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NORFOLK FARMS

Publisher

Stewart Grant • stew@granthaven.com

Editor

Jeff Helsdon • jeff@granthaven.com

Graphic Design

Tyler Carruthers • norfolkfarmsnewspaper@gmail.com

Business Development / Sales

Heather Dunbar • heather@granthaven.com

Billing Administrator

Jen Gaetan • jen@granthaven.com

36 Water St. St. Marys, ON, PO Box 2310 N4X 1A2

norfolkfarmsnewspaper@gmail.com | 519.655.2341 | norfolkfarmsnews.ca

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Did you know?

Canadian farmers grow around 150 varieties of potatoes for commercial production.

Did you know?

That generally speaking, it takes between 90 to 120 days for potatoes to grow from seed to maturity? The time will vary depending on factors like the variety of potato being grown and your area's growing season.

Did you know?

That poutine (traditionally, French fries topped with fresh cheese curds and gravy) was likely invented in rural Quebec in the 1950s? The word 'poutine' is Québécois slang, meaning "mess."

Did you know?

That the Ontario Ginseng Growers Association has over 150 growers, and the largest production of North American ginseng in the world?

Did you know?

That ginseng is Canada's largest field grown horticultural export crop?

Did you know?

That Canada's ginseng industry as we know it today can largely be traced back to the efforts of brothers Clarence and Albert Hellyer? In the 1890s, near Waterford, ON., the pair began to grow North American ginseng with seeds cultivated from wild ginseng plants.

Did you know?

That to grow ginseng, it takes a year of preparation, followed by three to four years before it reaches maturity – meaning it will be four to five years total before a grower will be able to harvest their first crop.

EDITORIAL

Farmers pull through tough times

Farmers and agriculture aren't immune from the uncertainty currently hanging over the country with the possibility of tariffs being implemented by the United States.

As this issue arrives in your mailbox, the next deadline is approaching for the tariff delay. Beyond that, if history is a guide, President Trump will likely go after Canada's supply management sector.

I was inspired by Norfolk Soil and Crop Improvement Association president James Kingsbury's words on tough time when he spoke at the group's annual meeting. He researched the woes facing farmers in agriculture publications, daily newspapers and other media sources and found a common theme. He found the present times we are going through aren't a lot different than past times.

To expand on this, there was always a common challenge due to the weather in one way or another. Inflation, interest rates, tax exemptions, oil prices, world conflicts, wheatboard woes and commodity prices were always stressors facing farmers.

It's easy to say the pressures of today are nothing like those of the past. In some cases, this is true. However, a few decades ago, interest rates were more than 10 per cent. That would have had a huge impact on farm operations.

Through tough times in the past, Kingsbury found a theme in the outcome for farmers and the farm community: they were resilient, innovative and adaptable. In other words, they were survivors.

Driving down the concessions of Norfolk County today, is a drastic change from the 1970s and 80s when tobacco dominated the landscape. With the downturn in tobacco, Norfolk farmers innovated and adapted – they survived.

No matter what lays in the days and weeks ahead, Norfolk farmers will survive.

- Jeff Helsdon, Editor

2024 brought high, potentially record yields for Southwestern Ontario grain farmers

By Jeff Tribe

If you give professional Canadian farmers enough weather and water, good things will happen.

"I would say some farmers are going to have record yields," said Devin Homick, Grain Origination Coach with Central Ontario FS, alluding to 2024 corn bushel per acre averages he's heard of in the 250-260 range. "Massive."

It was a really good growing season in Southwestern Ontario, said Homick.

"The crop didn't seem to get stressed, and a phenomenal month of September just finished it off nicely."

The annual FS crop tour toward the end of August indicated maturity lagging behind other years, and the anticipation of a long, dragged-out harvest. However, sunny and breezy September days advanced that prognosis considerably, to the point corn was coming off the fields, dry, in October.

"Unheard of," said Homick, who has seen that in the winter, but not at that point of the year across his 17-season career. "I've never seen corn come off at harvest dry."

There was some concern around tar spot, which will shut a plant down early, however farmers who managed the issue with a fungicide seemed to have good results.

Overall says Homick, farmers had a heavy crop with good test weights, which he attributes to the combination of hybrid genetics in conjunction with farmer expertise.

"If they get the right conditions and right management process, you can pump out the production."

Prices are down from record levels said Homick, although corn sitting at $5.30 per bushel in late November - contracted between $6.05 and $6.15 earlier in the year.

"Which at 250 bushels is pretty good money."

The pattern of lower prices with higher yields carried into soybeans said Homick, although with more variance in yields. Some were not as high, while other ground proved extremely productive, running as high as 70 or even 80 bushels per acre.

"Even 70 is a huge number," said Homick, pushing well past an older standard of 40.

"Same thing, genetics, management practices," he credited. "Farmers have always been really, really good at what they do, but as technology advances, they are able to ramp up production and maximize their yield per acre."

Devin Homick, Grain Origination Coach with Central Ontario FS, was happy to speak to generally high, even record grain yields in 2024.

The late November price was sitting at $12.75 per bushel, down from $16.75 in May 2023 and this May's $15.70.

"Our 2024 markets all peaked out in early May for corn, beans and wheat."

The latter was also an exceptional crop in terms of yield said Homick.

"The only thing was we were down on acres this year."

Wheat per-bushel price in late November was sitting at $6.40, significantly down from earlier contracted options of $9.

"That's just how much these prices fluctuated."

Local weather is certainly a consideration for farmers, but so too are global ramifications, like weather, well beyond their control.

For example, Russia and Ukraine are among the largest wheat exporters on the planet, their ongoing conflict creating its share of instability. South American production keeps increasing, which exerts downward pressure on price. The North American supply is considered to be of higher quality says Homick.

"But still, price does dictate a lot."

Port and railway strikes also affected the transfer of crops from the field to foreign markets.

"Vessel delays have been very common this year," he said, speaking specifically to tracking corn being shipped to Ireland. "We really are feeding the world."

Donald Trump's re-election south of the border has also raised concerns around tariffs and potential Canadian retaliation.

It would be nice if a crystal ball providing accurate predictions was optional equipment for Canadian farmers, installed for example, next to the GPS unit. However, one hasn't been developed yet nor is it likely to be, leaving farmers in the challenging and absolutely crucial position of trying to stay one step ahead of the markets.

"There are so many cards in the deck of the grain market," Homick concluded. "It depends on which cards get played. There are just so many variables."

Jennifer, Marcel Van De Hoef establishing their own greenhouse/garden centre path

Jennifer, left, and Marcel Van De Hoef have been both challenged and rewarded since their purchase and ongoing operation of J&M Flowers, a greenhouse cut flower/garden centre operation located at 415 Schafer Side Road, west of Delhi just south of Highway #3.

Asiatic Lilies are the main crop produced by J&M Flowers.

By Jeff Tribe

Marcel Van De Hoef was looking to pick up a load of ferns, not purchase the 25-acre property with an acre-and-a-half of flower-production greenhouse at 415 Schafer Side Road, west of Delhi and just south of Highway #3.

But sometimes perhaps, fate takes a hand.

"A whole new life, a whole new lifestyle," smiled his wife and co-owner of J&M Flowers (https://jmflowers.ca) Jennifer Van De Hoef.

And while their new path may have presented itself to them, it's one they have willingly stepped onto, embracing not only where it's leading, but where they choose to take it.

"We wonder ourselves what we've gotten into," Jennifer laughed. "But not in a bad way - like you say, it's a good crazy."

Marcel and Jennifer have an established pattern of keeping on the move, their former property the fifth in a series they purchased, improved and subsequently sold.

"Always looking for the next opportunity," said Jennifer.

Part of their previous property's development was a hoop house and small roadside stand offering garden and other plants, as well as ferns for sale. Chatting while picking up a load of the latter from the former Koop family operation, Marcel was informed it was for sale, piquing both his and Jennifer's interest.

"We weren't actively looking for one," she admitted, although for once, opportunity seemed to be finding them.

They had discussed the possibility of expanding their growing efforts, and with Marcel's career in the real estate industry, would check out properties when they became available. His interest was in part historical, harkening back to his family's greenhouse chrysanthemum farm in Holland, as well as working in other facilities.

"He also owned a floral shop at one point with his brother," said Jennifer.

Their subsequent offer to purchase the Koop property was accepted, closing in November 2024, start date for a new adventure accompanied by a series of learning curves. In general terms, Jennifer takes care of planning, ordering and bookkeeping, while Marcel is responsible for growing. His job description includes watering, lighting, fertigation recipe and greenhouse maintenance. He was exposed to the practices in Holland says Jennifer, "but never as the grower."

Marcel is also responsible for 'mechanicals' for lack of a better term, which fortunately often work as expected.

"And sometimes not," Jennifer laughed.

Other greenhouse growers have proven an invaluable resource, stopping by to not only chat, but welcome the Van De Hoefs to their properties and both offer and give advice when asked.

"Which is absolutely appreciated," said Jennifer. "It's a really good industry that way."

Horticultural sales have also provided a learning opportunity. Even a career salesman currently involved in real estate is adjusting to dealing with floral wholesalers to whom the facility's cut flowers go to.

"It's a whole different market and you are dealing with a perishable product," Jennifer explained.

The other most significant adjustment is the sheer volume of labour required to consistently produce top-quality flowers. Asiatic Lilies, slightly smaller and without scent compared to their Oriental counterparts, are grown year-round in a variety of colours including pink, yellow, orange, red and white. Roughly three-and-a-half cycles are grown annually, bulb to shipping taking between 10 and 12 weeks.

"In the summer it's a little quicker," Jennifer explained, "in the winter it might be 12 weeks."

They also produce delphiniums and matthiola on a seasonal basis, and are ramping up for production of Boston ferns, hanging flower baskets, bedding plant perennials and garden plants to supply an associated and expanding on-site garden centre.

"There is constant work, yes," Jennifer admitted, a load shared by four part-time employees, and increasingly as they get older, the five Van De Hoef children. Their youngest accompanies her regularly says Jennifer, showing an instinctive aptitude for plants.

"He sees what needs to be done, he knows what's going on."

For all the challenges, there have also been significant rewards.

"We just like the greenhouse," said Jennifer. "When you walk in, it smells nice, it's warm and you get your hands in the dirt.

"And the commute's good," she added with a smile.

There is a satisfaction to horticulture, Van De Hoef continued.

"You put in the time and watch your product grow."

In the short term, their goal is to gain experience and expertise in what the former owners did because it was working. They are also, however, beginning to implement their shared vision, charting their own path so to speak within those established parameters.

"It's an evolving plan," Jennifer concluded, alluding to significant expansion of the garden centre as one of their big goals.

"Putting our own spin on things and seeing where it takes us."

Golspie Dairy whole-milk vending machine provides farm-to-family opportunity

Marja DeBoer-Marshall shows off one of the two Golspie Dairy cheeses earning awards at the past year's Royal Winter Fair.

Marja DeBoer-Marshall stands beside the milk dispenser at Golspie Dairy, while fronting a second vending machine featuring cheeses, pre-bottled chocolate milk and extra bottles and caps.

By Jeff Tribe

There are likely less and less of us who grew up milking a cow by hand into a pail, pouring its contents through a paper filter, skimming off the cream and drinking the resultant raw milk from a pitcher.

Times change, there are many reasons this happens less. However, whether nostalgia or the rose-coloured glasses one tends to view their youth through, recollections are 'cow milk' compared to 'store bought' as favourably as premium ice cream to frozen ice milk.

Golspie Dairy (www.golspiedairy.ca) is providing a hyper-modern Dairy Farmers of Ontario (DFO) tested and pasteurized alternative to old-school methodology, connecting consumer to cow as directly as possible through a vending machine located on the family farming operation at 455259 45th Line, Woodstock.

"It's a different product," says Golspie Dairy's Marja DeBoer-Marshall. "Something you can't find in the grocery store."

DeBoer-Marshall was taking political science and global affairs when she met her future husband Laurence at The University of Waterloo, he studying biology. Their decision to return to his fifth, now sixth-generation family farm necessitated a career reassessment and financial discussion. Against the cost of expanding beyond its existing 30-cow milking herd, they instead diversified with an on-farm dairy combining award-winning cheese-making and a vending machine dispensing whole milk instead of drinks or snacks.

They had been exposed to the concept during visits to European farms, further research revealing there were 'a few in B.C. and one in Cape Breton.'

"That showed us it was a possibility here in Canada."

Their Brunimat dispenser is manufactured in Switzerland, shipped to Canada through a supplier in the Netherlands. The concept is fairly simple says DeBoer-Marshall, essentially a big refrigerator with pumps and an agitator to regularly mix milk, ensuring consistency throughout, rather than the cream rising to the top. While she considers the Canadian dairy system continues to provide the best milk in the world, the Golspie approach offers a whole milk alternative with associated content, texture and flavour benefits.

"It adds more body to the milk."

The milk is sourced from their own farm, requirements around the transportation of raw product requiring verification and samples for testing and quality assurance through the Dairy Farmers of Ontario milk marketing board.

"It ensures food safety is up to snuff and consumers are protected," says DeBoer-Marshall.

Heated to complete the pasteurization process, milk is then chilled to four degrees Celsius. Golspie's self-serve area is open daily from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. A payment control on the front of a dispenser accepting coins or tap-enabled debit and credit cards allows customers to make their purchase. A second vending machine which accepts coins, $20 bills and tap-enabled debit and credit cards contains assorted Golspie Dairy cheeses, extra bottles and caps, and pre-filled bottles of chocolate milk.

Consumers seeking milk place their own reusable container, or one from Golspie, into position, choosing between one quart (946 millilitre) or one gallon (3.78 litre) fills at $3 and $10 respectively. Originally, the dispenser was set up for one quart white or chocolate options. However, consumer preferences for all-white in different volumes encouraged a transition in March, 2024.

"We had customers who like to get a large volume of milk at one time," DeBoer-Marshall explained, adding that while having a preliminary business plan is essential, it must also be subject to demand. "You have to be flexible enough to respond to these changes."

After each sale, an automatic wash function cleans up any spillage.

"The dispenser is smart enough to keep itself clean."

Customers come regularly from as far away as London and the Kitchener-Waterloo area says DeBoer-Marshall, although she believes a majority are within a 10 to 15-minute drive.

Golspie Dairy does recognize the value of digital marketing in a modern world.

"We do some online advertising with key-words," she said, an investment pushing them toward the top of the page should someone happen to search 'fresh milk', for example. There is also benefit in producing a unique offering which for those who like it, tend to like it a lot and share their enjoyment through word-of-mouth.

"Honestly, that's the best kind of advertising, when people love your product and want to tell other people about it," said DeBoer-Marshall. "You can't pay for that quality of advertising."

There is no single easily-identifiable demographic among their clientele.

"Surprisingly, no. There is all sorts."

Some may pick up a quart or two a week, others a significantly larger amount. Many drink the milk, but there is also a percentage who prefer this option for making yogurt or cheese.

"It's been really interesting to talk to them and ask what they use the milk for."

Direct customer contact is among the most rewarding aspect of taking their business in a new direction, even on the rare occasions the feedback is negative.

"You can figure out a better product and better ways of doing things."

Overwhelmingly, reaction has been extremely positive. DeBoer-Marshall considers cheese-making awards from this year's Royal Winter Fair among indications they are on the right track, along with customer loyalty, enthusiasm and feedback. The latter has also provided a far-more intimate connection to the far-reaching impact of a single Canadian farm, even from what the dairy industry would consider a small operation.

"Our little farm feeds a lot of people," DeBoer-Marshall concluded. "It's not just for us and the cows, it touches a lot of lives every day."

Canadian soybeans used for Japanese soy milk

When Japanese consumers purchase soy milk, chances are that Canadian soybeans were the raw product.

Japanese food producer Kikkoman, which is the leading soy milk in Japan, uses Sevita soybeans in its product. The Japanese food giant provided an overview of its product and the importance of quality beans during Sevita's grower day in August.

While Canada is the number two exporter of food grade soybeans to Japan, Canada is number one in quality two. John Hendrick, Sevita export markets manager, said there is a preference for the Canadian products.

"The Japanese love the Canadian quality," he said.

Hendrick said the Japanese look at the protein content of the beans, and Canada can produce better consistency. While soil and quality are a part of this, product development is a huge component.

"Sevita is an example of this," he said, while acknowledging other Canadian companies have the same philosophy. "A lot of money is spent developing products to meet the market. There's not the same dedication to food grade non-GMO varieties in the States."

The Japanese preference is for non-GMO soybeans. While Sevita produces both GMO and non-GMO seed, the company will buy back 100 per cent of the production of the food grade beans to meet the needs of customers like Kikkoman.

The path from field to soy milk on the shelves in Japan, starts with conditioning and then export by Sevita to Japan. Distribution of the fully cleaned raw product is then handled by one of Sevita's trading company partners in Japan. This company then provides the beans to Kikkoman.

Soy products are popular in Japan, with the people liking the low calories and high protein levels. Japanese people also avoid GMO products.

After years of research, Kikkoman found ways to control the taste of soy milk and to add different flavours. The product is available in a multitude of flavours from chocolate and pudding to black tea.

The soybeans are peeled and cracked and then mashed into a slurry to start the milk-making process. The resulting milk is then sterilized and flavour is added. The fiber byproduct is dried and used for other foods.

Outside of soy milk, soybeans are also used in the production of tofu; miso, which is a fermented soybean past used to make soup for breakfast, lunch and dinner; and natto, which is a fermented soybean product eaten for breakfast.

Schooley Orchards Ltd. honoured with provincial Farm Family Excellence Award

Family uses United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals to guide decision making for their operation

By Tamara Botting

A number of Ontario's farmers were honoured with Excellence in Agriculture Awards at the Royal Winter Fair in November 2024.

The recipient of the Farm Family Excellence Award (West) was Schooley Orchards Ltd. and Apple Hill Lavender in Windham Centre.

"It was very exciting," said Jennifer Schooley, who – along with her sister, Melissa – is the fourth generation of the family to have a hand at the helm of the operations with their parents, Harold and Jan.

"It was the first time I'd been to the Royal Winter Fair in like 35 years … It was an especially nice reward at the end of a long, long year," Schooley said.

Cycles are common in farming: the changing of the seasons; a seed that grows to a mature plant that produces more seeds for the next generation of plants. One such cycle has informed the operations of the Schooley family's farm.

It started with the apples.

"We've got 36 acres of commercial apples. We've had apples on this farm since 1908," Schooley said, quipping, "I call it the apple addiction that we have."

Since the mid-1960s, the family has hired migrant farm workers from Jamaica to help with the operation.

"They come up at the beginning of April, because everything that we do on this farm is hand-harvested and labour intensive."

From April to June, the workers would help with pruning and thinning the trees. Up until just over a decade ago, there wasn't as much work to be done in July and August before things ramped up again in September and October during the apple harvest.

Then in 2010, Jan moved from her position as a ginseng and medicinal herb specialist for Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) into an on-farm food safety specialist, so she could grow larger quantities of lavender on the farm.

Sisters, from left, Melissa and Jennifer Schooley are the fourth generation of their family to have a hand at the helm of the operations at Schooley Orchards Ltd. and Apple Hill Lavender in Windham Centre.

"When she retired in 2012, she told my dad that she would love to plant a bigger plot of lavender. And my dad – who's a very big thinker – pulled out five acres, instead of a couple of lavender plants around the house like any other normal husband might do," Schooley said with a laugh, adding that that year, her parents had spent their 40th wedding anniversary planting five acres of lavender.

Using the lavender they grew, Jan began making products, including soaps, which she in turn sold to family and friends. Word of mouth spread, and the customer base grew. There were also plenty of customers who found the farm while out and about.

"People would constantly stop to come and look at the lavender and they would take pictures. They wanted to come onto the property and walk around," Schooley said.

Her parents decided to embrace this new business opportunity. They expanded their specialty crops; today growing around 30 different medicinal herbs. Early on in the venture, they updated the barn to make it into a storefront, and gave it a fresh coat of paint – purple, naturally.

"That was not my father's decision, which he always likes to share, because no self-respecting farmer would paint their barn purple. My mother and my sister out-voted him, and it worked out perfectly, because it's purple with this beautiful white trim, and it looks really nice with the lavender in the background. It's the first thing you see when you drive into the farm," Schooley said.

As this part of the farm's operation began to take off, Melissa (who had been working as a master potter) became a business partner with her mom.

At the time, there were few farms growing lavender. Jan, working in partnership with another local lavender grower, was instrumental in the foundation of the Ontario Lavender Association, while Harold mentored new lavender growers.

Adding lavender and the other medicinal herbs completed the labour cycle for the farm, Schooley said. The apples made it necessary to bring in the migrant farm workers, which allowed them to help grow the lavender, which in turn helps to supplement the cost of growing the apples.

Apples, Schooley said, are "a really expensive crop to grow. It's a very difficult crop to grow; and it's challenging, especially as our climate changes."

But now, with the two types of crops being grown, "It's like this never-ending cycle that we have going on; never shall the two part."

In 2021, Schooley decided to step away from her 20-year career in children's mental

→

health and join the management team of the farm, too.

Spending some time working off the farm after graduating school seems to be a common practice in the family; Schooley noted that her sister, her dad and her grandfather had done the same.

"Everybody leaves the farm, but then it pulls you back for some odd reason; I can't explain it," she said.

Since their return to the farm, both sisters have been working to expand the operations.

"We diversify as much as we can here," Schooley said. Because their neighbours are farmers with their own active operations, there's no options to expand outwards on their property, which is why they've had to take a vertical integration approach with their 50 acres.

"Every square inch of this land is used to help make our farm economically viable so we can keep going for generations to come," Schooley said.

Their success to date isn't something that happened by accident; the whole operation hinges on the mutual respect and partnership within the family management team, Schooley said. Intentional, scheduled communication helps to facilitate that – each week, there are team meetings with minutes and agendas to keep everyone on track.

More than that, "Everybody has input," Schooley said. When an idea is brought forward, they look at how to make it happen, rather than why it wouldn't work.

That said, as with any other business, they work to find the balance between taking calculated risks on new ideas, but also being willing to put things on pause when they don't work out as hoped.

As an example, Schooley spoke about their recent intentions to start producing a sweet cider. After they'd started making the cider from a plot of Silken apple trees, they realized that the production costs to make the cider were prohibitive.

"It's not the type of apple that can be sold in the grocery store because it bruises so easily, but it's the best eating apple I have ever had in my life, so I don't want to get rid of it either," Schooley said.

Schooley Orchards Ltd. and Apple Hill Lavender in Windham Centre was named the recipient of the Farm Family Excellence Award (West) at the Ontario Excellence in Agriculture Awards, which were presented at the Royal Winter Fair in November 2024.

So instead, they opted for a pivot into offering pick your own apples for the first time in autumn 2024. It was a huge hit.

It was another stream in their agritourism efforts; the farm, and Schooley specifically, has been involved in a lot of online education in classrooms.

"People are interested in knowing where their food comes from, how it grows, how to pick it," she said.

With the education piece, Schooley is using the skills she developed in her previous career as she engages with families and especially children.

"I love that part of the job … part of my passion is educating people," she said.

Later this year, if all goes according to plan, the farm will launch in-person farm tours for local schools.

Education is hugely important to the family; Jan and Harold are both plant pathologists, "So there's a lot of knowledge in the agronomy that goes into the operations of these farms; they have this incredible input into what we're doing," Schooley said.

The family has also decided to make sustainability a main focus for their operations, specifically by following the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which include things like responsible consumption and production, social inclusion, and quality education.

"(We are) incorporating all 17 goals into every decision that we make on the farm," Schooley said.

She noted that sustainability in agritourism is about a close relationship with the natural environment, the social and cultural factors of farming, and the relationships with other sectors in the community.

"It's all working together for a common good."

NORFOLK FARMS

Scan the QR code and visit us online

Have conversations with professionals to limit risks on your farm

'Risk is inherent to everything that we do just as human beings, let alone being farmers'

By Tamara Botting

"Risk is inherent to everything that we do just as human beings, let alone being farmers," noted Ben Eastman, Senior Consultant, Farm with Co-operators.

"Farming is a dangerous business … there are days where you've got to climb up the silo or you have to jump on the forks to load up corn to put in the planter; there are those things that you just have to do."

Eastman has literally spent his life becoming familiarized with the inner workings of agricultural operations.

"(I was) born and raised on a dairy operation, just south of Ottawa. It still operates today; Dad's still milking cows and raising crops," he said.

In his professional life, Eastman helps his company's advisors provide their clients – over 43,000 Canadian farmers – with proper education around risk management practices, changes in the market, and any other information they might need to make the best decisions possible to protect themselves, their families and their operations.

In September 2024, Eastman was a guest speaker at a virtual information session hosted by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA).

"Farmers are busy people; they wear a lot of hats," he said, noting that when running an agricultural enterprise, one might need to be a mechanic, biologist, veterinarian, etc. at a moment's notice – besides any familial, community, etc. obligations they might have. In Eastman's view, farmers shouldn't have to also try to be insurance and risk assessment professionals as well.

Shawn Edwards is a deputy fire chief and fire prevention officer for the West Grey Fire Service.

Ben Eastman is a senior consultant, farm with Co-operators.

That's where he and his colleagues come in.

"It's my job – and my obligation to agricultural communities and rural communities – to make sure that we are giving our clients the best advice and education to make informed decisions around their protection plans."

As Eastman noted, there are plenty of risks in agriculture that are out of a farmer's hands.

"You can't control the weather; can't stop wind. Until somebody is able to stop a lightning

→

bolt, things happen," he said. But there are ways to limit how big of an impact those instances of happenstance have.

For instance, "Right now, the big talk in the industry is large, catastrophic barn fires," Eastman said. So, if you're putting up a new building, "Don't build structures very close together; give them some space so that you don't have a fire jump risk."

Shawn Edwards, deputy fire chief and fire prevention officer for the West Grey Fire Service and fellow guest speaker at the OFA virtual meeting, shared the same pointer.

He also noted that fire prevention can often look like regular cleaning and maintenance.

Edwards explained that dust, cobwebs, and debris buildup on lighting and equipment that emits heat can be a fire hazard.

He added that many fires in agricultural buildings tend to be electrical related. This is because plenty of barns still in regular use could be almost or even over 100 years old, and "Some of the wiring in them is as old as the barn itself."

Not only that, but depending on what the barn is being used for, moisture and humidity can also affect the electrical systems and the wiring.

If possible, Edwards recommended, farmers should have fire separations for different sections of their buildings, "instead of it just being one big wide-open building."

This would keep things like sparks from a grinder or welding equipment in the machine shop area, and separate from highly flammable items, like hay and crop particulates.

Edwards strongly recommends contacting your local fire department before disaster strikes, because it might help limit how much damage a disaster can do.

"We'd be happy to come and see your operation, have a tour of it, especially if you're into some specialty or a new way of doing things; things are constantly changing in the agricultural industry," he said; this allows emergency responders to get a 'lay of the land' ahead of time, instead of entering an unfamiliar space during a crisis.

Edwards acknowledged that some farm operators may be wary about inviting the fire department to their property – concerned that they'd be inviting a full inspection, expenses to fix or change things, and possible fines, but he said that's not at all likely to happen.

He noted that because the Ontario Fire Code doesn't apply to all farm buildings, and that the building code for farms is very different than the standard one, "There's really not a lot of things we can say, 'You must do this.' But we can definitely make suggestions on preventative measures and how you can be safe," which might eliminate the need for the fire department to ever have to respond to an emergency at all.

Edwards said it's also important to talk to your local fire department so you can confirm what services they offer.

For instance, not every municipality has the capacity for a high angle rescue.

"So if your operation involves grain elevator storage and people working at heights, it could be an issue," Edwards said. "You should check with your local fire department and see if they provide that service; if someone gets in trouble, who should they call to help them?"

If you ever do have to call emergency responders, make sure they know where they're going.

"Unless you tell us different, we're going to come to where you've called from," he said.

"If you're a large operation that does a lot of field work, you should make sure your operators know where they are on the farm," Edwards said, noting that he's seen instances where a person has called for help from the home farm, and that's where the fire department goes, but the emergency is actually happening in a field further away.

"That definitely can delay things."

Other ways to avoid delays is to make sure the laneway up to your property is plowed and driveable, and that your address marker can easily be seen.

"Keep it visible so it's not overgrown," Edwards said.

Some municipalities participate in Farm 911: The Emily Project, wherein rural property owners can request a civic address and roadway marker for fields. Edwards said if this is an option in your area, it's a good idea do it, to help make sure emergency responders have an easier time finding you.

He also recommended that if possible, you have a water source for firefighting on site, such as an underground cistern or a pond. If there isn't a water source immediately available, the firefighters may use a portable water tank, which is similar to an above-ground pool that the water tanker trucks will fill for the pumper trucks by bringing water to the site from the nearest water source. However, the efficacy of this is impacted by "how far they have to travel to get to the water and how long it takes them to keep that water flowing. If there's a tangible water source right there on the property, that will go a long way to help mitigate a fire quickly," Edwards said.

That's why he suggested that if you're considering putting up a new building, look into additional fire prevention features while you're at it, such as fire separation in the building, or installing an underground cistern if you don't already have one.

"It would incur a little bit of extra cost, but in the end, provide you with a lot more peace of mind and safety," he said.

On the insurance side of things, Eastman also recommends pre-emptive investments to protect your farming operation.

He explained that unless you are mandated through something like a line of credit or a mortgage, you don't have to have insurance on all of the components of your agricultural operation, such as your tractor or livestock.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't have it, though.

Eastman used the example of a $100,000 tractor costing $1,000 annually to insure. Someone could choose not to incur that cost each year, but if something were to happen, then they would have a much larger expense all at once to contend with.

"There is a balance point," Eastman said, adding, "The data tells me that people are likely to have a claim once every five or ten years, give or take."

Ultimately, it comes down to an individual's risk tolerance level, and the financial hit an operation can absorb.

"Everybody has a different financial capacity," he said. For instance, the loss of a cow might be the cost of doing business for one operation, but financially devastating for another.

It's also important to look at the bigger picture; where a farm is and where it's expected to be going.

"(Some) farms may be making large capital investments; others may be getting ready to transition to a different operation entirely. It doesn't make sense that they all have the same kind of insurance," Eastman said.

That's why he, too, recommends having a conversation with the professionals; in this case, your insurance advisor.

"Farms have become so evolved … the things that we can do and see and (risks we) are exposed to as farmers, it's totally different than it was 10 years ago, and it'll be totally different in 10 years," Eastman said.

It's not always about the obvious things, either. Working around large machinery may put the farmer at risk for physical harm, but things like inviting the public to come onto your property for a pick your own endeavour or selling your produce directly to a local grocery store could prove to be litigiously dangerous.

"How do we manage some of that, and really provide (farmers) the tools to ultimately defend themselves and protect their operations from people who may not be acting in the utmost of good faith?" Eastman said.

He recommended talking to your insurance provider regularly – as you would any other professional whose services you require for the smooth operation of your enterprise – but especially before making any changes to your operation, so they can flag any potential risks and help you decide on the best preventative measures.

"As farmers, you can't avoid risk; it's inherent. But what can we do to make you safer, and give you the peace of mind that you are properly protected or your family to be protected in the event that something does go wrong."

If there is no water source immediately available on a rural property, firefighters battling a blaze may use a portable water tank, like the one seen here, as an alternative source. The portable water tank would be constantly refilled by tanker trucks driving in a circuit from the nearest hydrant or other viable water source.

Steve Peters is new chair of Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers

By Jeff Helsdon

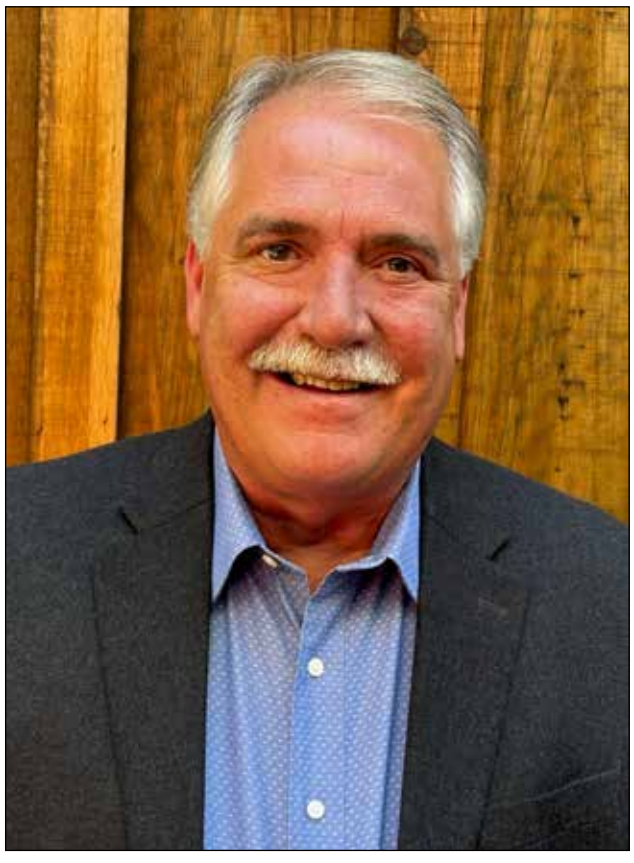
A familiar name and face is the new chair of the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers. Former Elgin-Middelesex-London MPP and minister of agriculture Steve Peters started in the role on Nov. 1.

Peters' primary responsibility will be as chairman of the board, meaning he will chair the meetings, be responsible for sub-committees, and represent greenhouse growers on Fruit and Veg Growers, and the Ontario Greenhouse Alliance.

"My role is a governance role," Peters said. "It also has a government advocacy role too, working particularly with Richard Lee, the executive director, and following through on directions of the board and to be an advocate."

Peters said the position needs someone with experience dealing with government abilities, who knows how to chair a meeting, and who ensures all board members have a say in any decision, much like a speaker or mayor.

He certainly has those qualifications. Before running for provincial politics, Peters was a St. Thomas councillor and mayor from 1991 to 1999. He was agriculture critic while in opposition from 1999 to 2003. He was appointed Minister of Agriculture and was then chosen by his colleagues as Speaker of the Ontario Legislature until he retired from provincial politics in 2011. Since then, he was the executive director of Food and Beverage Ontario and ran a farm market and bakery that provided opportunities for clients with the Canadian Mental Health



Steve Peters

Association running and is currently a councillor on St. Thomas city council.

"One of the reasons I applied is it's such a dynamic and growing industry," he said. "The potential for growth is huge. I represent OGVG on behalf of the board, for tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers. We're seeing a lot of those same farmers have moved to strawberries. Lettuce has been another large greenhouse growth sector."

Ontario is home to the largest concentration of greenhouses in North America, with most located in Southwestern Ontario.

"There was a lot of things that excited me about the industry," Peters said. "Part of my role is to deal with the challenges the sector faces as well."

He listed those challenges as carbon pricing, which has been a significant burden on the sector and added substantive costs to greenhouse production; municipal issues; ensuring enough electricity; how greenhouses can play a role in co-generation; business risk management; and possible tariffs issued by President Trump.

Richard Lee, executive director of the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers, said the government's focus on tariffs seems to be on automotive, steel, and electric vehicles, but he questioned whether the government is doing enough to represent the rights of the agriculture sector.

Overall, Canadian agriculture exports are worth $40 billion annually. Of that total, the greenhouse sector contributes $1.8 billion, or 532 million kilograms of exports. The majority of that is from Ontario.

Lee also identified challenges coming from municipal governments impacting the greenhouse sector.

Gilvesy retires as chair of farm group

By Jeff Helsdon

A Tillsonburg man is hanging up his hat after nearly two decades with the Ontario Greenhouse Vegetable Growers (OGVG).

George Gilvesy's last day as the chair of the OGVG was Oct. 31. He served as chair of the board from 2015 to 2024 and was the general manager of the organization from 2009 to 2015. Prior to that, he was on the Ontario Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers' Marketing Board for 18 years, of which he was chair for four years and vice-chair for six years. Gilvesy was a third-generation tobacco grower, who started growing on his own farm in 1978.

After Gilvesy was done his tenure with the tobacco board, the Ontario Farm Products Marketing Commission asked if he would assist OGVG on a limited basis. He found the skills he used as the head of the tobacco board could be used for other agriculture commodities.

OGVG represents the greenhouse tomato, cucumber and pepper growers of the province. There are 170 grower members. Gilvesy helped on an interim basis in 2004 and 2005 and then became the general manager in 2009. The position of chair of the board was an appointment from the Farm Products Marketing Commission until 2023. In 2024 the growers were allowed to appoint their own chair, which Gilvesy undertook for a year before deciding he would like to retire.

"I said I'm comfortable to go one more year and it would be in the board's best interest to look for a new chair for the transition," he said.

Gilvesy explained the difference between the two positions is the general manager oversees operations and implements the policies outlined by the board while the chair leads the board through the decision-making process, and guides board members through policies and regulation. The chair also advocates for OGVG with government. This meant Gilvesy spent a fair amount of time in Toronto, Ottawa and Washington talking to politicians and bureaucrats.

An OGVG press release announcing his retirement heralded Gilvesy for the work he had done on sustainability, food security, trade, market development and environmentally-friendly growing practices that benefitted OGVG members and agriculture in general.

George Gilvesy

"I have had the pleasure of serving with George, who has inspired me and given me so many new perspectives on how agriculture and government can work together to achieve common goals," said Rick Mastronardi, District 1 Vice Chair. "He will be sadly missed by many across the agricultural sector."

One of the hurdles that Gilvesy tackled in his early days with OGVG was the Netherlands dumping peppers into the Canadian market. OGVG hired legal counsel and took the issue to the Canadian International Trade Tribunal and won.

"It was a significant step forward for the organization," Gilvesy said.

COVID was another huge challenge for OGVG members to keep operating and growing food for the marketplace. Gilvesy said one of the big hurdles was the offshore labour. The Medical Officer of Health for Windsor-Essex, where many of the greenhouse operations are located, said foreign workers were not allowed.

"In 35 years, I've never seen such a machine going into resolving that," Gilvesy recounted. "The Premier, Doug Ford, was instrumental in getting that turned around, getting local, provincial and federal officials working together."

The whole issue was resolved within 72 hours.

In 2009, OGVG members had 1,575 acres of greenhouses. This has grown to 4,100 acres today in Ontario, with over 80 percent of the product exported to the United States. Gilvesy gave credit to the growers for the huge expansion, saying they had both the technology, knowledge and the aggressiveness.

"This is all on them," he said. "It's not necessarily what OGVG did but we tried to facilitate their growth as much as we could."

Gilvesy reflected back on his time with OGVG, saying, "It's been extremely rewarding to represent a group like this. It's been an outstanding opportunity. They are some of the most enterprising farmers in the world."

With more time on his hands, Gilvesy hopes to enjoy more time golfing, flying his plane and working on farm projects.

"There's going to be no shortage of things to keep me occupied, but first I'm going to catch my breath," he said.

Gilvesy was recognized by peers and the Ontario Produce Marketing Association (OPMA) with the Cory Clack-Streef Produce Person of the Year Award on Nov. 22 during the OPMA Gala and Awards Ceremony at the Bellvue Manor in Vaughan.

OGVG announced that former Elgin-Middlesex-London MPP, Minister of Agriculture and St. Thomas mayor Steve Peters will be replacing Gilvesy as chair.

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People and plan in place to guide future of GFO and District 6

By Luke Edwards

A new group of delegates have been acclaimed for District 6 of the Grain Farmers of Ontario, as the overall organization launches a new strategic plan.

Both were unveiled at the annual general meeting for the district - which covers Niagara, Haldimand, Hamilton and Brant - held in February in Caledonia. The district is allowed nine delegates, as well as two alternates. That includes director Jeff Barlow, who's currently in the midst of a two-year term.

Eight people were nominated to join Barlow as delegates, along with two nominations for alternates, meaning no elections were required and all those nominated were acclaimed. Delegates include: Barlow, Gerry Veldhuizen, Matt Beischlag, Ian Turnbull, Susan Gowan, Jay McLellan, Kevin Vanderspek, Aaron McQueen and Brad Nimijohn.

Alternates are Steve Vanderbolt and Dan Court.

Meanwhile, the GFO's strategic plan has received an update for the first time since 2020.

"We're really excited to launch this new strategic plan," said Paul Hoekstra, vice president of strategic development, telling members in attendance that GFO leadership hopes it will help "create the right environment for you to be successful in your business."

One of the changes in the new plan is removing the sustainability focus area, though Hoekstra said that didn't reflect an abandonment of sustainable practices.

Paul Hoekstra, vice president of strategic development for the Grain Farmers of Ontario, gave attendees to the District 6 annual meeting last month an overview of the organization's new strategic plan.

"We felt sustainability is ubiquitous across all our focus areas," he said. And that means both economic and environmental sustainability.

The plan includes four focus areas: advocacy and public trust, protecting and growing markets, research and knowledge transfer, and governance and operations.

Though not the sexiest of topics, Hoekstra said a governance review is an important step for the organization to take.

Customers the ultimate judges, but Royal Winter Fair awards also welcome for Gunn's Hill Cheese

By Jeff Tribe

A company's customers are the ultimate judges.

But a little positive feedback from sanctioned competitions never hurts.

"No matter what, it's always good to hear back," said Gunn's Hill Cheese co-founder and head cheesemaker Shep Ysselstein after victories in the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair's Flavoured Cheese, Not Smoked, and Flavoured Cheese, Smoked categories.

"And the other nice thing is, when you win a competition, it gives people an excuse to try something that may be new to them."

Ysselstein took the latter approach with cheese-making, particularly Swiss cheese-making, becoming interested in the craft through growing up on an Oxford Centre-area family dairy farm that now supplies his operation. He went to the heart of the Alps to learn his craft, spending a memorable summer helping tend and milk a 30-head dairy herd on Swiss mountainsides. Milk was collected in buckets via a mobile tie-stall system, poured into milk cans and then transported to an area cheese-making facility.

Despite a gruelling summer of work, he returned to Canada inspired rather than discouraged.

"That's where it all began."

Ysselstein and partner Colleen Bator combined family dairy experience, season of authentic Swiss cheese-making, subsequent cheese-making instruction, and also importantly, a business degree, into the founding of Gunn's Hill Cheese in 2010. Their original line featured Five Brothers, a hand-crafted washed rind product reminiscent of Gouda and Swiss Appenzeller; Handeck, a version paying homage to the Swiss mountain cheeses he made in Europe; Oxford's Harvest, a milder, creamier offering modelled after Swiss Mutchsli; and highly-popular curds.

All four remain staples in Gunn's Hills current 20-25-variety range of offerings, a lengthy list including flavoured versions of the originals, Brigid's Brie named in honour of Colleen's late Irish mother, Dark Side of the Moo (Mutchsli-style soaked for four days in Dark Side Chocolate Stout from Woodstock's Upper Thames Brewing Company) along with buffalo (Buffalo Bliss) and sheep-milk (Shepherd's Harvest) cheeses they craft for or others. They, and a selection of other local products are available for sale onsite at the cheese shop, located at 445172 Gunn's Hill Road as well as hundreds of other locations around the province.

Admittedly, a competition is not a competition is not a competition. Some have more entries, some differing numbers of judges, some admittedly more or less prestigious. But results can be important, a 2013 category victory for Five Brothers at the high-end 2013 Canadian Cheese Grand Prix competition sponsored by the Dairy Farmers of Canada provided an element of early credibility to Gunn's Hill's products, and every win provides a boost. Cheese is judged on a combination of technical attributes, salinity and texture for example, as well as a technical term which comes down to flavour: 'nice earthy, nutty undertones' compared to, for example, less-attractive 'barny' characteristics.

Gunn's Hill Cheese co-founder and cheese-maker Shep Ysselstein shows off the Five Brothers Smoked (in his right hand) and Tipsy (left) cheeses which won their categories at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair this fall.

Gunn's Hill Royal Fair winners included Tipsy, Oxford Harvest soaked in Palatine Hills Cabernet Merlot for four days before being aged for three to four months; and also Five Brothers Smoked, as the name indicates, Five Brothers cheese vacuum sealed to age. After eight months, 30 to 40 wheels are cold-smoked with applewood for eight hours.

"It gets that nice natural smoke flavour," said Ysselstein. "Apple tends to go best with cheese - hickory or mesquite can be too intense."

Gunn's Hill also picked up a pair of American Cheese Society awards earlier in the year, Dark Side of the Moo finishing first in its category, and Five Brothers second. Gunn's Hill is judicious with competition entries, limiting numbers and often using the opportunity to get external assessment on new products.

"You always get some feedback on them," Shep explained, which is an important part of the desire for improvement, important whether at the beginning of a company's existence or 14 years in.

"You can't just let it go," said Ysselstein. "We've got to continually focus on doing better, always trying to do a little better."

And while competitions are part of that ongoing challenge, customer appreciation remains the biggest win.

"It's still always fun to see people enjoying our cheese," Ysselstein concluded. "That's what keeps it exciting."

Province announces increase to farmer support program

By Jeff Helsdon

The Ontario government announced a substantial Risk Management Program increase at a Eden farm last Tuesday.

Elgin-Middlesex-London MPP and Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness Rob Flack was on his home turf for the announcement in Bayham just a day before Premier Ford dissolved the Legislature for an early election. Flack was joined by Minister of Finance Peter Bethlenfalvy and farm leaders for the announcement at the VanQuathem farm.

The Risk Management Program (RMP)is a safety net that helps offset rising production costs and falling commodity prices. Payments are made if the market price falls below the cost of production. RMP covers sectors such as grain and oilseeds, cattle, horticulture, sheep, veal, and pork but does not include supply-managed commodities such as dairy and chickens.

The announcement boosts RMP from $150 million to $250 million over the next three years.

Flack told those in attendance for the announcement that the government understands the importance of the $51 billion agri-food sector to the province's economy. This includes more than 200 commodities, livestock and poultry. From farm gate to plate, 871,000 people, or one in nine jobs, are in the agri-food sector.

"Our farmers are the lifeblood of our growing, our vibrant, our thriving agri-food sector," he said.

Since 2018, the number of people employed in agriculture grew by 30,000, the gross domestic product increased by $3 billion and exports increased 65 per cent to $26.2 billion. Expanding on trade with the U.S., Flack said the two-way trade, which he called "dynamic and complementary", is worth $45 billion. In the agriculture sector, Ontario has a small trade deficit with the States.

"The bottom line is there is no need for President Trump to add tariffs to our sector," he said. "Tariffs will only increase costs, cause potential job losses, and inflict consumer pain that is not needed."

He told the farmers if tariffs were implemented, the Ontario government "has your backs".

Rob Flack, Elgin-Middlesex-London MPP and Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness, announced an increase to the Risk Management Plan at an Eden-area farm on Feb. 28. Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy, to his immediate right, and farm leaders were on hand for the announcement that has been asked for by various farm groups.

"Today's announcement moves the needle in providing more confidence in our fast-moving sector, and we want to keep it that way," Flack said.

Ontario Federation of Agriculture president Drew Spoelstra said farmers need reliable safety net programs to offset growing tax burdens and increasing production costs.

"We also face significant challenges that are out of our control when it comes to market conditions, trade tariffs, and we might be facing down our bigger challenge yet," he said.

While Ontario farmers are adaptable and resilient, he added, "Farmers can only do so much and need reliable and effective safety net programs, like Ontario RMP, and others to stand behind our efforts to feed Ontarians, and others, around the world."

Mike Chromczak, a local cash crop and vegetable producer, is also the co-chair of the Ontario Agriculture Sustainability Coalition. This group has representation from the commodity groups eligible for RMP.

"Today's announcement is a monumental investment by our government that will help to fortify our domestic food supply, support jobs, economic growth while strengthening the resiliency of our respective sectors," he said.

Haldimand-Norfolk MPP Bobbi Ann Brady said she has long been pressing the government for such an increase to RMP, and while she said it was good news, she questioned the timing.

"This government has had until 2022 to boost RMP and they wait until the day before an election call," Brady said. "Thank you for the $100 million, but it's long overdue."

New innovation could give greenhouse cucumber growers a hand up

By Luke Edwards

To demonstrate how his team overcame a significant hurdle in their quest to develop viable robotic cucumber harvesting technology, Brian Lynch looked down and put his hand in his pocket.

Despite not being able to see clearly what was in his pocket, his fingers could quickly identify his car keys, some loose change, and whatever else he happened to be carrying around with him that day.

The new tools Vineland Research and Innovation Centre will be showing off to those in the industry in October is based on that very simple premise: Sight gets you close, touch gets you precise.

"To build something that's going to go exactly to that precise spot based on data from cameras is really challenging," Lynch, director of horticultural technology services at VRIC said.

Back in 2018 Lynch and his team at VRIC began searching for robotic harvesting solutions for greenhouse cucumber growers. Whatever they came up with had to be fast and accurate enough to make it worthwhile, but also at a price that meant a reasonable return on investment.

And that's where the challenge came in. The latest cameras can do amazing work. Laser systems can also return wonderful data. However, they either cost too much, take too long, or both.

"From the very beginning the strategy in how we solved the problem was driven by constraints on the cost," Lynch said. The goal, after all, is to produce something that growers will be able to buy.

So instead of focusing all of its attention on the "vision" of the robot, Lynch's team opted to use the cameras to get them close, and then develop a new tool to finish the job.

"It feels its way to the stem, so that means we don't have to know where the stem is, we just have to know where the cucumber is. And that's a lot easier of a problem to solve," he said.

A closed loop system finds the cucumber, working its way from the bottom of the vegetable to the top. Once the hand has detected it has reached the top, a cutting device snips the stem and the hand places the freshly cut cucumber in a bin.

"We've got to make sure the technology we're using relies on simple components," Lynch said.

Other camera-focused systems carry plenty of risk, he added. Leaves can get in the way, or worse yet, the device can get mistaken between the stem and the main vine. Lynch said he's heard stories of harvesting devices that killed plants after cutting what it thought was a stem.

The system produced by VRIC has no risk of that, he said.

Additionally, Lynch said it's far easier for camera systems to identify the cucumber rather than differentiate between leaves, stems and vines. Ultimately, Lynch said his job is to innovate products that are a benefit to the industry, growers, and in the end, consumers. With labour, and especially skilled labour, an ongoing challenge for growers, this technology could be a solution.

The goal now is to find some partners to get a product ready for commercialization.

Vineland Research and Innovation Centre is working to develop robotic cucumber harvesting technology. In the photo is Brian Lynch, director of horticultural technology solutions.

The focus for Lynch was developing the specific harvesting tool. Existing chassis technology could be adapted or otherwise used to round out a complete product.

In October, staff will be welcoming industry members to the VRIC campus for demonstrations of the technology. It's happening at the same time as the Canadian Greenhouse Convention, which takes place in Niagara on Oct. 9 and 10. Industry members interested in registering can visit here: https://tinyurl.com/2p9w3fwu.

Predicting when a product might actually be available is always a challenge, but Lynch is hopeful it could happen in a couple years. One thing he's realized during this work is that the adoption of robotic technology is something of a two-way road. As much as his team and others like him are trying to create tools that work in current greenhouse settings, future greenhouse and greenhouse vegetables can be considered with robots in mind. That means facilities that are built with robotic needs in mind. It also means changing caretaking techniques to have plants that work better with robots or even developing new varieties that remove plant characteristics that stump robot devices.

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Retiring Directors: L-R Sara Tiersma, Arthur De Boer, Mark Bousfield, Rinske Peeters, Lisa Anderson, Amy De Boer

By Brenda Moser

It was an evening of great food, farm talk, catching up and awards…lots of awards. The Haldimand-Norfolk Holstein Club held its 2025 awards banquet at the Jarvis Community Centre with attendance at about 170.

Club president Arthur DeBoer acted as emcee for the evening and welcomed all in attendance. After a brief opening speech and grace, guests enjoyed a great catered meal and got to catch up more with those at their tables.

In attendance were guests Leslyn Lewis, Member of Parliament for Haldimand-Norfolk; MPP Bobbi Ann Brady; Haldimand Mayor Shelley Bentley; Norfolk Mayor Amy Martin and Toby Barrett, former MPP.

After enjoying a great meal, it was time to hand out the awards. The Century of Holstein Award recognizes the dedication and contribution of Holstein farmers through their long-standing 100 years of continuous membership with Holstein Canada. Recipients this year were the Anderson Family Farm, accepted by de-

→

scendants of Raymond Anderson and Peartome Holsteins, accepted by descendants of Charles O. Peart, or CO.

Anderson was born in Bealton, Ont. and was known for his promotion of farming cooperatives, helping to create the Villa Nova Milk Co-Op, the Norfolk Berry Growers Association and the Ontario Berry Growers Marketing Board. In 1916, he established his Reafod herd of black and white Holsteins – one of the first in Norfolk County. In 1923, Anderson registered his Reafod herd. While Anderson was kept busy as a farmer, he still found the time to serve two terms as a Liberal Member of Parliament. The farm remains in operation today thanks to Anderson's grandson Gerald and his great-grandson Wade.

In February 1920, Peartome Farms purchased a 250-acre Guersney and shorthorn dairy farm on First Line in Hagersville. In 1921, CO purchased his first registered Holstein, Gano Countess. The farm also underwent other changes when CO built a 40'X100' steel truss barn. It continues as a Holstein farm in operation today. Doug and Mary-Ann and Heather and her husband Peter are the fourth generation of Pearts to operate the farm and stated, "It has been our privilege to be members of Holstein Canada". In 1953, they gutted the main barn and doubled the number of stalls. A calf barn and feed barn were also added. The sons are also very appreciative of the friendships that they have built along the way and how they have benefitted from the programs offered by Holstein Canada.

Also, that evening was the prestigious Heart of the Herd Award for 2023 was presented. Top county winners are eligible to compete for provincial champion and will only be eligible to win the title once. Heart of The Herd award for Haldimand-Norfolk was Kaylas Windbrook Nova 94 6E, owned by Douglas Winger.

After the main awards of the evening were presented, there were quite a number of individual awards to hand out, including some to the younger generation.

Zeldenrust Acres received the top herd management score in Haldimand-Norfolk at the banquet. Owner Herman DeHaan, left, received the award from Art De Boer.

Right to Repair: Farmers influential in prying open "digital locks" on electronics

By Diane Baltaz

Two federal bills that recently received Royal Assent restore Canadians' "right to repair" their own equipment, including tractors and combines, along with greater interoperability.

On Nov. 7, Bills C-244 and C-294 – the two bills intended to amend Canada's Copyright Act -- received Royal Assent. These changes to the act allow circumvention of technological protection measures (TPMs) or "digital locks" in order to allow faster diagnosis, maintenance, repair and interoperability of Canadians' technological tools, including the right to obtain parts from other companies.

Various lobby groups from across Canada, including the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA), laud these bills as a critical step towards Canadian agriculture's innovation and sustainability.

Bill C-244, introduced in 2022 by Wilson Miao, the Liberal MP for Richmond Centre in BC, allows consumers and businesses to bypass TPMs such as encryption and password locks to access electronic components without having to travel to a dealership for repairs.

Bill C-294, introduced by Jeremy Patzer, Conservative MP for Saskatchewan's Cypress Hills-Grasslands, focuses on the interoperability of different computer programs or devices in which they are embedded, including the right to purchase parts from other brands without violating copyright laws.

Simply put, this means that farmers can repair their equipment more easily without being forced to pay authorized dealers to diagnose and repair equipment, often at the additional cost of long waits. Equipment breakdowns became particularly detrimental during harvest periods, resulting in lost productivity.

"This is great," exclaimed Brant-Haldimand-Norfolk OFA director Larry Davis of Burford. "We (OFA) have been asking the government for legislation that lets people make their own repairs and run diagnostics without having to travel to a dealership. We want to fix things on our own farms ourselves right now, compared with waiting a week or two for a dealership to fix equipment, especially in the middle of harvest."

Gone are the days when fixing a tractor, like the one pictured or others of its vintage, was a simple job that a farmer could undertake. Tractors have become more complicated with onboard computers and GPS units, requiring repairs at a dealership. Canada's Right to Repair legislation will allow repairs outside of the dealership, which is something farm groups lobbied for.

"With interoperability, instead of taking my equipment to one colour machine dealer, I can now take it to another colour. We really need to try to work on repairs ourselves, on our own farms," added Davis.

Proponents such Western University's assistant professor Alissa Centivany lauds the new laws' benefits, including better longevity and care of equipment, minimized waste, improved farm productivity and Canadian food security.

Centivany has researched technology and copyright issues for decades. She co-founded the Canadian Repair Coalition (CanRepair) and testified on copyright's impact on right-to-repair at parliamentary committees. She uses what she calls the "Three Cousins" to address systematic issues around consumer products: reparability, interoperability and durability.

While Bills C-244 and C-294 deal with copyright's impact upon digital encryption on multiple products, Centivany's advocacy focused on the misuse of copyright to stop repairs that can be done by equipment owners or local mechanics. She stated that she entered her work "through the farmer portal."

"Farmers kicked it off – they need credit as they pushed this issue forward," she said. "It began with the USA farm movement. It went before state and federal legislatures and resulted in memorandums of understanding, and eventually legislation in a few states."

Centivany explained these initial gains occurred in the United States because that is where the major farm equipment companies are headquartered. Because these companies are multinational in operation, Canadian farmers' own advocacy gained momentum after the initial U.S. success. This occurred around 2016, she added.

"One must ask, what has copyright to do with farming?" said Centivany. "Computer codes get treated similarly to copyright on books, resulting in a 'lock', which farmers are not allowed to break even if the repair has nothing to do with the code."

"Farmers are really sophisticated about their equipment and modifying it. We should let them keep doing what they've always done well," she added.

Although critics call these bills a good step, some advocates say that stand alone legislation is still needed for a more comprehensive right to repair. These include reforms in provincial consumer protection laws that require manufacturers to design products with ease of repairs without the fear of infringing upon various intellectual property rights.

"It's still complicated as farmers need to get the tools," said Davis. "There are some open dealers and repair shops to get these applications. These repairs aren't only for farmers but also for other types of equipment."

Centivany said that Canada remains behind Europe in right to repair issues. However, she said that Quebec passed Bill 29, which protects consumers from planned obsolescence and promotes reparability and durability of goods.

She added that the Ontario Legislature passed first reading on Bill 187, an act intended to protect right to repair items ranging from household appliances, wheel chairs and motorized vehicles, including heavy farming equipment.

‘Grain Guy’ John Lanthier strives to predict agricultural future(s)

By Jeff Tribe

Modern agricultural numbers are big, rolling off Market Smart Inc. CEO John Lanthier’s tongue with the ease of studied familiarity.

A million dollars for a combine, another million for a sprayer, maybe three-quarters of that for a tractor, land running as high as $60,000 an acre.

There is another set of more volatile numbers, equally important to a farmer’s bottom line. Two years ago, Lanthier pointed out, farmers were looking at over $10.50 (a bushel) corn off-farm.

“And now we’re back to is there margin there or not? That’s when it becomes really important for the guys.”

Risk and reward are correspondingly large for modern agricultural operations within those potentially volatile grain markets, and selling at the right price is a major contributor to a successful year.

For example, a five cent per bushel swing on 1,000 acres of corn, pegged this year by one leading ag corporation at a 198.8 bushel-per-acre average yield, translates into $9,940 on those theoretical 198,800 bushels.

There are many routes to trying to hit the sweet selling or contracting spot. Many farmers do it on their own, and many are excellent at it, Lanthier credited.

“They know when to hold them and when to fold them, so to speak,” he smiled.

Other producers may consult with staff at their elevator, and some subscribe to industry newsletters. Lanthier is part of this supportive service space, his business card reading ‘Ag. Consulting’, a formal term he translates as ‘Grain Guy.’

“Essentially, I’m trying to predict the future, you could say.”

The career is a natural one for a person who has always been involved in agriculture, his parents owning and operating Agro-Spray Chemicals and Supply in Tillsonburg. A tobacco primer in his youth, Lanthier attended Ridgetown in the Horticultural Sciences program, graduating to start his own soil testing company in the Alliston area. He subsequently worked in the family business, as a district coordinator for crop insurance and as a grain marketing coach for a major agricultural company before founding Market Smart Inc. in 2006.

Lanthier describes his role as ‘a coach’, providing clients with timely, well-researched information to support their decision-making process, expanding at times into negotiation support.

Market Smart charges an annual fee for services including a trademarked daily newsletter ‘Grain Talks’, in which Lanthier strives to parse through ‘a thousand bullet points of information’ and edit them down to highlight the most pertinent pieces. He also compiles a monthly report, backing both up with several onsite visits annually.

“You can’t always explain yourself the way you want through writing.”

As important as the ‘what’ Lanthier produces is the ‘how’ and ‘from where.’ His desk features computer screens showing the futures exchanges for corn, wheat and soybeans, the currency market, stock market, and his communications, emails and other correspondence from customers and industry sources. Lanthier subscribes to an agricultural platform, allowing him to eye live futures and wire news feed headlines.

‘Grain Guy’ John Lanthier at his desk.

There are basic fundamentals, supply and demand, who’s buying, who’s not. But Lanthier is also aware of global affairs, conflict in Europe, the fact South American soybean production has roughly tripled from 60 million tonnes in 2010 to a projected bumper harvest in 2025, market nervousness around threatened tariffs from south of the border, and the impact of the Canadian dollar on imports and exports.

He also networks with industry insiders virtually and in person, rubbing shoulders and comparing notes, for example, at the recent Grain Farmers of Ontario, Elgin-Norfolk Branch meeting. His goals include reflecting local provincial factors amongst a global outlook.

“A whole bunch of networking and asking questions and being on my game, I call it,” Lanthier said. “Always informed, always asking questions, always connected.”

His truck is wi-fi enabled, providing a form of mobile office. Lanthier recalls one crucial extended stretch spent parked in a rural setting, reaching out to farmers before what he viewed as a time-sensitive price window closed. He likes a ‘hands-on’ approach, meeting farmers in tractor or combine cabs during busy seasons, around their kitchen table during quieter winter months.

A business in which it’s impossible to be right every single time has its share of challenge, but also significant reward. Agriculture is an extremely dynamic and volatile industry to try and accurately predict, but that’s part of the attraction for Lanthier.

“Adrenalin,” he laughed, “and it’s very satisfying to know farmers value what you are doing.

“The other thing is you learn something every day - you have to stay on top of your game. I really enjoy just being on top of it all, all the time, watching the ebb and flow of why it’s always changing.”

Working at the place where biology and chemistry meet

David Liscombe receives honourable mention for his work in horticultural metabolomics

By Luke Edwards

A scientist at Vineland Research and Innovation Centre has been honoured for his work in metabolomics.

Dr. David Liscombe received an honourable mention in the Research and Innovation Excellence category at the 2024 Excellence in Agriculture Award. Recipients were announced at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair last month in Toronto.

"It's really exciting to be acknowledged by the province in this way," Liscombe said.

He shared an honourable mention with Croptracker, out of Kingston, while Brock University's Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute took home the top prize.

Liscombe works at the intersection of chemistry and biology, studying the chemicals that plants produce and how they affect certain biological traits. His work at Vineland mostly focuses on metabolomics, a relatively new approach in the horticultural and agricultural sector.

"It's widely applicable to understanding lots of different complex problems in horticulture, and agriculture more broadly," he said.

Chemicals and chemical production in plants can have huge and wide ranging effects on the plant and the fruit it produces. Liscombe's work takes him from studying disease resistance and response to environmental stresses all the way to flavour profiles.

Metabolomics itself isn't entirely new, but using it in the agricultural space is. That's partly the result of improving technology. When Liscombe was in university he'd have to send samples to Germany, where a mass spectrometer the size of a room would be used to analyze the samples.

Now, thanks in part to funding from groups such as the Canada Foundation for Innovation, VRIC has its own benchtop system that Liscombe can use.

One of the big benefits of using the metabolomics approach is that researchers can more quickly determine what kind of effect something is having on a plant. As an example, Liscombe said a biostimulant or other treatment might not have a visible impact on a tree for a year or more. However, at the chemical level, researchers can find effects more quickly and determine any potential benefits, drawbacks or other changes.

"We can monitor those responses on the molecular level and look at how the chemistry of the plant changes," Liscombe said.

Liscombe said he loves having the chance to be presented with a challenge, and figuring out ways to address it, especially when many people might not realize the role chemistry can play in solving such questions.

It was a lesson Liscombe himself learned back at McMaster University, when his organic chemistry teacher Paul Harrison took a chance on a young Liscombe, giving the then-biology student a summer job.

"He really opened my eyes to how important chemistry is in biology," Liscombe recalled.

Like many other sectors, Liscombe sees the future of metabolomics incorporating more data science and artificial intelligence to comb through the reams of data they collect. While researchers can uncover valuable information, human eyes can only do so much in samples that include many thousands of chemicals.

Enhanced data analysis will also help with another direction Liscombe believes his area of study will take.

"Considering it from more of an agri-ecosystem rather than just looking at single organisms," he said.

David Liscombe earned an honourable mention at the Excellence in Agriculture Awards last month.

Learning from experience, AgriMentor program helps women improve agricultural knowledge

By Luke Edwards

With so much time spent on the tractor or in the barn, farming can at times be an isolating experience.

And that can be doubly so for women, who have long held important roles on farms but only more recently have they begun taking on leadership positions. To help women farmers find a role model in the industry, a program that originated in Quebec is now being offered nationwide. Called AgriMentor, it pairs experienced and inexperienced women farmers, giving the relative newcomer someone to confide in and learn from.

"They (the mentor) are able to understand what the person who is in front of them is going through," said Adelphine Kabedi, program manager for AgriMentor.

It launched last year with the help of Agricultrices du Quebec, an organization of farm women. Federal government funding support from Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada came through Dimension E, which provides services for female entrepreneurs in the agriculture and forestry sectors.

The success of the Quebec pilot led to this year's expansion.

Adelphine Kabedi is the program manager for AgriMentor.

It's led in Ontario by the Union des cultivateurs franco-ontariens (UCFO), with the support of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) and is offered in both English and French.

"While women have always been present in the agriculture sector for decades their role has often been minimized," Kabedi said.

"Today we see more and more of them taking the reins of their operations."

Like any farmer, women operators face the challenges of climate change, economic factors and more. However, Kabedi said they often also face additional challenges around issues like work-life balance, or finding a role model.

AgriMentor seeks to help that.

Mentees are paired with an experienced woman farmer who has undergone training to become a mentor. Kabedi said the pairing is based on the needs of the mentee and what they're hoping to get out of the program. Participants commit six months, with meetings taking place once a month.

It's meant to be flexible, since farmers don't work typical 9-5 days. It's offered in French and English, and meetings can be virtual.

In Niagara, roughly one third of farm operators are women, roughly in line with Canada as a whole, where about 30 per cent of farmers are women.

The program is currently focusing on finding more mentees to pair with the existing mentor base. For more information visit ucfo.ca/agrimentor-individual-mentoring, or call Kabedi at 613-488-2929, ext. 103.

Norfolk's largest mural celebrates agriculture as the county's cultural foundation

By Diane Baltaz

A brightly-coloured, stylized mural or "story wall" which depicts aspects of Norfolk County's agricultural identity now dominates the Norfolk Agricultural Society (NAS)'s historic Home Craft Building in Simcoe.

Last year, the Nova Mutual Insurance Company of Jarvis, along with community volunteers painted a large, three-paneled mural which covers the building's entire north wall along South Drive at the Norfolk Fairgrounds.

Designed and supervised by Nova Mutual's resident artist, Shane Drever, the group worked on it throughout 2024, finishing it in time for the Norfolk County Fair and Horse Show in October.

The first section of the mural depicts Norfolk farmers' work in the fields and its resulting abundance. The second panel depicts the Simcoe Farmers' Market, which has operated in the Homecraft Building's lower level since 1980. The third panel depicts the property's annual autumn fair, which has celebrated local agricultural for 148 years.

States Nova Mutual Insurance on its Facebook page, "The mural narrates the story of how our land, when nurtured with care, provides for our community, and gives us reason to come together and celebrate. It showcases the incredible agriculture that abounds in Norfolk County and surrounding area, to these goods changing hands form farmers to our community at the weekly Simcoe Farmers' Market, to the culminating celebration of the harvest at the annual Norfolk County Fair and Horse Show."

The Norfolk Agricultural Society erected the Homecraft Building in 1953.

This mural on the PAS's Homecraft Building on South Drive, Simcoe, depicts local farming, the Simcoe Farmers' Market and the Norfolk County Fair and Horse Show

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Farmers Lung can be an often overlooked condition

By Luke Edwards

Often thought of as the cause of little more than a temporary irritant, the musty air many farmers contend with on a daily basis can lead to issues far more serious than many realize.

Farmer's Lung is a condition that should remain a concern for those in the agriculture community, even if it's taken a backseat in recent years. If ignored, it can worsen over time and lead to a farmer losing lung capacity or even requiring a lung transplant. This winter, Workplace Safety and Prevention Services sent out a post to raise awareness of the risks.

Ryan Dick, a health and safety consultant for WSPS, compiled a resource sheet of information from various sources outlining what farmer's lung is, how it affects people and how to mitigate exposure.

"Take those extra steps to make sure your tomorrows are going to be fine," he said.

Dick grew up on a farm, and still runs a goat operation in eastern Ontario where he lives. Looking back, he thinks he may have been exposed to it as a child.

"I'm pretty sure I was exposed to this as a kid because I had one year where I couldn't do anything with the hay," he said. Like most, he figured it was just hay fever, but now he's not so sure.

He's become much more aware of it now, however, and not just because his role in the health and safety world, but having seen one of his children experience similar symptoms while working on the farm.

According to a page devoted to the condition on the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety website, "farmer's lung is an allergic disease usually caused by breathing in the dust from mouldy hay. However, dust from any mouldy crop - straw, corn, silage, grain, or even tobacco - can also cause farmer's lung."

While there's a seeming lack of awareness as well as a dearth of recent research into farmer's lung, Dick's resource sheet offered up some information that could help.

Late winter to early spring seems to be when issues with farmer's lung peak, he said, which is when hay has had time to become mouldy and bottom layers are being fed.

Like many conditions, the early stages of farmer's lung seem relatively innocuous, with symptoms having been described as similar to a nagging cold.

Advancements in best practices can reduce the risk of farmer's lung, but operators should still be aware of the risks mouldy hay can present to long term health.

However, if ignored it can eventually cause permanent lung damage. As it worsens, a farmer might begin to notice shortness of breath that makes strenuous work more difficult. It can get to the point where something as simple as getting out of a chair is a challenge.

Other symptoms include: fever, chills, a dripping nose, irritating and harassing cough, blood-streaked sputum, difficult breathing with a tightness in the chest, crackling breathing, muscular pain and depression.

Oftentimes farmers will just assume it's the flu or a cold and let the symptoms run their course. However, even a visit to a doctor may not yield a farmer's lung diagnosis since the farmer might not connect their illness to their work, and the doctor may not think to ask.

"It's so difficult to diagnose," he said.

Symptoms of an acute farmer's lung attack can linger as long as two weeks, but usually decrease after 12 hours. Severe attacks can last 12 weeks.

If a farmer is continually exposed to large amounts of mouldy dust and has several acute attacks over a period of years, they can develop a chronic form of farmer's lung. This can lead to increasing shortness of breath with occasional mild fever and usually a significant loss of weight with general lack of energy. This can last for months and is also marked by permanent lung damage.

Dick said there isn't much information on how many people in Canada suffer from farmer's lung, however it is most common in regions with wet weather at harvest time. It's also more common on dairy farms, "especially those not equipped with automated equipment for handling hay or feed," according to the CCOHS.

However, the organization pointed out it can affect a wide variety of people, including: grain handlers, stable employees, poultry workers, attendants of zoo and circus animals and pet shop workers. Even city people who occasionally visit stables can be at risk

Farmers working with loose hay out in the field have a relatively low risk. However, they can quickly inhale large amounts of dust when working with hay in a confined space.

Fortunately, there are best practices that can reduce risk. And in many cases, these practices fit in with other efforts to improve the overall operation of the farm.

Avoiding crop spoilage is the first step in reducing the risk, Dick said. Other tips include: drying wet hay, grain and crops at harvest (an effective but often challenging solution, Dick admits), storing hay with a high risk of spoilage in silage instead of bales, ventilating buildings that have a lot of dusty material, mechanizing chores that involve handling hay and feed, wetting down barns and stables before cleaning them to prevent the spores from becoming airborne, and finally, the use of properly fitted respirators.

The natural evolution of farming practices has helped in some ways. Moving to larger bales that are handled primarily by tractors reduces the risk of contact, for instance.

"Overall, we're handling the hay less, we know how to store it better," he said.

Dick encourages farmers and those who work on farms to consider adopting practices to reduce the risk of breathing in those damaging spores. WSPS has a resource hub for farmer's lung on its website, wsps.ca.

Tar spot a concern for Ontario corn growers, but there are solutions

By Luke Edwards

It may be an issue that needs to be on the mind of every corn grower in Ontario now, but fortunately there are ready-made solutions to the widespread arrival of tar spot.

"Really, tar spot is everyone's problem now," said Emma Dieleman, an agronomist with Sygenta. Dieleman was one of the presenters at the joint annual general meeting of the Niagara and Haldimand Soil and Crop Improvement Associations. She was one of several in attendance to discuss the fungal disease that has expanded to affect essentially all of the northern corn belt.

While the spread of the disease may seem concerning, Dieleman and others said there's no need to panic.

"Management fits really well into what we're already doing," she said.

Existing fungicides can be quite useful, and timing of application can fit in with spraying for other fungal issues like DON, Dieleman said. And most of the time, one pass is sufficient.

And since growers south of the border have been dealing with tar spot for a decade or so, new genetics are starting to become available that will provide better resistance. Already, she said certain hybrid varieties show considerably more resistance, and Dieleman encouraged growers to consider tar spot resistance in their annual seed planning.

Tar spot is now a province-wide concern for corn growers in Ontario. However, there are effective ways to deal with the fungal infection.

"Considering tar spot susceptibility is going to be super important going forward," she said.

The fungus was first confirmed in Ontario in 2020, but has now spread throughout the province. It can look similar to other diseases, but includes raised black lesions on the leaf surface that can't be rubbed off. It tends to start on the lower canopy and move up.

Cooler temperatures, high relative humidity, lots of dew and saturated soils are other conditions that tar spot loves.

When those conditions are right, farmers will begin to notice symptoms within about two weeks.

"And the cycle continues as long as we have the right conditions," Dieleman said.

However, farmers are also fortunate in that it seems as though it's the early part of the growing season is the most worrisome. A late infection offers limited risk, Dieleman said.

In a later Q and A panel, local agronomists said tar spot was one of the subjects that often came up during discussions with farmers planning ahead for 2025.

"Tar spot was part of the conversation, but it isn't the only thing we should be paying attention to," said Stephanie Fletcher of Twenty View Farms.

Others agreed, saying tar spot often came up in discussions, but yield continued to lead the charge.

Business offers HR solution to farms

By Jeff Helsdon

A new business is offering human resources solutions tailored to farmers.

Shawn McGowan started Agri-Business HR Solutions in October 2024. He saw the need for support in human resources after working for the Norfolk Fruit Growers Association and a large local farm for four seasons and being a member of the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association (OFVGA) labour committee.

"Through that I realized there is a real need for human resources in agriculture," he said.

Having a background in human resources and management, he decided to start his own business last summer. He had built a lot of contacts through working with the committee and approached Venture Norfolk with his business plan.

"My goal is to make human resources is affordable, not every farm is equipped to hire someone full-time for $100,000," McGowan said.

Originally from Hamilton, he has lived in Simcoe the past five years. McGowan studied business administration in school, and since has done courses through the Human Resource Professional Association, college courses, and is working towards his Certified Human Resource Professional Certification (CHRP).

With approximately 6,000 of the 36,000 ttemporary foreign workers in Norfolk County, McGowan saw Norfolk as a prime location to start the business. He sees the challenge for growers is to meet the Service Canada requirements for the program.

"I will do everything up to the arrival at the airport so the farmer only has to go get the people at the airport," he said, explaining the onboarding process can be streamlined to the point of processing 60 people within an hour or two.

Some of the services Agri-Business HR Solutions can assist with include: labour impact assessments, communication between countries for people arriving, benefits and payroll. McGowan offers his services by time, and in packages, rather than a farm operation requiring a full-time staff member.

"It's a time barrier with a lot of farmers because they are so busy with the operations side the administration tends to suffer," McGowan said. "Even simple things like onboarding, do you have an employee handbook, copies of all their paperwork?"

McGowan has presented on labour issues at the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Convention in connection with the OFVGA, and will be leading seminars on onboarding and how to run a team this year.

Although Agri-Business HR Solutions is targeted at the agriculture sector, McGowan said he can assist any small business, especially those who are using the temporary foreign worker program.

"The process of onboarding really isn't different between agriculture and small business. The pieces may be different but the process isn't different," he said.

Since starting the business, McGowan has been advertising, promoting his business through social media and has joined the Tillsonburg, Simcoe and Delhi Chambers of Commerce.

"A lot of it is word of mouth and getting out there," he said.

McCowan can be contacted at shawn@agribusinesshr.ca

Shawn McGowan.

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United Potato Growers of Canada GM gives industry update at 2025 Canadian Potato Summit

Total sales value of 2023/24 potato crop surpasses $2B

By Tamara Botting

It was a record crop for potatoes this year in Canada.

That was one of the main highlights Victoria Stamper, general manager of the United Potato Growers of Canada, brought to the 2025 Canadian Potato Summit. The virtual event was held in January, and presented by Potatoes in Canada.

She noted that when looking at the numbers over time – from 2003 to 2024 – "Although our planted acres haven't reached the peak we had back in 2003 of over 457,000 acres, we can see that production actually has surpassed back then, with the assistance of steadily increasing yields."

This crop season, there were just over 391,000 acres planted. Of those, 383,666 acres were harvested, and the overall production for the country was just under 127 million hundredweight (cwt).

The total sales value of the potato crop was over $2 billion in 2023/24.

"So, a pretty good crop in 2024," Stamper noted.

The most recent survey – which dates back to 2021 – showed 951 potato farms across Canada.

The largest potato growing provinces in acres were Prince Edward Island (85,300), Manitoba (78,600) and Alberta (76,500).

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Stamper noted that PEI, New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario all had a marked improvements in their harvested acreage. The lowest was PEI, which was up 2.5 per cent, and the highest was Quebec, up 6.6 per cent.

For context, she noted that this represents "not only what was pulled out of the ground, but also what is marketable from storage."

Production in Eastern Canada was up, "mainly due to much better weather conditions" than last year, Stamper said.

Weather always plays a big role agriculture, and this year was no different.

For planted acres, Stamper said there were some regional differences across Canada.

"Most started with an early spring; planting went very, very well. The crop was moving along right until July – some saying (it was) the best crop they had seen, and then … Mother Nature pulled the rug out from under us. August went very, very dry for many; Ontario actually had some June rains that kind of switched things up for them. In general, we can see that impacted in the yields; most regions are either stable or down."

As for the harvest, "Although most of North America in general experienced some unseasonably warm temperatures in September and October – causing harvest to slow for some, with partial dig days at the beginning – overall, the growers I spoke with were happy with how the harvest went, considering; especially compared to last year," Stamper said. "Conditions were drier, which may have caused some issues in certain areas, depending on the soil type, but much preferred – I think – to the solid rains of 2023."

Another major influence on the Canadian potato market is the one located south of the border.

Stamper said the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has estimated that production there is down about 22 million cwt – or 5.1 per cent from the previous year – with 38,000 fewer acres planted or harvested.

Over half of that difference was in Washington and Idaho alone.

Noting that Idaho produces around 135 million cwt of potatoes all on its own – and again, all of Canada doesn't quite produce 127 million cwt – Stamper said, "They are definitely a force to be reckoned with."

Victoria Stamper, general manager of the United Potato Growers of Canada, brought an update on the potato industry to the 2025 Canadian Potato Summit.

That's not in any way to suggest that Canada's potato crop is insignificant.

"We not only have more potatoes in the bin that we got out of the ground, but we also have more marketable crop. The issues of hollow heart and rot that we were seeing in the northeast, including New Brunswick, Quebec and some even in PEI, are just really not present this year, and we believe that the pack out rates definitely are improving," Stamper said.

There is a bit of a wait and see happening, since the region experienced unseasonably warm temperatures through harvest, and it's not yet known how that will impact the long-term storage, "particularly on yellows, which can be subject to some issues in storage," Stamper said.

One of the essential foundations of the potato market is there being a balance between the fresh and processing sector (where potatoes are made into products like French fries and chips).

"We are monitoring potatoes from the processing sector, that they don't fall into the fresh market … we do keep an eye on that," Stamper said.

"The global demand for French fries … continues, but at a lower rate than previously forecast. We were originally around 3 to 5 per cent per growth forecast in the last couple of years, and that's maybe slowed down to 1 per cent."

Currently, Canada as a whole continues to have a good potato seed industry, with 58,525 seed acres certified across the country in 2024.

However, Stamper said, "There are concerns that fewer acres under contract for the processing (sector) may impact the planting intentions in 2025; something for the seed sector to think about."

She added that for producers in the seed sector, "they have the same production cost as in the other sectors, but even higher risk. (It's) something we need to work on and make sure we're keeping on track with in our seed sector and supporting them."

Trying to look ahead, the numbers show that there is still a demand for potatoes, in the fresh and processed sectors. Around 85 per cent of households buy potatoes, and quick service restaurants continue to expand.

Also, "The chip market is quite active, particularly in private labels, where consumers are still looking to spend their dollar the best way they can," Stamper said.

Potential challenges on the horizon for the market include the possibility of strikes with workers in the distribution portion of the supply chain, crop application availability and cost, erratic weather, and seed availability.

One of the largest unknowns as of the potato summit (and print deadline) was whether the tariffs on Canadian goods entering the United States as proposed by US President Donald Trump would be implemented, and if so, what impact they would have.

"Our associations in Canada are definitely lobbying and making sure that people are aware tariffs are not good for people on either side of the border," Stamper said.

Despite the challenges the potato growing sector faces, "The most important factor, really, is for us to come together as an industry and face these challenges together, rather than divided; it's just more productive for us long-term."

Potato trials bring researchers together from across Canada

Simcoe site tests heat tolerance in varieties, sees 'excellent results'

Erica Fava, left, potato breeding program biologist with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), and Vanessa Currie, potato research technician with the University of Guelph, gave an update on the National Potato Variety Trials 2024 during the Canadian Potato Summit 2025.

By Tamara Botting

The ideal potato for growers will be one that has heat and drought tolerance, pest and disease resistance, matures early, has long-term storage potential, maintains its quality while in storage, and – of course – has competitive yields.

"That's an awful lot to ask of one potato, so we're doing our best to work towards those goals," said Erica Fava, potato breeding program biologist with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC).

She and Vanessa Currie, potato research technician with the University of Guelph, gave an update on the National Potato Variety Trials 2024 during the Canadian Potato Summit 2025. The virtual event was held in January, and presented by Potatoes in Canada.

Currie spoke on behalf of the non-AAFC researchers. (Broadly speaking, these are industry partners, even though, as she pointed out, she personally is at the university).

"The research integrates a capacity from public and private organizations to improve potato production. The National Potato Variety Trial Network leverages the expertise from across Canada as a critical aspect of the potato breeding pipeline in Canada," Currie said.

In the trials, the selections are broken down into three tiers; they start at tier one, and move up a tier with each subsequent year of testing.

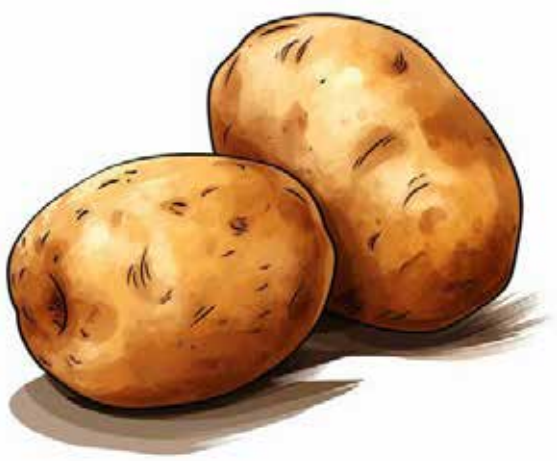
The testing includes things like putting pests and larva on leaf disk samples from the potatoes in the trials, and evaluating how much they eat; also, charting the different varieties' growth rates and yields.

Fava added, "Our program has really been focussing on disease resistance, and viruses in particular. We test all of our selections fairly early on for PVX (and) PVY in particular; we have a number of selections now with PVX resistance, and we're starting to build up more lines with PVY resistance."

Once the trials are completed, "Our selections can be taken up by industry members to test on their own farms, or through the coordinated trial."

After that, "If there's still interest in the lines, they may be then registered as a commercial variety and be marketed."

Under the current operating model, producers financially contribute to the work being done, and the benefits they receive in turn include



non-exclusive access to the lines within the breeding program. (The AAFC's website has a list of the potato varieties currently available for non-exclusive licensing, which can be found here: bit.ly/3WAQsi4.)

"This model has been really great for our program, because we've had a lot of direct communication with the members, which has helped our selection decisions and our cross decisions. It has also given us some stable funding to run the program," Fava said.

Currie said it is important that Canada have its own stable of Canadian varieties "for food sustainability."

Specifically, "The goal of the network is to ensure new (and) improved Canadian-adapted varieties become available to Canadian companies and growers. More specifically, the project aims to breed these new varieties with a suite of traits which enable the Canadian potato industry to thrive amid mounting societal and environmental pressures. This success will be realized through resistant varieties with the capacity to thrive under the variable and extreme conditions of a changing climate."

One such trial – looking at heat tolerance in the AAFC lines – was conducted at the Simcoe research station.

Currie said, "We had excellent results in that trial … and look forward to continuing that, to determine which lines may be the most resilient to climate change."

She said part of what made the varieties in Simcoe perform well is that they matured early.

"If you want varieties to do well in warmer regions, you've got to get them in, get them grown, and get them out in short succession," Currie said. "We're continuing to work on those varieties that are adapted for warmer climates."

This is one of the strengths of the program, Currie said; since there are partners across the country, "each region is able to cater a little bit to their own markets, yet we collaborate on a national scale, and tie everything together through the researchers."

Fava noted that currently, "Our program really mostly concentrates on the fresh market reds; however, as we're making selections, if there's something that's looking promising, either in the white or yellow category, we'll keep those."

If people are interested in getting an AAFC line, Fava said "it's important to go to a lot of Field Days in your area, to get a firsthand look. … If you want to trial a line, reach out to me, and I'll do my best to make that happen."

Both researchers offered to send further information, including detailed reports, to anyone who is interested in learning more; their email addresses are erica.fava2@agr.gc.ca and vcurrie@uoguelph.ca.

Measured approach to growing leeks made Canning Produce Ontario's largest producer

Bob and Mary Jane Davis (left) still help out Emily and Corey Davis, who are posing with two of their three children, Adley and Riker.

By Diane Baltaz

You could say that Corey Davis of Canning Produce, Paris, was born into growing one of the world's oldest and nutritional foods.

In 1988, just prior to his birth, Davis's parents, Bob and Mary Jane, assumed a retiring farmer's contract to grow leeks for a local wholesaler.

Although human beings consumed leeks since the Bronze Age (4,000 BC) and while building the Egyptian Pyramids, they were still a minor and seasonal niche crop in Ontario in the late 1980s. Most retailers relied on importing most of this allium from Mexico and the United States.

Intrigued by its possibilities, the Davis family took the contract on a trial basis, growing a small acreage on their farm, located between Canning and the Brant-Oxford County Line. It took only a week to harvest, and, despite its labour intensity and high input costs, they loved it.

Today, Canning Produce is Ontario's largest producer of leeks, producing approximately 84 acres annually, and supplies three large grocery chains from late July through to March.

Corey joined the farm full time after graduating from university in 2012 and now manages the crop. His wife, Emily, handles office duties and finances. Bob and Mary Jane continue to help out.

"My goal is to provide leeks to customers year round," said Davis.

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Corey Davis (right) with his father, Bob doing their daily crop inspection.

Their varieties fall into three categories: spring leeks, which mature early with pale green leaves; fall leeks, which are darker in colour and hold well in the fields; and winter leeks, characterized by dark, blue leaves.

These categories permit a staggered production for earlier plantings and a longer growing season than most growers produce. The first seedlings are planted in the farm's seven, propane-heated greenhouses in early February, are ready for field planting shortly after April 20. The final planting generally ends by mid-June.

First harvest happens around July 20, said Davis; after washing, trimming and packaging in bundles of three, go directly to market on the following day. The second harvest occurs in October, allowing the Davises to extend their sales into the winter.

The family originally grew sweet corn, which Davis's grandparents specialized in after purchasing the farm in 1943. Bob and Mary Jane took over the farm in 1984 and purchased it in 1998, while raising their four children, of which Corey was the youngest.

The Davis family gradually extended their leek acreage when market demand allowed it. They visited growers' farms in Europe and in Canada to glean new ideas. In order to increase efficiencies, the farm added a wash line, and Bob rebuilt an old peanut harvester to harvest leeks.

Corn production ceased by 2001, the same year that the farm incorporated as Canning Produce, Inc. The family also transformed their barn into a pack house and extended their storage facilities. The seven greenhouses were added in 2004, said Davis. By 2007, Canning Produce hired 10 skilled temporary foreign workers from Jamaica to handle their increasing field work and processing.

"It got big in 2008," said Davis. That was when his father took a box of leeks to the headquarters of Loblaw Corporation, with a pitch about their extended market season.

"They talked, but it was still a year before they bought from us," he added.

Presently, Sobeys and Metro also ordered their produce, with each bundle bearing the farm name and location on the tag.

Seed stock comes from Nunham's, a Netherlands seed company which Davis said sets the industry standard.

"There are tons of different varieties of leeks," he said. "I am continuously trying their latest and greatest releases to see how they grow."

Growing leeks once they get into the field provides a "balancing act" said Davis. "They're a thirsty crop; otherwise, the plants just sit there, not growing. Yet they don't like being wet."

Davis irrigates at night in order to optimize water efficiency, drawing water from an on-farm pond as well as from the Nith River.

"Although that means working during the day and then being up nights to irrigate!" he added.

Diseases are few, and the leek moth has yet to seriously threaten the crop, but times of excessive moisture keeps Davis vigilant against fungus.

Leek fields are rotated in alternate years with oat-clover plantings. The crop also demands several fertilizer applications throughout the season.

Weed control is mainly done manually. They carefully time the crop's cultivation, waiting until the leaves are tall enough to inhibit sand from splashing into the plants' upper leaves.

Emily handles the farm's promotions such as posting crop updates and recipes on the farm's social media when she's not dealing with pay roll, orders and spreadsheets.

"The most asked question I get about leeks is 'What do you do with them?'" she said. Less pungent than onions, she said that the entire plant is edible, nutritious and versatile, braises well and makes excellent soup stocks – especially as leek-potato soup.

"Braised leeks make a great side dish," said Davis. "Use them as a stuffing, or adding to roasts, grilled meats, quiche, and grilled cheese sandwiches. If you use the whole plant, cut the leaves off."

The family's favourite recipe is leek bruschetta, which a Quebec leek grower shared. Frying the medallions in soy sauce is another Davis delicacy; so does air frying them to create leek chips, which their three children, Adley, Riker and Kashton, enjoy.

By winter-seeding early variety leeks in the greenhouse, the first harvest happens around July 20, providing earlier sales to the grocery chains.

Colorado potato beetles continue to offer control challenges to farmers

'It's the entire season where you have them feeding on these potato plants'

Christine Noronha, left, entomologist with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), answered some audience questions following her presentation, 'Colorado potato beetle management in potatoes' at the Canadian Potato Summit 2025 in January. Bree Rody, agriculture editor for Potatoes in Canada, facilitated this portion of the presentation.

By Tamara Botting

"If you grow potatoes, you have (Colorado) potato beetles," said Christine Noronha, entomologist with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC), as she presented at the Canadian Potato Summit 2025. The virtual event was held in January, and presented by Potatoes in Canada.

These insects spend their winters hibernating in the soil; generally, they'll go to hedgerows or forested areas, where the soil doesn't freeze

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very deeply. In the spring, they'll emerge and find the new potato plants to feed on (they also eat tomato and eggplant leaves) and lay their eggs – up to 500 over a four to five week period.

Noronha said that even if the early growth of the potato plant is completely consumed, it will grow new leaves.

"Potatoes are quite resilient at that early stage in the season," she said.

However, these pests aren't just a spring problem.

"It's the entire season where you have them feeding on these potato plants" both the adults and the larvae, Noronha said.

Besides eating the leaves and stems, "sometimes you'll even see them feeding on the tubers" at the end of the season.

Noronha called the Colorado Potato Beetle "a very important insect defoliator of potatoes."

Insecticides have been the main approach when trying to control the potato beetle population, but unfortunately, "it has a long history of developing resistance."

In fact, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the potato beetle's resistance to the common insecticides of the time had developed to the extent that there was a control failure in many regions, including Canada.

"We just couldn't control these beetles; there was nothing in the toolbox to use. That's when researchers and farmers started using other methods to control potato beetles, because there was nothing else," Noronha said.

Biological controls have be en studied and used, including an entomopathogen that just infects insects, as well as introducing other bugs that feed on the potato beetles' eggs and larvae.

Mechanical controls developed have included lining trenches with plastic (where the degree of the slope keeps the beetles that are walking trapped), using a machine to blow the beetles off the plants and trap them in a container, and using a machine similar to a vacuum to remove them from the plants.

Noronha said that while alternative methods can be effective when the potato plants are smaller, their efficacy diminishes as the plants get bigger.

That's why "insecticides play a really big role in our integrated best management strategies; they are a tool that is required in the toolbox. So, we need to figure out ways to reduce the development of resistance, or slow down the development of resistance."

She explained that when you spray an insecticide, there will always be some beetles that are naturally resistant to it, and will survive to mate. The offspring of the survivors are likely to have inherited the same resistance, meaning that with each subsequent spray of the same insecticide, you'll only be killing those that aren't resistant to it – a group that will continue to get smaller – and the population that is resistant will be able to thrive unchecked.

That's why it's important for potato growers to use different classes of insecticides each time they spray, so "we don't let them reproduce to the extent that they are going to take over the population," Noronha said.

As important as rotation between insecticide classes is, it's not a silver bullet.

"The potato beetle is called a super bug, and the reason for it being called a super bug is because it develops cross resistance," Noronha said. "That's why in the 1980s and 1990s, we had this resistance to all the insecticides, because sometimes what happens is, they develop resistance to one, but they are also less susceptible to another chemical, so they have this cross resistance between the different classes. This is what makes it such a difficult insect to work with."

She noted that in a 2023 study, scientists found that there was a low level of cross resistance between the diamides and the neonicotinoids.

"This is really important information, and we really need to look at it and use it to make decisions for the future, of how this insect is going to be managed."

Research continues to look at different approaches to address potato beetle controls. For instance, there is a new class of pesticides, RNAi, which use RNA interference to control pests. Also, potato breeding programs always strive to make the plants less appealing to potato beetles in the first place.

In the meantime, it's important to use the tools currently available responsibly, Noronha said.

She urged potato growers to scout their fields regularly – making sure that they use insecticides "only when thresholds are reached," and that after an application, they scout the field again to assess its efficacy.

"Because if there is a failure in control, you know that you could stop it right there and delay resistance at that time, because if you wait too long, the whole population becomes resistant, and then it's very difficult to work with it," she said.

All of these are important steps to make sure the industry is able to "keep these insecticides in our toolbox as long as we possibly can."

Great Mountain Ginseng continues to grow

Alex & Schelling Yeh

Products in Store.

By Brenda Moser

More and more people are focusing on their personal health and how they can improve it. Much of that has to do with what we eat and how we can become more conscientious of that. It has become evident that we seem to be turning to natural products and the benefits they provide. One of those products is ginseng and it has seen an increased interest in the last few years. Two brothers can attest to that first hand.

Alex Yeh of Scotland and his brother Schelling of Toronto have pretty much grown up in the ginseng industry, starting with their grandfather in Waterford in 1976, when he established Y.E. Ginseng. To gain more knowledge in the growth of ginseng, grandpa worked for free at a Canadian-run ginseng farm. Three years later, he was able to acquire a quarter acre of land and built a store, in 2020, at 1904 Windham Rd. 3 for ginseng sales. It has since closed down. This laid the foundation though for Great Mountain Ginseng. In 2022, the siblings decided to purchase a piece of land to start growing and today the Yehs have 100 acres of land at 4425 Highway 24 North. They also partner with three farmers in the Delhi area, Burford and Tillsonburg.

Ginseng is weather dependant, requiring cold winters and dry summers, but not too hot and sunny. They harvest around 100,000 to 120,000 pounds a year locally and then purchase from other local growers.

There are about 85 grades of ginseng, and the older the product the better the flavour, size and shape. The Yehs focus on raw ginseng for their honey, coffee, instant tea and candy. They

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have product in 13 stores or outlets but the bulk of their product is sold in their local store. They have recently expanded into dried seafood, allergen products and organics as well.

Their facility is, to say the least, quite a sight to see. The building stage was quite a challenge as they started building in 2019, and then COVID hit. The construction of the 45,000 square-foot structure threw them some curves along the way, due to COVID restrictions, but they persevered and are using every square inch of the facility now.

I was given a guided tour by Schelling and was impressed by not only the cleanliness but the procedures they must go to pass government regulations. Every stage of processing is assigned its own sterile room where all staff follow stringent health and safety rules (lab coats, hairnets and controlled temperatures) to insure there is no contamination of any kind.

"We are an organic facility, and ahead of the curve compared to other companies," said Schelling. "Our busiest time is September to December with a steady stream of buyers coming in".

From the processing area we then headed towards the huge warehouse…40,000 square feet…also climate controlled, housing prepared and packaged products ready for shipment. Floor to ceiling were boxes upon boxes of Great Canadian Ginseng awaiting shipment. They supply to several out-of-area stores from Toronto to Ottawa to Montreal to Vancouver as well as T & T Supermarkets, with outlets in London, Waterloo and Mississauga.

Schelling explained that they are already considering expansion of their facility and have no plans to leave this area.

"We are very vested in this area so any possible expansion would be here. We work well with the farmers here. We are also happy to work with the local council. They have been very helpful with building permits and we have a good rapport with them," he said.

Great Mountain Ginseng.

Store hours are Monday to Friday 8 a.m to 4:30 p.m .

"We try to accommodate customers as much as we can and educate them in our products," Schelling said.

Online ordering is available, but if at all possible, it is worth a trip to shop instore to check out the many products they sell. There are between 2,000 and 3,000 products available …not all in store, of course. They also carry some traditional herbs and remedies and staff can answer any questions you might have. Their latest product they are featuring in store is maple syrup..

Signage will be put up shortly, but in the meantime the 911 number of Great Canadian Ginseng is 4425. To keep up with technology they are also on Facebook, You Tube and Instagram under Great Mountain Ginseng.

Raise a glass to CCOVI: Institute at Brock wins provincial research and innovation award

By Luke Edwards

When highlighting some of the projects that led to her team winning a provincial award, Debbie Inglis included one program they don't even maintain anymore.

It was by design, not mistake.

The program in question is the VineAlert project, which warns grape growers when temperatures drop to dangerous levels, helping them pinpoint when to turn on their wind machines. Brock's Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute developed the program but handed off management of it to the Grape Growers of Ontario a few years ago.

However, for CCOVI's director, it was a perfect example of what provincial officials were looking for when determining research and innovation award winner at the Excellence in Agriculture awards.

"They also were looking for ties back to the industry sector you're supporting," explained Inglis.

To Inglis, having the industry take over the program is among "the best acknowledgment to us that the industry sees value in this program."

CCOVI won the prestigious award, finishing ahead of Kingston's Croptracter and David Liscombe, from Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, who each received honourable mentions.

"The most rewarding aspect here was to be recognized by the province for outputs to the industry that are making measurable and tangible difference for the grape and wine sector," Inglis said.

The university, led by vice president of research Tim Kenyon, nominated the institute for the award. In addition to highlighting their research and innovation work, Inglis said the nomination also showcased the strong female leadership that exists. Beyond Inglis, two of the institute's three staff scientists are women, as are 70 per cent of staff employees and more than half of the undergrad students the institute supports.

CCOVI won the Research and Innovation award at the Excellence in Agriculture awards. From left: Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness John Jordan; CCOVI Director Debbie Inglis; Brock Acting Vice-President, Research Michelle McGinn; Minister of Agriculture, Food, and Agribusiness Rob Flack.

The VineAlert program is just one aspect of CCOVI's research into supporting Ontario's and Canada's grape growers. They also research varieties and their responses to the cold winters that exist in Canada.

Disease is another huge focus of the institute.

"We've done a lot of work over the past few years to improve our ability to detect harmful plant viruses that can get into grape vines and take away from vine productivity, yield tolerance, cold temperature and, ultimately, fruit quality," Inglis said.

That work has put them at the forefront of clean plant efforts on the national scale, supporting the Canadian Grape Vine Certification Network.

As Inglis explains it, "there's no way to get rid of grape virus from the grapevine, other than to rip it out of the vineyard."

That's why repositories with certified clean plants are vital and detecting virus in grapevine material is so important. With cuttings taken from a mother plant are grafted onto rootstock, any virus in the mother plant will be passed on to its cuttings.

New research by Brock has been conducted to eliminate the presence of virus at the tissue culture stage, ensuring clean mother plants.

Another area the institute has focused on in recent years is providing their expertise to wineries, especially smaller wineries who can't afford their own research department. More than 150 clients use CCOVI for various analytical services, such as measuring levels of acidity, sugars or sulfur dioxide. Inglis said they can provide some input to wineries before they send samples off for regulatory approval.

"It's not fun if a winery finds out just at the time they want to release their wines that they're not within the limits," Inglis said.

CCOVI's also been accredited by the Ontario Wine Appellation Authority (VQA) for analysis, and beyond that, Inglis said they don't just conduct the analysis but add in interpretation and knowledge transfer to growers and winemakers who may not have the same academic background.

As if that's not enough, CCOVI has also dedicated resources to helping improve sparkling wine quality, providing research at

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each stage of production, along with local production using appassimento styles.

And since they are a part of a university, CCOVI is also known for its professional and continuing studies, and especially for their creative approaches. Inglis said they were early adopters of online courses and micro credentials, which help people already working in the industry gain important knowledge without having to take a leave of absence from their jobs.

Looking ahead, Inglis said the new research farm being developed by Brock will be huge for the work they do at CCOVI.

“That will be a big component of our clean plant program going forward,” she said.

With sustainability becoming a bigger focal point, and climate change affecting growing seasons, Inglis envisions her team being a key player in developing new varieties for use in Canada.

“There are some projects that are just starting up that are looking at newer sustainable varieties coming out of Europe to see if they will perform as well as they are performing in Europe but under our climatic conditions,” Inglis said.

“If that all goes well in terms of their production efficiency as well as quality of wine then we can put those grape varieties into the clean plant program.”

And it’s not just new varieties as a response to climate change, it’s also new wines in response to consumer changes, as customers are looking for lower or non-alcoholic options. Inglis said they’re exploring things like locally isolated yeast streams that divert sugar production elsewhere, as well as technology that reduces alcohol levels.

Inglis thanked Kenyon and the larger Brock community for both the nomination and its general support, as well as the industry at large for supporting them both financially and with their time.

Finally, inglis said the whole CCOVI team deserves kudos. When she found out they won she quickly gathered everyone for a photo.

“This was an award for the team,” she said.

CCOVI Director Debbie Inglis said the institute’s win at the recent Excellence in Agriculture awards was a true team win.

NORFOLK FARMS

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Child Nutrition Network supports school snack programs

By Brenda Moser

Norfolk County is fortunate to have soil and climate conditions that are conducive to growing and harvesting a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. Some of these crops are shared with local schools thanks to the generosity of local businesses and companies that help to fund the Farm to Schools program.

The Child Nutrition Network was established in 1998, under the umbrella of Haldimand Norfolk Reach, the Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit and several community members and organizations.

Sharon Smyth, program co-ordinator for the CNN, works for REACH and has been there about 18 years now. There are 44 schools who benefit from the program and Smyth is responsible for about 35 of those schools. CNN provides breakfast, morning meal, lunch and snack programs. In total, they provide nourishment to over 9,300 Haldimand Norfolk children and youth two to five days per week, depending on the need. The program is universal for all students and anybody can access it.

The Farm to School program has been running for over 14 years and works with the Norfolk Fruit Growers, where apples are kept in cold storage and berries in freezers until needed. In Caledonia and Dunnville, the Salvation Army offers fridge and freezer space for the program.

Community clubs and organizations are also generous in donations to help cover any costs incurred for the program. The program also benefits from fundraising

The program runs from October to June and Smyth stated that they have been fortunate in having an abundance of fruit and have only run out one or two times. Smyth describes the program as a real win-win for everyone.

As with many other school programs, the Farm to School program relies on volunteers to step forward to pick the apples up (in Simcoe), once a week, on Tuesday, and deliver them to the schools on their list. They are appreciative of their delivery driver, Dave Douglas, who volunteers his own time to pick up in Simcoe and drop off at the various schools on that day's list. They also rely on parent volunteers at each of the schools to keep the program running.

The Snack Program, run by the several schools, can also offer such things as fruit cups, applesauce, smoothies, sometimes cantaloupe…all healthy and never high in sugar and certainly not chocolate.

"The students might try something they've never had before and discover they actually might like it." adds Peggy.

Apples remain available to the students all day with bins in the office, gym and guidance room. They're able to grab an apple any time.

The snack program has been a great experience for Garbedian.

"It's a great partnership hanging out with the kids…I'm very lucky. We're always looking for parent volunteers. Word of mouth seems to work and we welcome seniors as well to apply."

There is a large number of funding partners…provincial, regional and local… and a list of these can be found at www.hnreach.on.ca . The success of such programs can only succeed with community support and a huge.

Pictured, from left, Peggy Garbedian - Boston Public Parent Volunteer and Dave Douglas - Volunteer driver.

Local apple grower chair of Ontario Apple Growers

By Brenda Moser

Chris Hedges, a Simcoe native, spent his school summer holidays working on farms and gaimed knowledge first hand of the apple industry. He put that knowledge to use when he bought is own farm, and also in his new role as the chair of the Ontario Apple Growers.

Hedges obtained a degree in economics and finance. He is a first-generation apple farmer who acquired about 20 acres of orchard in Windham Centre in 1998, and has grown that acreage over the years. The original orchards are now almost all gone and have been replaced with newer, higher density orchards.

Hedges has expanded his apple farming over the years to more than 300 acres, including such varieties as Empire, Macintosh, Delicious, Northern Spy, Gala, Ambrosia and Honeycrisp.

In 2023, the apple industry saw a larger supply than demand for apples.

“The apple industry is not as strong as it was about five years ago,” Hedges said. “It looks like the 2024 crop will see supply closer to demand. Shipping is not cheap, so it brings up the cost of apples.”

Another factor in the cost of apples is Mother Nature. Climate can affect the quality and quantity of a harvest and in 2010 Hedges learned that first hand when a damaging frost hit his crop. He was quick to research a solution for that and he, in turn, installed ‘frost fans’ in his orchard. They click on when they sense a temperature decrease and keep the air circulating. This prevents the frost from being able to settle on the blossoms, making a difference in his crop yield.

Hedges sat on the board of the Ontario Apple Growers from about 2005 through to about 2012 as a director. That same year, Hedges was awarded the Ontario Golden Apple Award. He has also served as vice-chair and chair. In 2020, he returned to a regular board member. He went on to serve as vice-chair in 2023 and, eventually, to chair about one year later.

“I like being chair…there are more meetings and I try to serve on every board committee,” he said.

Hedges firmly believes in being involved and encourages all growers to be active as well.

Hedges spoke about how the apple industry is changing and evolving. “It’s harder and more expensive to ship out of country. We export a lot to the States, the Caribbean and India, but shipping and transportation is not cheap.”

As a grower, Hedges is revisiting crop insurance and protection from hail, making sure he has enough coverage. He is also active in pest management and what the new changes and requirements are.

It’s that time of year when most growers will be looking towards the 2025 crop. In addition to preparing for his own growing season, Hedges is looking forward to serving growers as chair.

“These are challenging times for Ontario’s apple industry. Ontario apples are a popular, year-round fruit choice and we will continue to advocate for the legislative support we need, from all levels of our government, to produce food in an economically sustainable way,” he said.

Chris Hedges, Chairman of Ontario Apple Growers.

Solving the landfill question for greenhouse growers

By Luke Edwards

The days of trucking every scrap of greenhouse waste to the landfill is coming to an end, and that end is a lot sooner than many people realize.

As landfill space in Ontario fills up, industries such as greenhouses are going to have to find alternatives. Participants in one of the sessions at the Canadian Greenhouse Conference, held last month in Niagara Falls, learned of both the challenges and opportunities operators face amid dwindling landfill space.

"There's certainly an urgency to finding alternatives to landfills," said Alexandra Grygorczyk, a research scientist at Vineland Research and Innovation Centre.

Despite that urgency, Grygorczyk said there are opportunities. Leamington's greenhouse sector currently landfills about 150,000 tonnes of fruit grade-outs, vines and growing media each year.

Her presentation highlighted some of those alternatives, moving along a hierarchy from most to least preferable.

At the top of the list are prevention measures that reduce the amount of waste produced in the first place and finding other options to use the produce that is safe for human consumption. Grygorczyk said this is already being done in other sectors, such as with apples where lower graded fruit is processed for other purposes. It's a practice greenhouses could emulate. For instance, cucumber juice has value in the cosmetics industry, she said.

The latest innovation report from VRIC also outlined work that's ongoing to find an alternative use for the juice produced during the process to freeze corn. The pressed cobs are used for animal feed, but the juices are a challenge for conventional wastewater systems and end up mostly being trucked away for irrigation. The hope is that new uses can be found.

Similar research is going into using byproducts from onion processing as clean label antimicrobials.

Back in the greenhouse, other lower graded produce can also be used for various purposes. In these cases, Grygorczyk suggested looking to smaller companies who are finding creative ways to use these products.

Alexandra Grygorczyk, a research scientist at Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, said alternatives to landfilling greenhouse waste are becoming more needed. Fortunately, researchers are working on solutions.

There is some fear in the industry that using lower graded produce will de-value the top quality fruit, however, Grygorczyk said that's not the case, pointing to the success of the apple industry in following this practice.

"That should not be a concern for the greenhouse industry," she said.

For its part, Vineland Research and Innovation Centre recently added food grade laboratory facilities to its infrastructure, giving researchers like Grygorczyk added space to come up with other upcycling solutions.

When that fails, food donation can become an option. Second Harvest is a logistics company that provides support for food producers, organizing donations to ensure they get to charities that can use them.

Additionally, said there are Good Samaritan laws in Ontario that protect growers who make these kinds of donations. Growers that donate can receive a tax credit that's equal to 25 per cent of fair market value.

When human consumption isn't possible, it's time to turn to animals and machines, Grygorczyk said. These options include using the waste as animal feed, composting it, or using it in bio-material/bio-chemical processing or in anaerobic digestion.

The session also featured a presentation from Tamara Lockwood-Ortiz of Bugs4Rent and A Zero-Waste Future. She told the audience of a project her business is undertaking to provide an on-site biodigester that is "harnessing Mother Nature's composter."

Modular units can be placed on a property and the larvae of black soldier flies can reduce waste products to frass, which can then be used for other beneficial purposes. Lockwood-Ortiz said they're trying to show growers how doable this process is, so they can scale up to help meet the industry's waste challenges.

At the bottom of the hierarchy is landfilling and discarding. Grygorczyk pointed out that even unmanaged "compost piles" fall into this category, since it leads to anaerobic decomposition, which in turn produces significant greenhouse gasses.

And even if it remains the easiest and most efficient option for many growers, she said increasing tipping fees and the fact it's nearly impossible to get new landfill space approved in Ontario means it's an option with a short shelf life.

"Soon enough you're not going to have a choice," she said.

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Experts tell farmers cybersecurity is important

Dr. Ali Dehghantanha wowed the crowd at the Norfolk Soil and Crop Improvement Association with stories of how scary cyberattacks can be for farmers.

Andrew Burns, agriculture manager and partner at McFarland Rowlands Insurance spoke of the benefits of cyber insurance.

By Jeff Helsdon

Cyber security isn't likely at the top of many farmers' minds. But it should be.

Take a look around the modern farm, and it's easy to see the many different points where farmers are vulnerable to hackers. Tractors and combines are a good place to start with GPS systems and computer-aided operation. For dairy farmers, computers are at the heart of robotic milking systems, and electronics operate feeders and fans in many livestock barns and silos.

Dr. Ali Dehghantanha, a professor of cybersecurity at the University of Guelph, has a background in battling cyber threats in the military and finance worlds. On Jan. 30, he presented some interesting stories of his past involvement in cyberattacks against farms at the annual meeting of the Norfolk Soil and Crop Improvement Association.

Becoming infected with malware may be as simple as clicking on an attachment in an e-mail.

He gave the example of a dairy farm that was attacked twice and paid the ransom. When the fee went up a third time, he was called. Dehghantanha's team went through a containment, eradication, and reorganization of the system but turned down an offer for on-going service, preferring to use their IT people. Then, 15 days later, the milk and food system wasn't working.

"This time, the attackers came with the best ransomware," Dehghantanha said. "It was something we didn't have an encryption key for."

The ransomware was beaten eventually.

Although farmers wonder why hackers would come after them, Dehghantanha said some hacker groups specialize in agriculture.

"They want to optimize their profit of gain," he said. "If they find a target easy to attack, they will come after you.

Groups targeting agriculture are working from China, Russia, Iran and domestically. Many of the domestic hackers are animal rights activists whose goal is not money, but shutting down the operation. Dehghantanha said up to 60 per cent of businesses that are attacked by ransomware end up shutting down.

Andrew Burns, agriculture manager for McFarland Rowlands Insurance, spoke after Dehghantanha and said it's suspected foreign countries could be after farmers to shut down the food supply if a war erupted.

In case of an attack

If a ransomware message pops up on the screen, Dehghantanha said backdoors were likely created on the system, and valuable information was already stolen.

"If you see ransomware messages on the screen, it's been there for months, if not years," he said.

At that point, he said the best thing to do is to call an expert.

Prevention

Dehghantanha suggested many simple things farmers can do to prevent an attack. These include:

- Having a complex, unique password
- Conducting regular vulnerability assessments
- Subscribing to a cyber security monitoring service
- Finding the right expert
- Attending cybersecurity workshops

Insurance

Burns said the issues associated with a cyberattack can be more widespread than shutting down computers on one farm. Hackers can access contact lists, and viruses can spread quickly. This opens the infected farmer to lawsuits from those to whom the virus was spread.

Cyber insurance protects from such lawsuits and also assists with paying the costs of fixing infected computers. Burns said cyber insurance is still reasonably priced.

2024 yields show Ontario grain production has come a long way

By Luke Edwards

Last year Ontario's grain growers gave 110 per cent, literally.

Well, for two out of the three main crops, at least. For soybeans it was only 109 per cent.

Yield results from last year were presented at the annual general meeting for district 6 of the Grain Farmers of Ontario. And while there was much consternation throughout the day about potential tariff wars, upcoming elections and the carbon tax, there weren't any complaints about last year's harvest.

"I think Ontario agriculture has just done a fantastic job," said John Hussack, an agronomist with Agricorp.

Provincially, both soft red winter wheat and corn reporting came in at 110 per cent of historical averages. Wheat surpassed 97 bushels an acre, while corn was just short of 199 bushels per acre. Soybeans, meanwhile, had an average yield of 53.38 bushels per acre, 109 per cent of the historical average across the province.

Across the board the numbers were also good locally. District 6 covers Brant, Haldimand, Hamilton, and Niagara, and each region surpassed the province's already lofty averages for wheat, corn and soybeans.

"It's been a while since Haldimand was above the provincial average in soybean yield," said Hussack.

That was in large part thanks to an ideal fall, said Steve Twynstra, GFO executive member, relieving some concerns brought on by a late, wet spring.

"October saved our bacon," he said.

Twynstra pointed out the importance of the province's grain farmers, who provide 90,000 jobs while generating over $4.1 billion in production value and over $27 billion in economic output each year.

Agronomist John Hussack said grain yields were quite high both locally and provincially last year.

GRANT HAVEN MEDIA

Field corn is essential to Meadow Lynn Farms' operations

Crop helps feed dairy cows

By Tamara Botting

Ontario grows around 63 per cent of Canada's corn. It's the province's second-largest crop by acreage, and the largest by volume. But why is so much effort put into growing this crop?

The general public is perhaps most familiar with corn as a side dish, or an ingredient in things like tortilla chips, cereals and sweeteners.

For the industrial world, corn is used to make things like alcohols, oils, and starches, as well as ethanol, which is often mixed with gasoline.

In agriculture, corn is essential for farmers raising livestock to keep their animals fed and healthy.

Thomas Judd is one such farmer.

He, his wife, Sarah, and parents, Fred and Sharon, own and manage Meadow Lynn Farms in Simcoe.

"One of our main focuses is the dairy operation," said Judd, noting that they milk a herd of 55 Jersey cows.

He largely heads up that portion of the operation.

Sharon mainly manages the nine acres of pick your own strawberries, and Sarah runs the 50 community support agriculture veggie box subscriptions.

Fred is the point person for the field crop side, producing primarily hay, wheat, and – of course – corn.

"Everybody's got their own expertise, and we can share some labour where it makes sense, too," Judd said.

"I guess you'd call us a diverse farm."

Altogether, they farm around 400 acres, and about a quarter of that is dedicated to growing corn.

"It is – especially for milk production – almost a given that a dairy farm uses corn silage as at least one of the ingredients on their farm," Judd said. "It's almost a necessity, that that is a reality for dairy farming."

He noted that while the percentage of how much of a dairy cow's diet is made up of corn silage can vary, "depending on the operation and some of the goals of the operation," the range generally falls between 40 to 55 per cent.

"It's very important that we have corn silage available," he said.

Meadow Lynn Farms goes through hundreds of tons of feed each year, and around 400 tons of that is corn silage grown on the farm – which is essential to offsetting some of the overall costs incurred by the operation, not to mention being beneficial for the cows besides.

Judd explained that corn silage has a "large amount of soluble fiber; it's the mix of forage plus sugar."

Corn silage is made from field corn; not what most people think of when they envision corn on the cob.

"Humans don't actually eat field corn. Sweet corn is a different breed of corn altogether; that's its own category," Judd said.

With corn silage, the entire stalk "is chopped very finely, and that includes the ear. It's before the stalk has died out completely; this is when the stalk is maybe half coloured or so, and it's before the cob has reached peak maturity."

Judd noted that during harvest time, it's common to see a large forage harvester driving through the field with a spout out the side, filling a truck driving alongside it with the processed material.

The cows can eat the field corn – ear, stalk, husk and all – because they're ruminant animals, meaning they have four quadrants to their stomachs.

→

"It's the entire reason they're able to eat grass and we're not," Judd said.

Judd said generally on Meadow Lynn Farms, around 50 to 60 per cent of the field corn grown is commercially sold for consumption elsewhere, such as on other farms, feedlots, etc.

"That varies every year, depending on the growing season, depending if it's a good year or if it's a poor year," he noted. "If we lose some ground, or if we have crop failures, then of course, we're never going to prioritize commercial production over feeding our dairy cows. That's always the priority that we take care of first, and after that is just what we're able to take advantage of."

While farming brings with it inherent risks, there are some things farmers can do to help set themselves up for the best chance of success. With growing corn, that includes the practice of crop rotation.

"We can't just keep growing corn on corn on corn, year after year, and expect the same result," Judd said. "Corn is one of the most nutrient-hungry crops – certainly on the nitrogen side."

If a farmer were to grow the same crop in the same area year after year without taking a break and/ or doing anything to put the nutrients that plant uses to grow, then the soil would become depleted, and the crop wouldn't be able to grow there anymore at all.

That's why farmers will keep track of what they're growing where, and make a point of growing different things on the field every so often; with Meadow Lynn Farms, the alternate crops to corn include alfalfa and soybeans.

"Each farm is going to be different on how they set their crop rotation," Judd said.

Not only can different plants add different nutrients to the soil, but "Our advantage with having livestock is that we're able to give back to the soil in terms of nutrients; we do have manure and compost that we're able to spread back on the ground," Judd said.

"When we're able to do that with our manure from the dairy facility, it's a little bit of an extra advantage that our farm can offset our fertilizer bill. It's a small way that we can kind of close the loop on the nutrient cycle on the farm."

In this way, he said, their operation can "make sure that (the soil) stays nice and productive for years to come."

Because sustainability is a key component to any farm's operation. It's not only about making sure that the farm as a business can continue to operate, but also it's about being a good neighbour.

Judd noted that the farm's front laneway is actually within the city limits of Simcoe.

"So we have to be aware of where we're trying to produce food for us and for the good people around us," he said, adding that they also need to be "concerned with trying to reduce the impact for everybody else who is very, very close to us, just in terms of living in proximity to a commercial dairy, vegetable, strawberry and field crop farm."

Peavey Mart seeks creditor protection, local stores to close

By Norfolk Farms Staff

Two local Peavey Mart locations will be among the dozens that close as the company seeks creditor protection.

An initial announcement from the company suggested it was only 22 Peavey Mart stores in Ontario and Nova Scotia that would close, and the Simcoe and Tillsonburg stores weren't on the list. However, a follow-up announcement said the company would complete a full wind down of all 90 Peavey Mart stores and six MainStreet Hardware stores across the country.

"We are sure that it will affect some farmers more than others," said Norfolk Federation of Agriculture president Tyler Townsend. "It's really unfortunate that this has happened."

Delhi-area cattle and crop farmer Larry Chanda found Peavey Mart had many things farmers needed that weren't available elsewhere. He also liked the discount Ontario Federation of Agriculture members received.

"With cattle, Peavey Mart would stock fencing supplies or the odd medication you could get over the counter that you didn't need a prescription for," he said. "They just seemed to have a real variety of things you wouldn't pick up at a different store."

There are options for former Peavey Mart shoppers for some farm supplies in Norfolk, but they might have to drive further for other items, and to multiple retailers. Doerksen Country Store in Port Rowan carries livestock and pet feed, fencing supplies, automotive lubricants and country home and garden items. Simcoe's Golden Belt Feeds carries more than just pet food, having livestock feed, and some smaller items for livestock.

"I really can't say at this point how many farmers it will affect or how badly it will affect the farmers that heavily rely on it, but in saying that, maybe it creates opportunity for something else to take its place," Townsend said.

Peavey details

It's not known yet the closing date of the Simcoe and Tillsonburg stores, and Peavey is saying little except through a press release.

The announcement suggested overall challenges facing the Canadian retail industry were among the factors that led to the decision to seek creditor protection. Those include record low consumer confidence, inflationary pressures, rising operating costs, ongoing supply disruptions and a difficult regulatory environment.

"The company's immediate priority is to generate liquidity through the closure process while continuing to work with funders, partners, and stakeholders to explore potential opportunities to preserve the brand," the announcement said.

Locally, the locations were operated as TSC stores until 2021 when they moved under the Peavey Mart banner. Peavey Mart acquired the London-based TSC Store brand in 2017. Peavey Mart began in 1967 as a "chain of 'super farm markets' whose first location opened in Dawson Creek, B.C.," according to the company's website.

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A Disappearing Landscape: The Townsend Barns Project

By James Christison, Curator

The wooden barn, once a staple of the rural landscape, has become an endangered species. Vast changes to the agricultural industry across Ontario, including Norfolk County, have meant a total re-evaluation of what a farm requires to operate and be successful. These barns, as generations have known them, are no longer essential and their demise has become a reality.

The Waterford Heritage & Agricultural Museum is dedicated to recording this disappearing landscape, a mission fueled by the legacy of the historical society. For two decades, members of the society travelled the concession roads surrounding Waterford, creating an invaluable photographic archive. This effort, affectionately known as "The Townsend Barns Project," showcases the diverse barn designs influenced by the regions agricultural needs. Many of the structures date to the latter half of the 1800's and, while largely comprised of hip roof and bank barn styles, include rare octagonal, brink, and log examples.

Following a successful exhibition at the museum, the project ignited renewed community interest in preserving this agricultural history. Over the last two years, the museum completed the digitization of over 600 images and, aiming to broaden its reach, has now created a GIS interactive portal for the public using StoryMap technology.

The online portal allows visitors to explore these photographs and delve into the museum's research. This dynamic resource will continue to expand with ongoing additions and updates. In the last few months along, three documented barns have been lost, bringing the total to 21 since the project's inception. This online initiative therefore plays a crucial role in preserving the legacy of this rural history and ensures its accessibility for future generations. To see the project, visit: www.norfolkheritage.ca and click on the "discover" link.

Do you have a story about an old tractor?

Since the move away from horse-drawn plows, tractors have been an integral part of farming. Tractors are a tool, but there is something about an antique tractor that brings not only a sense of nostalgia but also an appreciation for the mechanics of an old tractor.

To celebrate old tractors, and farm machinery, Norfolk Farms is launching a new feature called “This Old Tractor”. The concept is for readers to submit photos of the tractors that helped their ancestors tame the land, along with a short write-up – three to five sentences – about the photo, and it will be published in Norfolk Farms.

Here’s my ‘Old Tractor’ story to start.

I found this photo of my grandfather Clarence and an ancient tractor amongst the items my father saved from his father’s photo albums. There are few details with the photo, but judging from the belt attached to the tractor, my guess is it’s powering a thrashing machine. I don’t know if the photo was taken on my grandfather’s home farm in Norfolk County or on the farm he homesteaded in Saskatchewan, but suspect it was the latter from the terrain. My research found this was likely an early steam tractor.

Please send scans or electronic copies of photos and information to jeff@granthaven.com

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