheep are clean, but when they lie down at night their wool picks up dirt."

Duncan periodically assists in teaching sheep shearing and hoof trimming courses offered by the CCWG, with the most recent course having been at the Glenn Kelley sheep farm north of Paris.

"It's satisfying and nice to help the animals. I meet a lot of different people and I see different farms." 🌿



Rachel Duncan of Paris often demonstrates her trade at the Drumbo Fair.



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Christmas trees replace the ancestral orchards at Our Old Farm near St. George



Amy Bradley with a future Christmas tree at Our Old Farm.

A former apple farm on the McLean School Road north of St. George is producing tree crops again with the next generation of owner.

Amy Bradley, the youngest of five children of Sheila and the late Cliff Jones Sr., and her husband, Mike, planted approximately 2000 Christmas-compatible conifers on the 20 acres of rolling, sandy loam soil on Our Old Farm – the name given to her childhood home.

The Bradleys purchased the farmstead in 2014 when the Jones moved into St. George. Their parents farmed the land for 50 years, specializing in apples, as part of the renowned St. George "Apple Belt."

"At one point, our commercial apple production rivaled those of the other farms," said Bradley.

But in the 1990s, her father cut down the orchard, leaving only a few trees near the family's 1871 farm house and restored bank barn.

The Bradleys bought the farm because they wanted their son, Jack, who is now 14, to live rural life. Bradley's own childhood memories were positive. She recounted stories of tending the farm animals, tobogganing down the hill between their house and one of two, spring-fed ponds, and skating on it during the winter – once with 30 children.

"I grew up here. It was a family farm," said Bradley, adding "It's a great place for kids to grow up."

The evergreens' density is approximately 500 trees per acre, consisting of balsam, Fraser, pine and spruce. The plants range from knee-high to human height: "They're not viable yet!"

With help from Mike, Bradley irrigated the saplings with pond water during the plants' first two years in the fields. She trims them

into shape each summer as they mature.

Branches from the "less attractive trees" are harvested for Bradley's wreath operation which she runs from a workshop in the barn. She makes approximately 200 wreathes per year, using kiwi and grape switches from her garden and ponds as frames. Sales are on-farm.

They sell well, said Bradley. "I enjoy doing wreathes; I may stick with them if the trees are not viable."

Informing her farm choices is Bradley's previous work as a heritage and agricultural specialist at Doon Heritage Crossroads in Kitchener, a living museum that depicts rural life in the former village of Doon set in 1914. While she resigned upon Jack's birth, she draws upon her specialist experience as much as her parents' teachings.

Bradley maintains large gardens consisting of heritage vegetables and herbs which she said feeds her family for much of the year. "Just today (March 7) I dug up parsnips," she said.

Another garden contains permanent berries, such as black, red and white currents gooseberries, kiwi fruit, josta berry and raspberries. In honour of her father, Bradley planted six apple trees, including Jonathan, Duchess, Transparent, Novamac and Spy.

Produce is canned, pickled or preserved for their own use, selling the surplus at a roadside stand or donating to a food bank in Brantford.

The family tends 10 heritage breeds of chickens, as well as Pilgrim Geese (a grey breed of medium weight) and runner ducks. They previously exhibited them at the Paris Fair.

Bradley is currently revamping the outdoor poultry pen's fencing with willow switches, weaving



Heritage poultry and eggs are another activity with Bradley.

them into the barrier in the style that farm families often used a century ago.

They rent a 10-acre pasture to a neighbouring dairy farmer.

Bradley enjoys the local wildlife, notably the birds, including the Eastern blue birds, which are attracted to the ponds.

Locally, Our Old Farm is known for its social media postings, which Bradley posts what's happening on

the farm: canning, pickling, baking, crafting and gardening advice.

"It's my hobby," said Bradley. "Part of me misses being at the museum and sharing information with people. I try to answer questions about gardening."

Bradley is a past president of the St. George Horticultural Society and was involved with the Brant 4-H Clover Buds and the Poultry Club.🌿

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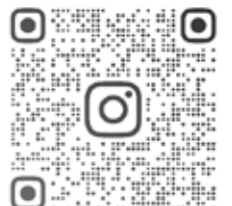
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The Club began in 2011 when John & Kathy Borda met with over fifty people at the Burford

Fairgrounds because tractor enthusiasts and retired farmers needed a good reason to get together and discuss tractor issues. Today, there are upwards of 125 members, some of whom do not even own a tractor themselves, but appreciate the beast of field and forest. The Club has an official Board Of Directors and meets the third Tuesday of each month, hosting guest speakers educating mostly on farming issues, and attending different site tours. They have a fifty fifty draw at each

meeting, which keeps membership costs a reasonable \$30 per annum.

Additionally, the Club offers a wide variety of events including culinary gatherings in the winter months, a plow day in the spring, a two hour tractor parade complete with a road and crop tour in the summer, and participation in the Christmas parade in December.

Check them out on Facebook, or putt putting along at the next parade! 🍃



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Flack brings experience to realigned ministry

Minister Rob Flack brings a diversity of experience in agriculture to the newly realigned Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness.

The Elgin-Middlesex-London MPP was appointed and the ministry realigned as part of a cabinet shuffle on June 6. The new ministry oversees food safety, food security and food inspection. The change also made rural affairs a separate portfolio and added agri-business to the ministry.

The minister explained the ministry changes add an economic lens to the ministry, recognizing the importance of agri-business. His mandate letter from Premier Doug Ford instructed him to create an environment to attract investment in agri-business through both domestic and foreign investors.

"Ontario is an agri-food powerhouse and will continue to grow," Flack said.

He quoted some statistics to back this assertion:

- Farm gate to plate, Ontario's agri-food industry has a gross domestic product of \$51 billion, which is up \$3 billion from 2018 when the Conservatives were elected.

- 871,000 people are employed in the agri-food and beverage sector, which is up 30,000 since 2018 and is more than the automotive sector.

- One of nine jobs in Ontario are in the agri-food sector

- Agriculture exports are worth \$26.2 billion annually, up 65 per cent since 2018.

- 80 per cent of agri-food exports go to the USA

- Ontario is number one in Canada in terms of output per acre.

Flack said only California is larger in terms of output per acre in North America, although Illinois and Iowa have larger farm GDP.

The ministry's budget for 2024-25 is \$855 million, which is up down from the 2023-2024 but up from the first two years of the government's mandate. Still, the ministry's expenditures are only a small percentage of the total expenditures of \$214 billion. Flack explained the ministry budget contains funding for a lot of joint programs with the federal government such as AgriStability. He proudly said the budget for Foodland Ontario and associated branding has gone up, while the former government cut it.

One of the programs Flack believes important to the future of agriculture is AgScape, a program to provide curriculum-based factual food literacy information to educators and students.

Flack did not grow up on a farm, as his parents were teachers. However, his grandparents lived on a farm as did his cousins.

"I spent every waking moment I could on that farm," he recounted.

He also worked on farms as a hired hand on dairy and beef operations while a teenager.

After attending the University of Guelph, he started working for Master Feeds. After going through a variety of different positions, and

six different owners, he became CEO. His experience included chicken processing, animal feed, vitamins, grain handling, crop production and more.

Saying he can "walk the talk", Flack said he has knowledge of many sectors of the agriculture industry. "It's my career in agri-business that gave me those nuances."

Today, he owns a 200-acre farm in the Ottawa Valley where he grew up. It is a working farm with a cow-calf operation and white pine harvesting. Flack also served in multiple leadership roles with the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair Board and Canadian Hereford Association.

With an increasing reliance on technology, one shortfall that many in the agriculture sector are noticing is poor or lack of cell service on their farms. Flack acknowledged this is an issue in rural Ontario, and even in his riding.

"It's better than it was, but we have more work to do," he said.

He pointed to the government's investment in rural broadband, and said he talked to Infrastructure Minister Kinga Surma about cellular coverage at the recent Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference.

One of the concerns of many associated with agriculture that Flack shares is bringing a younger generation into farming. He pointed to a \$1.6 million investment in the AgScape. He also mentioned programs to bring fresh produce into schools.

"We've got to encourage kids to go into agricultural programs," he said. "We've got to get them interested while they're still in high school."

He said there are four jobs for every graduate of agriculture programs with the University of Guelph or Ridgetown Agricultural College. Citing himself as an example, he said there are great opportunities, and lent the advice to stick with a company.

"There's no better industry to work in than agri-food," he said.



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As well as selling items from their own farm, Kristi's Market Kitchen sells produce, cheese and products that are exclusively locally sourced



Since it first opened its doors in 2018, Kristi's Market Kitchen has been proudly serving "local food to local families". This begins by selling produce from their own family farm, Droogendyk's Market Garden, like sweet potatoes, kale, leek, lettuce, rhubarb and herbs. They also have a bakery where all fruits within their treats are also locally sourced. Then, they sell produce and products from local farmers, like Devries Fruit Farms in Fenwick and Northfield Blueberries in Scotland. Hewitt's, Mountain Oak, Bright Cheese & Gunns Hill provide the Dairy products for sale in the store, and other veggies are brought in from White's Potato Farm, Streef Produce, and Welsh Bros. Even the bread is sourced in Brant County (The Bun Shoppe, Brantford). Additionally, they also have local vendors who provide items like natural deodorant, lip chap, and cards to be sold in the store.

Kristi's Market Kitchen employs two full time and four part time staff who manage the store as well as bake baked goods made from scratch (you won't find any cake mixes at Kristi's). A special feature of their bakery is their Oliebollen and Apple Fritters (or Applefloppen in Dutch). As a Christmas/New Years tradition,

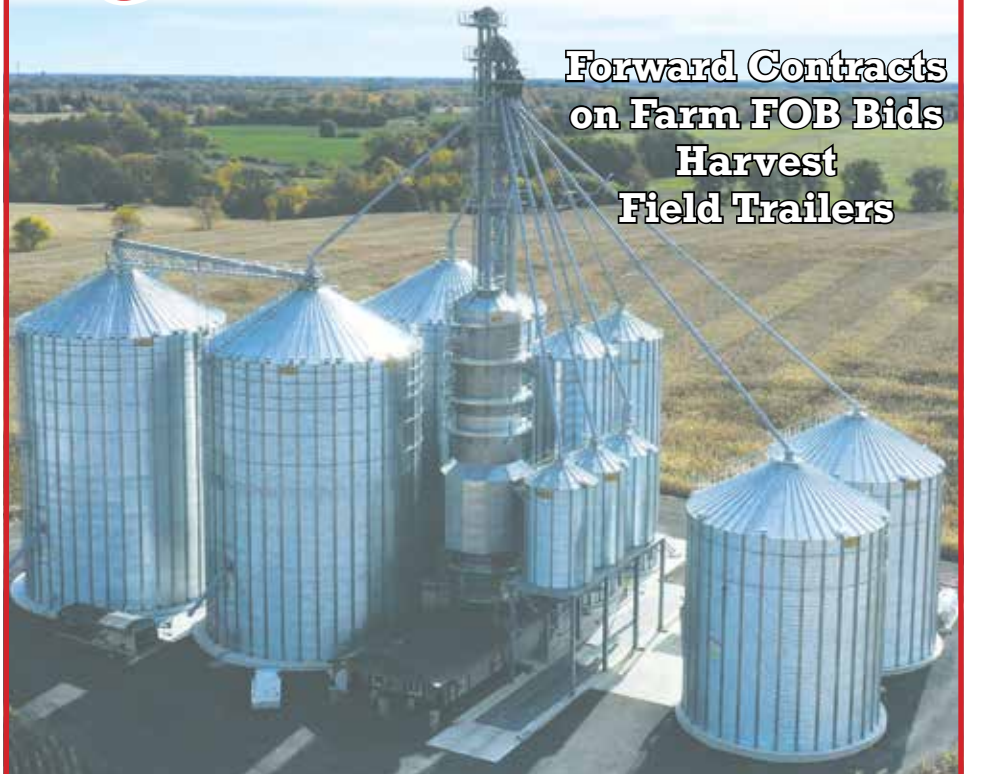
they are sold at Kristi's from mid November through to the end of December, but are also available in Dutch stores across Southern Ontario.

Running a farm and business can be taxing, especially while raising a family and having a stall at a Cambridge and Burlington market, but being able to provide jobs for, and stimulate, the local economy is worth the time and care of running the small businesses. Kristi loves seeing the farming equipment come by and pull off to refuel, stating that their customers "love that we bring in local produce and support our local businesses. They support us because we support local." 🌿



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Questions?

If you have questions about key priorities or advocacy, we encourage you to reach out to our elected leadership. OFA is governed by an 18-member elected Board of Directors consisting of Ontario farmers representing 15 geographical zones from across the province.

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Syngenta unveils largest NK Seeds corn portfolio launch in over a decade

Syngenta, a global leader in agriculture innovation, is proud to announce its biggest NK Seeds corn portfolio in over 10 years with eight new hybrids added to the line-up for the 2025 growing season.

Syngenta Group prides itself on being an innovation powerhouse, with 6,500 employees working in research and development (R&D) globally and \$1.4 billion invested in R&D each year.

The extensive product launch underscores the company's determination to help growers increase their yield with robust, high-performing seeds, which have been developed with unique traits and genetics to suit diverse farming conditions.

"Our steadfast commitment to investing in research and development is instrumental in grower success," said Dan Wright, Head of Syngenta Seeds Canada. "This range of corn seed options is a testament to our scientific diligence in tailoring agricultural solutions to the unique regional needs of Canadian growers."

To mark the achievement, and celebrate 140 years of continuous seed sales, Syngenta hosted 130 growers and dealers at a Field Day launch event at the Arva Research and Development Innovation Centre on August 21, 2024. Attendees got an exclusive first look at the new portfolio and heard from the corn development, trait and breeding team

– gaining insights into the decades of R&D behind this accomplishment.

A commitment to innovation at NK Seeds goes back to 1884, when the then Northrup-King Seed Company began selling seed corn. It was the first private seed company in North America with a formal R&D program, and the first to commercialize a biotech trait in corn.

"Today, we're excited to continue that 140-year-old legacy of innovation," said Mark Kerry, Head of Sales for Syngenta Seeds in Canada. "We're bringing more reliable and high-performing corn genetics to our customers faster than ever – with profit-protecting traits such as insect and drought resistance and improved genetics for better standability and disease tolerance."

"With this new corn portfolio launch, NK Seeds helps provide more choice and innovative technology to farmers," said Matt Rundle, Corn Product Placement Specialist for Syngenta Seeds. "Our new corn portfolio, backed by our rich legacy and continuous research, is just the beginning of what farmers will see from Syngenta Seeds in the coming years."

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To learn more visit www.syngenta.ca. Follow us on X at www.x.com/Syngenta, www.x.com/SyngentaCanada, www.x.com/NKSeedsCanada and on LinkedIn at www.linkedin.com/company/syngenta.



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Though still concerned, OFA pleased with progress on proposed tax changes



Fears among the farming industry over changes to the federal government's capital gains tax has been somewhat alleviated by a new announcement.

In a statement issued recently, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture said it was pleased to see farmers become eligible to apply for the Canadian Entrepreneurs Incentive (CEI), which will reduce capital gains taxes paid when certain business owners decide to sell their business.

"While the OFA continues to have serious concerns about the increase to the capital gains inclusion rate, we are pleased that the federal government has responded to our feedback and made changes that will allow Ontario farmers to access the Canadian Entrepreneurs' Incentive," the statement reads.

In the spring budget the federal government announced the capital gain inclusion rate would increase from one half to two thirds on anything over \$250,000. The change sparked fears in agriculture circles, with farmers worried about the increase tax they may have to pay if, for instance, they sold their farm.

By including them in the CEI, farmers will be able to apply to the program and have their capital gains inclusion rate reduced to one third for up to \$2 million in lifetime capital gains.

The changes are in response to consultations the federal government has had with affected parties, like the OFA.

In addition to the CEI, the federation said the "increase of the lifetime capital gains exemption is appreciated at a time when many farm operators are looking at transition plans or exit strategies for their farm businesses."

The federal government is increasing the exemption from \$1 million to \$1.25 million.

Consultations on the capital gains tax and lifetime capital gains exemption continued until Sept. 3. 🌱

Meet our Agriculture Services Specialist

We know that farming is more than a business - it's a way of life. We are committed to serving Canada's farm communities by providing flexible financial solutions that let you get on with the business of farming. We'll take the time necessary to understand your unique needs. Together we can meet today's challenges and anticipate tomorrow's opportunities.



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Say goodbye to windy-day worries with wire racking solutions

A.M.A. Horticulture introduces custom racking solutions to keep containerized plants upright and in formation for nurseries and garden centres

Windy days can be a nightmare for nurseries, garden centres and other growers, with pots blow over in the wind, creating a mess, causing damage to plants, and costing hours of labour to reset products. There is a solution for stabilizing, merchandizing and transporting containerized plants that allows growers and retailers to kiss their windy-day worries goodbye.

A.M.A. Horticulture Inc. is proud to bring custom and turnkey racking solutions for containerized plants to North America through a new partnership with Dutch horticulture company, Van Schaik Rack Solutions. A.M.A. Horticulture Inc. is a dynamic, solutions-focused supplier that has been serving the horticulture industry since 1982. The company has a team of industry experts who understands emerging trends, opportunities and pain points. They work alongside their customers to deliver innovative, custom solutions and cutting-edge products that improve growth and profitability.

Growers and retailers can choose from two customizable wire grid systems that stabilize potted plants and can be transported by forklift, depending on container size. The Original Rack is designed with outward facing sides and works well on gravel or paved surfaces, while the V-Foot Rack offers inward facing supports to prevent damage to landscape fabric and other groundcovers. Garden centres can also work with A.M.A. Horticulture to design customized tabletop display systems.

“When it comes to new products, we’re focused on quality solutions that solve real problems,” says Rick Bradt, who co-manages A.M.A. Horticulture along with wife Connie Bradt. “These racking solutions tick that box more than once. They keep your plants upright, preventing damage and making better use of your staff’s time. On top of that, they can be transported by forklift. Instead of slugging heavy containers across the yard, now you’re moving up to 70 plants at once. That’s a massive savings in time and labour.”

A Tree & Stem Rack is also available for retailers looking to enhance presentation of long-stem plants and trees that can be difficult to merchandize. Available in two sizes, the rack holds trees and taller plants up to 2.5 meters. It has a special binding system that is gentle on stems, and it is adjustable for different stem lengths and distance between plants.

All Van Schaik products use high-quality galvanized metal with a zinc coating that withstands weather and won’t release zinc, preventing damage or leeching.

“As weather patterns change and challenges with windthrow increase, growers and retailers are looking for solutions to prevent product damage and reduce labour costs,” says Connie Bradt, co-managing director of A.M.A. “We’re proud to partner with Van Schaik to offer these racking solutions that can be fully customized to meet our customer’s needs.”

More information is available on the company web site at www.amahort.com

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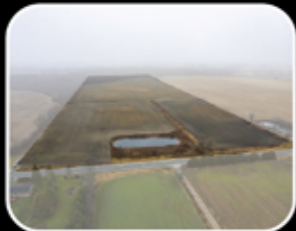
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