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These Men are Making Hay, and The Sun is Shining on Them



A couple of young men from the Jarvis area, DJ Wassenaar and Matt Bergman have reason to be proud after being named the Ontario Young Farmers of the Year.

DJ's dad John purchased the Jarvis area farm in the mid-80s. In 2010 DJ quit a full-time job to farm, doing custom work, snow plowing and whatever else fit his schedule. In 2012 he met Matt while snowplowing and in January of

2015 the two men formed a partnership called Haybury Farms Inc. Both share a passion for agriculture.

Knowing that agriculture is a tough business to enter without help, they seized opportunities as they came up and did a lot of thinking outside of the box. Figuring how to make cash flow was a challenge. Bergman remarked that in the end, farming required volume.

The main base for the enterprise is the Jarvis farm, although they don't actually farm that land. DJ laughed, "Still dad's ... makes his own hay with his own equipment!" They have large barns for hay storage, drying system for hay and a newly built large shop for equipment maintenance, which includes office and meeting space.



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DJ and Matt started with custom work and gradually expanded their land base; they now work about 4200 acres here and in the Algoma area, producing hay and field crops. About two-thirds of the acreage is in the local area, and one third in the north. DJ explained that there is more opportunity in the north, with dollars going further. The soil there needs work though, so calcidic lime is trucked north, with produce coming south on the return trip. The men own their own trucks and trailers as it is not feasible to hire rigs for that job.

They grow hay, packed in large square bales and dried in a large hay drier destined for niche markets. This is mostly exported to the US, and even overseas, to areas that are unable to grow sufficient quality forage. Very little is sold locally, as farmers in most areas of Ontario grow their own hay.

Corn and soybeans are also grown, with about one-third of each crop being organic and the remainder conventional. The men have built their own elevators for the organic crops as they can't be mixed with conventional crops.

Organic is tricky to market, as there are fewer buyers, and marketing doesn't follow the same base as conventional crops "Ebbs and flows are wild," Matt stated. There is no set price, with price set by the farmer rather than a marketing board. It all follows supply and demand.

The men were nominated for the title of Ontario Young Farmers of the year by a friend who had previously won the award. Although they found the application procedure a bit daunting, they traveled to Guelph to give a presentation, slide show and speech to tell their story and explain what makes them unique.

At the end of November, the two men will travel to Lethbridge, Alberta for the national competition, where the winners from each of the seven regions - Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia/Yukon will compete for the Canadian Young Farmers of the Year award. The competition will be judged by a judging committee, where each competitor's passion and story, along with what makes them unique will be considered, or in Matt's words, "Where you're from and where you're going." The men will be accompanied by both their fathers, who they credit with being some of their biggest supporters.

As to the future, DJ's goals are to, "Continue to be better at farming ... improve soil health and drainage ... lots of improvements."

Matt feels that their present size and scale are comfortable and that the main focus now is on improvement, stating, "Growth from within now."

Both men have young families; the children love visiting the farm. DJ would like for the farm enterprise to carry on, but it is far too soon to know if any of the children will want to go that route. 🌱

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NFA recognizes bursary recipients

Recipients of Norfolk Federation of Agriculture bursaries were recognized at the summer meeting.

Each of the recipients received \$1,000 each towards their studies. Students must be attending a post-secondary institution and taking studies in either agriculture or environmental fields.

Shaylen Campbell is studying environmental science at the University of Guelph. Growing up on a cash crop farm in the Waterford area, she hopes to work in soil and crop research.

Asked her interest in this field, she answered, "Allowing farmers to get the maximum yield they can and grow the best crops."

Marshall Porteous-Smith grew up on a Christmas tree farm in the St. Williams area. He will be attending the University of Guelph, taking a masters business course focusing on food and agriculture. He decided on this area of study due to the diversity of opportunities in the workplace.

Regan Court will also be taking food and agricultural business at the University of Guelph His family runs Court Farms, a cash crop farms and custom elevator business. He hopes to carry on the family business and wants to further his education from the business perspective.

Raelynn Demarest will be studying equine management at Ridgetown College. She did not grow up on a farm but worked for Horizon Seeds and competes in show jumping. She has always wanted her own business and hopes to purchase a farm to board horses, offer riding lessons and breed and train horses.



Recipients of the Norfolk Federation of Agriculture bursaries were recognized at the summer meeting. Left to right are: NFA treasurer Dave Campbell, recipient Chaylen Campbell, recipient Marshall Porteous-Smith, recipient Regan Court, recipient Raelynn Demarest and NRA president Tyler Townsend.

Applications for the NFA bursary are available from the guidance departments of Norfolk secondary schools. It will also be on the web site in the future. The deadline for applications is June 1. A bursary is also available for the

Ontario Federation of Agriculture through their web site at <https://ofa.on.ca/resources/agricultural-scholarships/>



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Norfolk County reaffirms support for allowing farm severances under certain conditions

While they don't have any interest in taking prime farmland out of production, councillors at Norfolk County believe there may be some opportunities to increase housing supply by opening up some rural areas.

At the Aug. 13 special council meeting, Norfolk councillors supported a motion from Mayor Amy Martin that called for advocacy letters to be sent to counterparts at Queen's Park and in Ottawa to reaffirm its support for allowing an additional farm severance in areas where it makes sense.

"Let's reinforce our current position, requesting the provincial and federal governments to do what they can to allow...one additional farm severance," Martin said.

"If there's a plot of land that's not entirely farmable, it's not prime agricultural land, why can't a farmer sever it, one additional lot, and build on it?" she added.

The county has previously supported this position, and there was a time when Ontario allowed such severance under certain conditions.

"We're not just going to take good, agricultural, cultivated land out of production. But there are little nooks and crannies where maybe it is possible," said Coun. Chris Van Paassen, in support of the mayor's motion.

Coun. Linda Vandendriessche suggested allowing such severances could actually save farmland.

"What happens is people who want a rural lot tend to buy a 25- or 50-acre farm and then they decide 'I can, so I will' build a house in the middle of the field," she said.

"It'll save some actual good arable land, to be honest with you."

The motion came as councillors were heading off to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference and during the same meeting they approved a staff report recommending they apply to the second round of funding for the Housing Accelerator Fund. The application is contingent on getting an exemption for a "four unit as-of-right" bylaw. Applications to the fund require a municipality to allow four units on low density residential property, but Norfolk County staff and council agreed they're not ready to do that yet.

Martin said the advocacy letter will help demonstrate Norfolk is serious about increasing housing supply despite not being ready to allow four units as-of-right.

"It's already documented that it's the will of council to do this. This time we include the federal partners as well and demonstrate the other ways we've been advocating to get our housing numbers up but we're a rural community so four as-of-right doesn't always make sense," she said.



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Farms of Norfolk Football Association tournament a high-energy community event

The Farms of Norfolk Football Association (FNFA) soccer tournament is part sports event, part cultural event – and every bit a high-energy seasonal celebration.

There is of course, the soccer, featuring 12 area farm-based and sponsored teams whose players are largely Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program employees originating in either Mexico or The Caribbean. Bragging rights in pool play and particularly the playoffs are as hotly contested as any Euro final or world cup.

But apart from 192 players, there are also hundreds of fans from the farms and countries of origin represented on the teams, as well as community members popping by to take in the games and enjoy the day.

Throw in food trucks, bouncy castles for the kids and music blasted from a variety of electronic devices, spun by DJ's or created on-site via the Schuyler Farms travelling band, and the result is an arguably unparalleled atmosphere.

"It's an intense day of soccer, lots of enthusiasm," said Co-ordinator Carrie Sinkowski. "There is a lot of energy and excitement on the day which really adds to the event."

The tournament grew out of Sinkowski's job-related (she is a community developer with the Community Legal Clinic, Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk) desire to connect offshore workers to available resources, a broad spectrum of health, medical and legal services they might not be aware of.

"Connecting community and providing more capacity for engagement is very, very important."

That goal initiated conversation around some form of community event, a dominoes tournament being among the ideas discussed. However, the first year, 2018, was also 'a FIFA year,' says Sinkowski, whose family members'



Schuyler Farms' Seirgo Thomassian (left) takes a shot, defended by Sandy Shores Farms' Marvin Vasquez Hernandez (right).

passion for the sport led to her suggesting the idea of a soccer tournament to her boss.

"They were like, 'yeah!'" she recalled.

The original concept was a 'show up and sign up' format, however this presented logistical challenges in terms of transportation and coordination. Instead, farmers were approached to sponsor teams from their operations, with fees paying for colour-coded jerseys for their players, lunch, facility rental, insurance and carded referees.

The first year's tournament featured six teams, the second seven. COVID-19's unwelcome arrival cancelled the 2020 and 2021 events, however against the fears of having to rebuild lost momentum, 11 teams signed up for the 2022 FNFA draw. Last year, 12 teams participated, with that number again on the field this year. The roster does change from year to year, with two new squads represented in a 2024 draw featuring Fox Hollow, Schuyler Farms, Scotlynn,



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Schuyler Farms drummer Adian Thompson adds to the festive atmosphere.

Sandy Shore, Townsend Farms, a Leiden Farms community team, Piccioni Bros., EZ Grow, Co-operators (Simcoe Office) and squads from Ryder Farms and Proplant sponsored by the Grand River Community Health Centre.

Some farms have gone so far as to have built soccer pitches on their operations so teams can both be selected and practice, with inter-farm games leading up the FNFA event.

“It’s not just a one-day-and-done event any more,” said Sinkowski. “It’s filled out in so many ways.”

Additional sponsorship came from Cambridge Storage and Mini Warehouses, Bayer Crop Science Inc., Sunlife, Brantford and District Labour Council, The Neighbourhood Organization, Proplant, the Community Legal Clinic Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk, Nova Mutual Insurance and Huron Farmworkers Ministry.

Tournament timing is tricky says Sinkowski, given the desire to find an optimal time to permit the maximum of teams and players to participate. She has fielded the unsolicited suggestion it should be lined up with ‘harvest.’

“What harvest?” Sinkowski responded. “It starts in May with asparagus and goes through to November with cabbage. We can never make it so all the farms can some.”

The second Sunday in August (the 11th this year) has been chosen as the best possible alternative.

“It wasn’t random.”

The event requires an incredible amount of work and coordination, the ‘irrational part’ of Sinkowski’s brain typically waking her up at 4 a.m. the day of, in a panic she’s forgotten something.

Transportation usually seen conveying workers from the bunkhouse to various fields around Norfolk become team buses for the day. A Kubota sponsored by Norfolk Tractor is tasked with trash collection, and her friends and family members are conscripted into a variety of diverse support roles.

FNFA is worth the effort, having both maintained and built on its original vision of positive community engagement. Some fans come for the day, others pop in for a game or two says Sinkowski, a cumulative daily total of players and supporters estimated at around 2,000.

“It’s highly-competitive and it’s a lot of fun,” she summed up. “It’s just a great day.”



Co-ordinator Carrie Sinkowski looks forward annually to the Farms of Norfolk Football Association tournament as a high-energy celebration seasonal celebration.



Sandy Shores Farms’ Richard Dyer (right) defends against Schuyler Farms’ Stephan Stanley.



Sandy Shores Farms’ Peter Smith (right) goes up for a head ball against Schuyler Farms’ Stephan Stanley with Sandy Shores’ Alexis Rivera Sosa in the background.

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Glenridge Hazelnuts ‘the real deal’ in terms of Ontario production



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



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

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

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

“We’re still learning, that’s for sure,” said Adam Sharp, reiterating his father Bill’s open-doors policy when it comes to provincial hazelnut development, illustrated with an Ontario Hazelnut Association (OHA) Farm Tour Saturday, September 28th at the family’s St. George-area properties.

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

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

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

Their interest was piqued and developed over years of research at OHA symposiums, along with the fact equipment used in their cash-cropping operation as well as farming experience in general could be sourced for hazelnuts.

“A lot of it crosses over.”

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

“I don’t care what industry you are in, you struggle to find people,” said Adam.

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

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

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

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

“That’s the big part too,” says James.

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

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

“That was quite exciting.”

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

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

“I hope we can keep on top of it.”



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The transition from getting trees in the ground and moving them forward to age of production was ‘exciting’, but also required a corresponding addition in harvesting and production equipment.

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

“There’s really only one way to get stuff off the ground.”

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

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

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

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

“It was like watching paint dry,” said Adam.

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

Hazelnuts were always considered some form of ‘value add’ crop says Adam. Stephanie Sharp is in charge of Glenridge Hazelnuts product development, branding and marketing.

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

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

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

“It’s pretty fair to say hazelnuts and chocolate go together really well,” she said.

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

“I may be biased, but hazelnut better is by far my favourite.”

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

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

“But in a good way,” Stephanie emphasized. “It’s good to have a challenge.”

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

“We’re here to share, to move the industry forward,” he concluded. “We’re still so small we do need each other and will need each other forever.” 🌱




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Fiddleheard Farms – A hidden treasure



Ed & Dayle Swing.

Throughout Norfolk County there are a number of long-established farm operations and many of them are large scale, while some are still smaller Mom and Pop farms. While crops are not as large or herd counts as big as others, the joy and enthusiasm of these smaller operations seems to be ten-fold. Always ready to take the time to stop and visit and make you feel welcome to their farm are Dayle and Ed Swing.

Fiddlehead Farms may be a bit out of the way but it is worth the beautiful country drive to get there. Located at 823 St. John's Road, Simcoe, the Swings bought the 67-acre tobacco farm 33 years ago and have worked to repurpose it, improve it and expand it all while loving every minute of the work put into it. The name of their farm came to them by chance.

"When we bought our farm, we took a walk in our back bush and there were so many fiddleheads in it...so that became our name – Fiddlehead Farm" states Dayle.

They have turned the former tobacco farm into their 'hobby homestead' and have spent countless hours working to regenerate the farm to a more natural state. They encourage the growth of milkweed plants to attract the monarch butterflies, the existing pond, used previously for irrigation, is now a haven for attracting turtles, fish, birds such as herons, ducks geese and their gosling. Most of all it is a haven for relaxation away from the traffic and bustle of everyday life.

As we explored the farm, we were greeted by the free range chickens, ducks and guineas that were content to go about their day. Their grandson, Sam, has several free run chickens there for producing eggs that can be purchased from their stands while you're there. The varieties of his chicken are Barrel Rock, Lavender Opington, Azura and Olive Eggers.

We turned our tour to their herd of cattle that, by the way, are quite friendly and accepting of visitors.



Farm fresh eggs and veggies for sale.

"We started out with Hereford and eventually went to different crosses to raise in our pasture. Now we even have Speckled Park crossed with Angus and Hereford".

Their cattle are raised on pasture, hay and spent grains. They have formed a partnership, so to speak, with a very local brewery - Charlottesville Brewery – and use the spent grain from the beer making process as a 'treat' for their cattle. What would be garbage for the brewery is put to good use on their farm.

The Swings are doing more than their part to protect the land and make use of everything possible to regenerate their lands...always thinking of future generations. They explained that they delay haying in order to protect the nesting grounds of their feathered friends such as the bobolink who, according to Dayle, "are at risk of losing their natural habitats". They also compost their manure, in piles, and let it sit a few years before spreading on the fields.

Also grazing their pasture are their two horses – June and Sisco.

"Our horse-loving daughter, Kristen, rescued June and our mini Sisco came along shortly after that for company for June".

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Sampling of some of their meat products available

They are obviously very important members of their four-legged family.

Occupying a portion of their property is a rather large garden, producing a variety of peppers, tomatoes, squash, pumpkins, onions, kale, zucchini and sunflowers.

"The sunflowers attract the bees for pollination. We manually weed the garden area with no chemicals used ever" adds Dayle. "We use

our produce for canning, meals and selling to customers."

Fiddlehead Farm has 28 acres of bush with significant wetlands and habitat for nesting indigo buntings and pileated woodpeckers. There is also a pecan orchard, planted years ago, yet hubby Ed is still waiting for that pecan pie. Patience Ed...patience.

When you visit the farm to perhaps purchase farm fresh eggs or pumpkin or squash you

can also check with Dayle to see what meat – processed from their own cattle by Townsend Butchers – she has for sale in her freezer.

In closing I can safely say that a visit to Fiddlehead Farms is worth the drive. Just be sure to allow a little time to visit with the Swings and 'hang out' with their four-legged and feathered friends 🌿



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Flack brings experience to realigned ministry

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

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

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

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

He quoted some statistics to back this assertion:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After attending the University of Guelph, he started working for Master Feeds. After going through a variety of different positions, and six different owners, he became CEO. His experience included chicken processing, animal feed, vitamins, grain handling, crop production and more.



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

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

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

“It’s better than it was, but we have more work to do,” he said.

He pointed to the government’s investment in rural broadband, and said he talked to Infrastructure Minister Kinga Surma about cellular

coverage at the recent Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference.

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

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

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

“There’s no better industry to work in in than agri-food,” he said. 🌱







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Markhoeve Farms open house was well attended

In 2009 Marcel and Ingrid Backx, and their three children Femke, Lotte and Stein, left their home in the Netherlands and started a new life here in Ontario. For about nine years they lived on a small dairy farm in the town of Brussels, just north of Listowel, and tended a herd of about 35 cows. Then decided they would like to expand their operation and begin a 'new to this area' venture so they purchased the former Watt farm and pancake house on Conc 11 Townsend.

Since purchasing the property, they have made many changes and improvements and have steadily built up a business and following. . . Markhoeve Dairy. Since then, they have introduced local shoppers to some healthier alternatives to store bought milk, yogurt and cheese. After converting the former pancake house, they installed new stainless steel milk processing equipment and the transformation began. After OMAFRA and Norfolk County gave them their stamp of approval they began processing their own milk and gradually added other products as the business grew.

They now process and make a variety of healthy alternatives for those with digestive issues or those just wanting to eat healthier. Their products include both white and chocolate milk, yogurt, Kefir (a fermented beverage with a consistency between yogurt and milk), cheese and quark. They also offer

different flavors of cheese based on the cultures they use.

Markhoeve Dairy is happy to stay small and stay local and use local farmers for many of their added ingredients. Their yoghurt drink uses strawberries from Meadow Lynn Farms, their jam is made with haskap berries grown locally at Plaid Shirt Farms and Fancy Farmerettes, sweet maple syrup is from Chambers and their blueberries come from Berrylicious Fruit Farms in Burgessville.

"We like to keep it local with locally grown ingredients" adds Ingrid.

The Backx family have worked hard to ensure that they offer healthy alternatives to their customers. Since their opening they have grown and added several new products and recently held an Open House to allow the public to tour their farm and see first hand the improvements they have made. They are open Wednesdays 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Thursday, Friday and Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Be sure to browse not only their own products but the many and increasing healthy alternatives they are adding from other Norfolk farmers.

Ingrid added "We want to stay small and local so we can offer more specialty products and educate customers easier".

Follow them on Face book at Markhoeve Dairy and be sure to stop in to visit them. 🌿



Lisa & Wyatt Anderson stopped by to say Hi to Mootilda.



Femke & Mom Ingrid with a sampling of their products.



Ethan, Oliver and Dad Chris Odorico hanging with herd.



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AgRobotics Demo Day gives look at future of farming



VitiRover

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After Baresich approached the ministry in 2021, the group was formed and began to look into the possibility of using robots and artificial intelligence (A.I.) to solve many problems growers are facing. At the end of the first year, the group was working with five different robots. That number has now grown to 20 different robot models working in the province, some on farms and others in research trials, with a goal of reaching 30 by the end of the year. The



The Burro



Harvest Corp Technologies asparagus harvester

group's membership has expanded to over 180 people from all over the world.

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

The group's purpose is not to sell robots, but to provide input on how to improve the machines to work better in Ontario production systems. The group has been really successful at building cross functional teams and finding the right partners to solve important problems growers are facing.

The AgRobotics Demo Day attracted a lot of attention, with more than 170 people registered. Here are the products displayed.

AgXeed AgBot 2-055W3

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

The Agbot will mow and spray at the same time. Not only will it

spray, but it will spray intelligently. It can read chlorophyll levels to aid with spot spraying, judging where spray is needed and where it isn't.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Crop Tracker App

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



Naio Technologies Oz

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

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

Augean Robotics Burro

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

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

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

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

VitiRover

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

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

Harvest Corp Technologies asparagus harvester

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

A powerful vision system and AI learning are at the centre of deciding what spears are cut. An oscillating cutter is used to cut, then a gripper puts the spears on a conveyor to a bin.

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

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

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

Vivid Machines Vivid X Vision System

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



AgXeed AgBot 2-055W3

and rootstocks, while monitoring blossoms, fruit development, and yield at the block and section level.

Picketa Systems

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

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

Naio Technologies Oz

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

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

Korchi Innovations

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

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

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

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



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'We keep going, "bee-cause" someone has to'

Norfolk beekeepers talk challenges, triumphs

One day about a decade ago while he was in the garden, Troy Moodie noticed that he didn't see any bees flying around.

He and his wife, Kelly Bowers-Moodie, knew this was a problem because, as Bowers-Moodie noted, the vast majority of the fruits and vegetables humans eat "comes from plants that bees pollinate."

So, the couple decided they were going to do what they could to help. They joined the Haldimand Norfolk Beekeepers Association (HNBA) and started beekeeping. Today, the pair and their five children run Moodie Bees Apiaries in Walsingham, which has 48 hives and sells honey, bee pollen, and beeswax products.

Bowers-Moodie focuses her efforts behind the scenes on tasks such as advertising, marketing and packaging; she's also been the Queen Bee of the HNBA since 2018, and amongst other tasks, gives informational presentations

about bees and beekeeping on behalf of the association.

This was a necessary shift when, a few years into their beekeeping journey, "I found out the hard way that I am anaphylactic allergic to honey bees," she said. "I tried desensitization therapy, but it didn't work. Needless to say, I don't work directly in the field with the bees anymore."

But while she can't be hands-on with that aspect of beekeeping, Bowers-Moodie does a lot for the field through her work with the association, helping new beekeepers get started.

"We always need more beekeepers. More bees equals more food," Bowers-Moodie said.

This support includes finding suppliers; connecting new beekeepers with each other and helping them connect with established beekeepers; being an information source for things like which tasks need to be completed with the hives each month; and giving the general public



Kelly Bowers-Moodie has been the Queen Bee of the Haldimand Norfolk Beekeepers Association since 2018.

more information about bees and their vital role in the environment, and especially in agriculture.

As an example, laypeople may not know that some farmers will get beekeepers to bring their hives to their farm so the bees can pollinate their crops.

"Every year, farmers are finding it harder to find beekeepers to pollinate," Bowers-Moodie said.

Over the years, Bowers-Moodie said she's seen "Many beekeepers ... throwing in the towel."

That's because beekeepers and their hives are facing many challenges.

For instance, many bees are getting infected with mites that carry diseases and can cause deformities. "To keep hives healthy, beekeepers need to treat for mites in the spring and fall," Bowers-Moodie said.

In addition, hives need to be regularly monitored and treated to prevent the spread of American and European foulbrood, a fatal bacterial disease.

"If hives are infected with the spores, they need to be burned and buried," Bowers-Moodie said, adding that bee populations can also be vulnerable to pesticides.

Winter brings a whole other set of challenges.

"When winter temperatures fluctuate too much, the bees will eat their honey stores too fast or break cluster and freeze," she said. And while some beekeepers will wrap their hives in extra insulation to try and prevent heat loss, "There is always the risk of holding too much moisture in the hive by doing this, and the bees will die."

In the end, "There's too many variables to find the perfect balance to keeping bees," Bowers-Moodie said.

And when an apiary does suffer a loss of bees, it's getting harder to recuperate afterwards – assuming you can start in the first place.



B's Honey Products is a family-run company that was started in 2019 when Zach Buchner purchased two hives. Gradually, his girlfriend (now wife) Holly and parents Glenn and Cheryl Buchner



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“Start-up costs are rising, and if you don’t make enough from pollination or honey sales, then you are borrowing to do so.”

Over the years, Bowers-Moodie said she’s seen “Many beekeepers ... throwing in the towel.”

But there are those who hang on.

“Every year, we dust ourselves off and try again ... crossing our fingers that we’ll have spring survivors,” she said. “Every year we struggle with bee losses, but we keep going, ‘bee-cause’ someone has to.”

Another person who knows all too well the challenges that beekeeping can bring is Glenn Buchner.

“We have encountered 100 per cent winter survival and up to 90 per cent winter losses of hives,” he said.

It’s a wide range to have experienced, especially considering Buchner and his family “have been beekeeping for five years now, so (are) relative newcomer(s) to this.”

It all started back in 2019, when Glenn and Cheryl Buchner’s son, Zach, purchased two hives and started beekeeping; the next year, he and his then-girlfriend (now wife) Holly bought 10 full hives and 10 nucleus colonies.

“He realized that he needed help in managing those hives, so I started assisting,” Buchner said. “My wife and I stepped into the business in 2021 by purchasing 10 nucleus colonies and some wooden ware. ... The challenge of maintaining the number hives we have set as a goal and the many ways one can achieve this keeps us interested along with pride in watching the colonies thrive.”

B’s Honey Products is based in Tillsonburg, but has three remote bee yards in the area.

“We currently have 18 double deep hives, down from 40 of last year due to winter losses,” Buchner said. This roughly translates into almost 2 million bees; there are around 40,000 to 70,000 bees per deep box.

The company sells honey and beeswax paste, which they both sell and use in their wood manufacturing business, Solid Edge Wood Products; Holly also makes body products using beeswax as a base.

Buchner said they’re members of the Ontario Beekeepers Association, “which gives us educational opportunities, reduced group insurance options, and keeps us up to date on relevant industry information though regular publications.”

An important part of their agricultural operation includes communicating with other area producers.

“We have had the opportunity to speak with area farmers about the timing and method of application of herbicides and fungicides, which affects the bees,” Buchner said.

They also try to spread the word about responsible beekeeping,



Moodie Bees Apiaries has 48 hives.

particularly to those who are doing it as a hobby.

“Some hobbyists do not realize the work involved in successfully keeping bees,” Buchner said, noting that if a beekeeper doesn’t treat their hive for mites, for instance, “that can infect hives up to five kilometers around.”

He strongly recommends that anyone considering getting into beekeeping do their research first – talk to a beekeeper, take some educational courses, etc.

“Learn more before jumping into it,” he said.

Even those who don’t plan on becoming beekeepers themselves can benefit from learning more about what’s involved. Buchner said helping to educate the public is an ongoing task.

“When the opportunity arises, we try to educate individuals. I find that most people are interested in finding out more about bees once they start asking questions and get honest answers. We try to inform them that is very much a symbiotic relationship, where the beekeeper helps the hive thrive and gets the benefit of the excess honey the bees produce,” he said.

Ultimately, “Beekeeping is interesting, challenging and rewarding,” Buchner said, and being involved in it “makes us more aware of our environmental footprint.”

Because of that, “We have changed our personal as well as business practices to be better stewards of the environment.” 🌿



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Soil and Crop Association highlights irrigation options

There was a time, not that long ago, when any mention of irrigation meant hard pipe and irrigation guns. Much has changed since then, and there are many less labour intensive and more efficient options on the market.

The Norfolk Soil and Crop Improvement Association's annual field day highlighted some of these options at an event this past summer. Participants rotated through several stations at Sandy Shore Farms, which hosted the event, to see the different technology in action.

Dubois Agrinovation was displaying drip irrigation. Philippe-Michael Caron of Dubois explained that drip irrigation is 90 per cent efficient, as opposed to 10 per cent efficiency with spray guns.

While most think of drip irrigation as the low-pressure tapes that are buried, not all drip is this way. Caron explained the low-pressure irrigation system uses capillarity to disperse the water through the irrigation drippers. The water then expands like a balloon under the ground. It takes less power to run it, but there is seasonal set-up.

High pressure drip is a tube that is suspended above the ground. It operates at a higher flow rate and works well in bumpy or hilly topography.

One advantage is fertilizer can be injected, along with the water, into the drip system.

Setting up a drip system requires a pump, which can be diesel/gas, electrical, 12-volt or solar, a filter, fertilizer injection system, air vent and filter. While it will cost about \$500 for a below-ground tape system and \$1,500 for a turbine system, an increase in crop yield of up to 25 per cent can be seen, Caron said.

Pivot

Pivot irrigation systems can either be circular or lateral. The lateral works best in long, narrow



Booms can also be used on traveler irrigation units for situations where other types of irrigation aren't practical, such as on rented land. Scott Black of Cadman Irrigation explained the pros and cons of the unit to the crowd.

fields while a circle will work in most fields. Pivot spans can be 105 to 213 feet in length. Sprinklers are then installed at appropriate intervals. The whole system is customizable and a swing arm can be added to a pivot irrigation system to get the corners that are missed.

Duane Phillips of Cadman Irrigation explained all that's needed for a pivot system is water, power and a concrete pad to put the pivot on.

Water can come from a pond, well, river or lake, and the system can run at pressures of 300 to 1,500 p.s.i.

"You're getting little impact from the wind," Phillips said.

Traveler

Scott Black of Cadman Irrigation explained that a traveler is ideal if the field isn't square or

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Philippe-Michael Caron of Dubois Agrinovation explained the merits of drip irrigation while standing next to a display showing the pumping unit, injector and other components for this irrigation type.



Pivot irrigation systems are more efficient than travelers and less work for the farmer as moving it is not needed.

if the grower is irrigating on rented land. He did note travelers are more work than pivots and take 20 to 30 minutes to move around the field.

Travelers use an electric or gas motor to move the irrigation system around the field, dragging a flexible hose behind.

Most travelers come with a gun, although a boom sprinkler system can be installed.

Black was up front in admitting there are disadvantages to travelers. This irrigation form is more susceptible to wind influence, there is more evaporation and with a gun it can't be used on

delicate plants like lettuce. It is also less uniform in how it applies the water.

"You won't get uniformity across the field," he said. "There will be areas with puddles."

Organizers pleased

James Kingsbury, president of the Norfolk Soil and Crop Improvement Association, was pleased with the turnout, saying it exceeded organizers' expectations. He explained there is a different theme for the field day every year, and the focus was much narrower this year than last year.

"The focus was on different types of irrigation and the advantages and disadvantages of each type," Kingsbury said.

He said the day wouldn't be possible without the sponsors: Norfolk Federation of Agriculture, Cadman Irrigation, Dubois Agrinovation, Tirecraft, Treadright, HJV Equipment, Livingston Excavation, Sandy Shore Farms, Alex Szucsko Farms, Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association, OMAFRA, Underhill's Farm Supply and Syngenta. 🌱

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The equine connection: Local man explains how growing up with horses leaves a lasting impression

By Michael Wiebe

My 50-acre hobby farm is on the east side of Highway 59, just north of Valley Heights High School, on Big Creek hill. When not practicing law with the Brimage Law Group in Simcoe, Ontario I enjoy this property, complete with a stream-fed pond, some older tractors and especially, three draft horses.

I grew up on a tobacco farm west of the Sand Hills on the Lakeshore Road. My family began share growing tobacco on this farm in the spring of 1961 when I was 5 years old. The horse era had essentially passed from the farm scene but the draft horses were still a requirement in the tobacco fields to pull the boats at harvest time. As a child, I was quite taken by the size of these horses. There was also the exercise of harnessing them in the morning and unharnessing them at the end of the workday. The whole atmosphere of horse management was intriguing to me.

The horse chapter came to a close on our farm in 1967 (Centennial Year) when my father purchased a High Horse Pony priming machine. There were still some farms using horses and boats in tobacco harvest into the early 1970's but mechanization was clearly winning out. Given that horses were only needed for approximately 6 to 8 weeks (the length of a tobacco harvest) many farmers rented horses rather than owning them. This was the case on our farm. It was not uncommon for these rental horses (unfamiliar with their surroundings) to become startled in the field and to run away, often damaging tobacco boats



Michael Wiebe and his horses on his home farm

and, more importantly, tobacco. It also did not help that many of the young fellows priming tobacco had not experienced the days of horses on a farm and did not have the familiarity with horses as did previous generations. During the harvest of 1966 when I was 10 years old, we experienced a bad runaway from the back of the farm with a big Clydesdale mare. The excitement was heightened by the fact that I was riding the horse. I stayed on until we reached the kiln yard and ended up tumbling off into a pile of tobacco slats. I had the bruises to prove it! Despite this "high adventure" I hated to see the horses leave. I can remember the men and the livestock trucks who delivered rented horses to

the area tobacco farmers. These men were known as drovers and some names which I recall are Roy Mudford from Port Rowan, Dell Rockefeller (commonly known as Dell Rocky) and Clarence White-sell, both from the Tillsonburg area. There was also a fellow by the name of Milo Heatherington who had a large horse rental barn in Delhi. I never saw this barn but his granddaughter, Diane Barker, became a lawyer around the same time that I did and I worked with her briefly in Toronto. She told me all about her grandfather's horse operation and I thought it was something grand.

On the quieter side of things, in 1964 we had a big black Percheron gelding named King to pull the

boats for the primers. He was well-mannered and a pleasure to be around and I became quite attached to him, going for a ride bareback at every opportunity. He would stand patiently at the side of the wagon, waiting for the kid to climb up the wagon tongue, onto the rack and then onto his back. Great fun for an 8-year-old!

Shortly after acquiring the acreage in 1993 that would become my home, I contacted my friends in the Amish community to arrange to have a hip roof barn built. I like light horses and had taken some riding lessons but for reasons of my childhood, the choice of horse had to be draft. Approximately 16 years ago I started out with four Shire geldings. With a busy law practice, I was spending a lot of time in the barn and sometime in 2017 I sold two of the Shire geldings. This left me with Jack and Prince. Approximately 3 years later, Jack died. Prince was on his own for over a year and I finally decided it was time to acquire more horses. You will see Prince pictured with this article along with a team of matched grey Percheron geldings (full brothers) by the names of Mitch and Slat. Prince is approximately 15 years of age and at ages 4 and 5, Mitch and Slat are considerably younger.

Having been given some plowing lessons by a good friend, Cecil Wells, in Paris, Ontario my next project is to work up the courage to teach Mitch and Slat to plow. Outside of the Amish community, farming with horses may be an era gone by, but, for the hobbyist and the enthusiast, the size, power and gentle disposition of these big horses continues to be a drawing card. It has been said that they are a powerful reminder of a simpler past.

It is certainly worth seeing a team of horses (preferably matched grey Percheron geldings) on a Massey Harris 51 walking plow, cutting a straight furrow. 🌿



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Kowalsky brothers team up for roping

Simcoe-area brothers Justin and Devon Kowalsky were amongst the competitors in the team roping event at the seventh annual Norfolk Pro Rodeo held this past July.

Team roping is the only rodeo event that requires two cowboys to work together. This event is based on a situation, which was often seen on ranches, where there was a need to rope and control a steer for branding or doctoring.

The “header” is the competitor who starts in the left-hand box. After the steer is released, the header ropes the steer by the horns, and wraps the rope around the saddle horn. The “healer” or right-hand competitor rides beside the header, ropes the back feet after the horns are roped. The event is judged by how quickly the steer can be roped by both competitors.

Rodeo is not something the Kowalsky brothers grew up with, but they did grow up around horses. They often watched the Calgary Stampede, whetting their appetite for rodeo.

“We’ve had a long history with horses with my grandpa,” Justin said after their competition in Nixon.

Going into the sport new meant a steep learning curve for the Kowaskys. There are clinics put on across the province, but they learned in the Brantford area. Devon has been competing nine years and Justin six.

“Just going and doing it is the easiest way,” Justin said.

A horse is obviously a vital part of the equipment. Roping horses are typically quarter horses, but the horse also needs training. Competitors can either buy a finished horse or train their own. Justin’s advice was for beginners to buy a trained horse.

“I can focus on myself and not on the horse,” he said. “To people getting into it, I would recommend buying a finished horse.”

A finished roping horse comes with a price tag ranging from \$5,000 to \$50,000.

In a typical summer, every weekend from June to September is spent travelling across the province for competitions. Devon has competed in Quebec and the USA as well. Justin has been taking it easier this summer as he bred his horse.

Practicing comes easier for the Kowalskys than others as they have an arena to practice in. They also have a partner to practice with.

“I don’t think being brothers really makes a difference for the in-arena performance, but it is handy to always have someone that you can practice with,” Justin said.

The brothers don’t always compete together. Devon lives in Rockwood now while Justin is still in the Simcoe area. Justin works for the Timmermans, who host the Norfolk Pro Rodeo, operating their bleacher rental business. If they don’t compete together, phone calls need to be made ahead of time to see who is going to be an event and teams need to be pre-arranged.

The team aspect of team roping is what Justin likes best, and why is likely to continue to focus on this event.

“To me it’s the most fun because you build more relationships,” Justin said. “You have to find a partner.”

It also needs coordination between the competitors.

“It does require a bit of partnership between partners as some people handle the cattle different, some horses move different speeds,” he said. “There’s a lot of variables that can change going down the arena.”




Justin Kowalsky, right, and brother Devon were two of the local competitors in the Norfolk Pro Rodeo this summer. They competed in the team roping event, which requires competitors to work together.

As viewers of the hit television series Yellowstone who watched character Jimmy get injured, rodeo can be dangerous.

“You could fall off your horse, lose fingers, there’s always injuries,” Justin said. “There are a lot of things you can do to invite it though.”

Both Justin and Devon made it to the Roping Association of Ontario finals three times. Devon also made the Ram Rodeo finals twice.

“Maybe you go and win, and that’s great, but just having fun is important,” Justin said. 🍀




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Talbot Road Poultry of Jarvis holds an “open barn” for public education and fun



Bruce Van Der Molen uses a single control system to maintain the building’s mechanical systems.



Talbot Road Poultry’s three barns use an all-in-all-out system to grow 50,000 broilers each time.

When Bruce Van Der Molen of Talbot Road Poultry finished building a new broiler barn on his Jarvis-area farm this summer, he filled it with people before putting in birds.

This open house – or open barn – doubled as a public education event in addition to expanding his Highway 3 broiler operation, which has two pre-existing barn. Neighbours, poultry farmers and the public toured the spotless new edifice, which has the latest technology necessary for providing a comfortable life for broilers -- that is, meat birds raised to a weight of two to five kilograms.

Highlighting the day was a BBQ hosted by the Jarvis Lions’ Club, along with games and a sample square dance lesson for the children.

“It’s a casual education opportunity for the general public,” explained Van Der Molen, who serves as secretary of the Chicken Farmers of Ontario’s District 4 (Norfolk, Haldimand and Niagara), with 94 registered members.

The opportunity enabled visitors to discuss

poultry practices, such as housing conditions, means of enabling the birds to express natural behaviour, feeding, watering, and biosecurity measures against pathogens such as highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI).



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The Jarvis Lions Club hosted a BBQ and children's' games at Talbot Road Poultry's public education day

The barn that visitors toured was a single-tier, open floor structure, like 48 percent of Ontario's 1,300 chicken barns are. It comfortably accommodates 20,000 chickens, expanding Talbot Road Poultry's total production to 50,000 birds per shipment.

Visitors saw that the birds can freely roam about, although the chicks establish their own space, said Van Der Molen. They learned that

when the doors are closed, the barn's lights stay on 18 hours daily when poultry is present. The heating-cooling system keeps the chicks comfortable at 32.2C; it drops to 20C as they mature.

Van Der Molen previously suspended the automated rows of feeders, heat lamps and water troughs above the room for the event, in order that visitors could roam freely.



The Van Der Molen family (left to right) Anne, Minne, Bruce and Chris

"It (the automated feed systems) facilitates easier cleaning," said Van Der Molen. "The barn is completely sterilized each time between flocks. We add new bedding each time for comfort and to encourage natural behaviours."

Van Der Molen uses an all-in-all-out schedule for the three barns; the chicks – who are of



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CountyLine congratulates Bruce and Ben Van Der Molen on their recent broiler barn build and open house!

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Canadian Chicken Farming Facts

- Haldimand-Norfolk has 82 registered meat poultry farms: 51 in Haldimand County and 31 in Norfolk.
- Ontario remains Canada's largest producer and processor of chicken (including stewing hens), or 478.4 million kilograms produced nationally in 2022, while Quebec accounted for approximately one-quarter, or 358.5 million kilograms.
- Chicken protein dominates other meat proteins in Canada: estimated per capita consumption in 2022 is 36.1kilograms.
- In 2016, there were 2,817 regulated chicken farmers in Canada.
- The average live price paid to Canadian chicken farmers in 2022 was \$2.043 per kilogram live weight.
- Chickens are not given hormones; using them for poultry has been illegal in Canada since the 1960s.
- The broiler chicken market in Canada remains supply-managed; that is, a quota system exists to ensure a consistent supply of chicken for the marketplace and a guaranteed fair return to the farmer.
- In 2016, Canada exported more than 134 million kilograms of chicken meat and edible bi-products to more than 70 countries, primarily to the United States.
- It takes approximately 1.9 kilograms of feed to grow one kilogram of chicken. Their water consumption depends upon the age of the bird and the temperature conditions.

Facts gleaned from the Chicken Farmers of Canada's website: Let's Talk Chicken.ca

the Cobb broiler breed -- arrive from Thames River Hatchery when they are two hours old. They stay for approximately 45 days upon which a Niagara-area poultry processor sends in a catching crew to collect them.

The farm has six-and-one-half broiler harvests annually, the "half" carrying into the New Year, said Van Der Molen. This methodology enables him to run the system with minimal effort.

The new barn uses one control panel to operate the feed and mechanical systems, compared with the original structures, which need separate systems for each function. Van Der Molen said that the new build is also more energy efficient, using approximately 50 percent less electricity than the pre-existing barns. Alarms signal malfunctions directly to his mobile phone to ensure quicker responses.

The "open barn" was Van Der Molen's first public hosting; his brother, who manages the family's nearby dairy barn located on "the home farm" held a similar event last autumn.

"It just happens when there's a newly-built barn to do it," explained Van Der Molen. "It's important for the public to know about farming."

Kathryn Goodish, the Ontario Chicken Farmers' spokesperson, said, "Bruce is a CFO District Committee Representative. He is a very active and engaged member of our district team and an excellent advocate for farmers in our community."

The Van Der Molen farm story began when parents Minne and Anne emigrated from Holland in their childhood. The family lived near Strathroy before buying a farm on

Walpole Concession 8 road east of Jarvis. Minne worked in the broiler hen business before marrying Anne. The couple alternated between raising pullets, laying hens and broilers before embracing dairy farming.

As the third of Minne and Anne's four children, Van Der Molen learned about both the dairy and chicken businesses on the home farm without any additional post secondary agricultural training. He studied at George Brown College and married Kelly in 2003.

By 2014, Van Der Molen opted to farm as well, choosing poultry over dairy as he could operate the farm more efficiently due to being visually impaired.

But that meant starting from scratch. The couple purchased a 50-acre site on Highway 3 which lacked any structures. "It was just open fields --there was no house, no barns. We built everything new at the time."

Talbot Road Poultry became established, despite being marred with Kelly's death in 2018. Van Der Molen now farms with son, Ben, with their dog Houston in tow.

They also cash crop wheat, corn and soybeans with Ben handling most of that work. They plant cover crops such as oats and peas to enhance the clay soil, as well as spreading manure on their fields at appropriate times. Their corn is processed into their custom feed.

The pair lives comfortably from their farm income, although Van Der Molen works off-farm as a piano tuner while Ben does local custom farming work.

A member of the Jarvis Lions' Club, Van Der Molen plays the organ at several area churches and plays the saxophone with the Haldimand-Norfolk Concert Band. 🌿

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Kisa, an eight month old Tornjak puppy from Croatia is learning to guard sheep and goats in Ontario under the tutelage of Hero, an older mixed breed guardian dog.

The Tornjak breed of dog developed in the countries of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina as a livestock protection dog. It is an ancient breed, with written references dating back as far as the 9th century. The dogs of that time were essentially the same as those seen today. The name of the breed comes from the Croatian word tor, meaning an enclosure where sheep or goats are kept.

The breed is highly intelligent, courageous and protective of its charges. They tend to be friendly with people, but can be suspicious of strangers, especially when at work with a flock or herd. Unlike many other guardian breeds, Tornjaks come in a variety of colours and patterns, ranging from mostly white with small patches to dogs that are heavily coloured in black, sable, brown or tricolour with white markings. The coat is long and luxurious, giving the dogs ample protection from severe weather conditions.

Tornjaks are not large as guardian breeds go, but they are certainly not small dogs. The range for the breed is 60 to 110 pounds, with heights ranging from 23 to 28 inches. Females tend to be smaller than males. Life expectancy is 12 to 14 years.

Like many other breeds, the Tornjak was almost lost due to the ravages of the World Wars and the vanishing of the nomadic shepherding lifestyle. Starting in the late seventies, enthusiasts from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina searched for remaining dogs to rebuild the breed, with a breeding commission established in Croatia under the supervision of the Croatian Kennel Club. Today Tornjaks are well established and gaining popularity in many countries, including North America.

There are currently not many Tornjaks in Ontario, yet several have been imported in the last few years. Some of these are working on farms, others are companion dogs. In time perhaps this will be a well-known breed here. 🌿

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Norfolk farmers volunteer as precipitation recorders

If Brian Woolley knows it rained the night before, he tries to make sure he takes the 250-metre or so walk to his barnyard to check the rain gauge between 7 and 8 a.m., the same time each day.

"It gets me moving in the a.m.," he quipped.

Woolley and his wife operate "a small hobby farm by today's standards," in the southeast corner of Norfolk County.

They grow grain corn, soybeans and winter wheat; they also tend two hives of honey bees, and are hoping to make maple syrup in 2025, as Woolley's brother did before he passed away a decade ago.

It was three or four years ago that Woolley started collecting rainfall data for CoCoRaHS (Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network) as a member of the Norfolk Soil and Crop Improvement Association (NSCIA).

CoCoRaHS, according to its website, is "a unique, non-profit, community-based network

of volunteers of all ages and backgrounds working together to measure and map precipitation."

Woolley said he had noticed in the NSCIA annual report that no one was recording the precipitation levels in his area, so he volunteered.

"As a result, I was provided with a very accurate rain gauge," he said. "I joke about it, but I truly believe the rain gauges we are using can truly measure a 'spit of rain,' as it measures to the 1/100" of an inch."

Thomas MacDonald, who operates a small cash crop farm in the northwest corner of Norfolk County, also got involved in recording the precipitation data when he saw that no one else in his area was doing so; that was several years ago.

"We enjoy recording the daily readings, as well as checking data from other areas," he

said. "Observing trends in rainfall helps in planning irrigation."

Jason Robinson, who farms corn and soybeans with his dad in the Courtland area, said the data helps them make decisions about their day-to-day operations.

"The rainfall is important to us; it lets us know if we can get out and do something on our farm, like planting, spraying, etc.," he said, adding, "some of our farms are a distance away from our main farm, so I can get on the website and see what everyone else got around the area and make a decision (based) on what our land got for moisture."

Robinson both submits data to CoCoRaHS and runs the local reports for NSCIA.

"It's nice to find out what everyone else got in the area," Robinson said, noting that he updates the spreadsheet once a month.

Looking at the trends over the past few months, Robinson noted, "This year we have had a lot more rain in June/ July than normal, but then late August and September, the rain has stopped, and we now need rain across the area. That's not normal for Norfolk. We are normally dry for July, and then come September, we start to get some moisture. Hopefully we still have a good crop."

Woolley said his corner of the world "has generally had less rain than most areas of Ontario this year, but we've had enough I believe to at least achieve an average crop this year."

He noted that in 2023, the weather cooperated, and he had "near record crops."

But that's always been a big part of farming in general.

"I've always had a keen interest in knowing how much it has rained. Rain, along with sunlight and nutrients, is key to production agriculture. When talking to farmers, I don't think a conversation goes by without someone mentioning rain and it usually comes down to either it rained too much, or it didn't rain enough."

Woolley noted that the company he works for sells some pre-emergent herbicides that require rainfall for activation – in most cases, just a single half-inch of rain within seven to 10 days of application for the product to work up to the expectations.

If that amount of rain doesn't come, or it comes late, "it usually means that the grower will need to spray another product post emergently in order to achieve acceptable weed control," Woolley said. "From a professional standpoint, I'm very interested in the rainfall in the months of May and June. These are the main planting months for all crops but also important for crop protection products to properly work."

That's a big part of why he expects he'll continue to record the rainfall, "Unless, of course, I'm on the wrong side of the dirt to do it."

Woolley noted, "Having rain information, (the) amount and when it happened, can provide growers with a good sense of what the potential yield will be for the year. Too little, too much, too soon, too late can all have a tremendous negative impact on yield."

For more information on CoCoRaHS and how to get involved as a volunteer, visit cocorahs.org.



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Norfolk Fruit Growers' Association's Deb Matthews retires after 46 years of apple work

Port Dover resident Deb Matthews enjoyed working at the Norfolk Fruit Growers' Association (NFGA) so much that she stayed there for 46 years.

Matthews is the outgoing retail store manager for The Apple Place, the NFGA's landmark store at the co-operative's headquarters on Queensway East in Simcoe. She began working in the processing line on Oct. 4, 1978 before advancing to retail, becoming a fixture in the store and in the community.

Matthews officially retires at the end of October, and will be replaced by Kim Popkey of Tillsonburg, who comes to the job with much food retail experience. Training Popkey, who was hired in June, is one of Matthews' last official duties.

"I've seen a lot of changes over the years after beginning in the processing line," recalled Matthews, laughing.

Back then, said Matthews, the apples required more personal handling while in the line, from washing and hand grading them, then sending them down the line to the dryer and adding the "shine spray" before they were packed into purple trays. Today, much of the processing is done electronically.

Matthews said that the processing work was seasonal, but staff could choose to stay on to repair old wooden bins and clean up in order to work full time. She said that the wages were livable, with approximately 75 workers at the time, including truckers, packers and a small retail store.

After 11 years, her boss, Murray Churley, asked her to work at the store. Training her was Debbie Exelby, who had previously moved from packing to the store.

"It was a great change," said Matthews about the move. "I had customer interaction and also with the apple growers -- it was just as if you're running the store."

The Apple Place was smaller then, with no bakery at the time, said Matthews. Upon Exelby's retirement, she became the manager.

Being a manager means multitasking, from handling everything from inventory, store layout, working with the processing crew and other staff, even assisting in the increasingly busy bakery when Matthews had time. She greeted busloads of agri-tourists who came to visit the facility.

Matthews works 48-hour weeks, from Monday to Saturday; but she added, "I had summers off when the store was closed in order to regenerate."

Store product increased during Matthews' tenure, with everything from fair trade coffee to local condiments and foods from other apple processors appearing on the shelves. Gift baskets became popular, with Matthews' daughter, Jessica, assembling them.

The Apple Place's signature baked good – the apple cider doughnut – became a best-seller. Matthews assisted the NFGA in successfully lobbying Norfolk County Council to declare it as the County's Official Doughnut in 2015.

Matthews witnessed apple varieties expand from the few "oldies" such as Ida Red, Mac, Spy and Cortland to approximately 20 varieties.

"Honeycrisp is the most popular, although it's a toss-up between it and Ambrosia. And



Deb Matthews helped the NFGA lobby the County to declare the apple cider doughnut as Norfolk's official doughnut.

the Empire has been a biggie (for hand-eating) for years."

"You know all of the local farmers too," said Matthews. "There were at least 100 members when I began; they were little growers with small acreages. Now the orchards are bigger with fewer growers, but the volume and varieties have increased."

Matthews has no regrets: "I loved both jobs; I had no qualms with either section."

She looks forward towards time at home with husband Paul, who also worked for the NFGA.

Matthews admitted, "I will miss working with Kim. I will miss the regular customers, but I collected quite a few phone numbers to meet some of them over tea!" 🍏

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Vintage Tractor Drive



During an August morning, a collection of vintage tractors departed the Delhi museum to enjoy the scenic backroads of Norfolk County. The classic Farmalls, Cockshutts and John Deere tractors cruised their 40 km journey in style. The aesthetic beauty of these machines was greatly appreciated by the residents of Ontario's garden.



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Latest temporary foreign worker announcement does not include ag says FARMS President Ken Forth

Justin Trudeau's announcement the Liberal government would be restricting the number of low-wage Temporary Foreign Workers allowed to enter Canada as of September, 2024 does not impact agriculture, says Foreign Agricultural Resource Management Services (F.A.R.M.S.) President Ken Forth.

The Prime Minister made the announcement at a party retreat in Halifax late in August, 2024. A related release indicated food services would not be impacted, an imprecise definition which may have raised concern among an agricultural industry which relies on the experienced, skilled labour provided by offshore workers.

However, Forth says he spoke with Employment Minister Randy Boissonnault two weeks prior to the public announcement, and received general assurances there were not concerns around agriculture. The week of the announcement, ministry department heads reaffirmed that position.

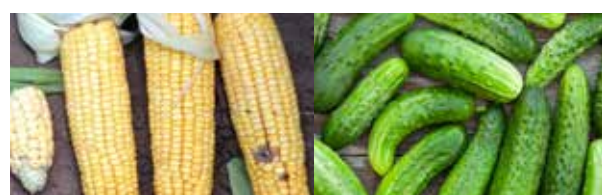
"It's necessary for food production and food security and will stay intact," Forth said, summarizing their comments.

The F.A.R.M.S. president appreciated the sense of security their approach offered.

"For the first time, you don't have to read anything into it. We're not in it."

In essence, the Liberal government announcement translates into returning to pre-pandemic levels in other industries which have continued to source temporary foreign workers past its conclusion. Those ongoing levels are seen to have impacted student, among other employment opportunities.


There is a distinction between the long-running Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) and others Forth emphasized. SAWP has been operational since 1966 as a symbiotic relationship between the Canadian and Jamaican governments. Envisioned as a form of foreign aid, SAWP provides income to foreign agricultural workers and a dependable, committed labour force to Canadian farmers.



Members of the public may understand offshore workers are only employed in the agricultural industry rather than construction or service industries where other programs may direct them.

"But they don't see it because they don't drive by a farm and see an army of people picking apples or tomatoes," said Forth.

Another distinction is SAWP has been reviewed annually for both successes and areas of improvement since inception by stakeholders from both governments, agricultural representatives and employee liaison services. Conferences may be hosted in a variety of locations including Ottawa, Mexico or the Caribbean says Forth, but they have been held throughout the program's existence.

"We do that every year." 



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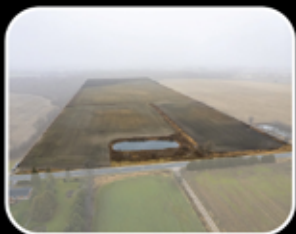
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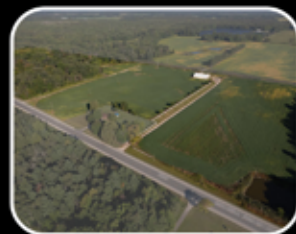
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SECTION B / ISSUE 31 / FALL 2024

Giving recognition where recognition is due

It was standing room only when the Waterford Heritage and Agricultural Museum honored this year's inductees into the Norfolk Agricultura Hall of Fame. The two new members of the 'elite' club for 2024 are Jacob Joseph Proracki and Tom Haskett.

There were a large number of familiar faces in the gathered crowd from family members to friends, fellow farmers, local politicians - Haldimand-Norfolk MPP Bobbi Ann Brady, Mayor Amy Martin, Councillor Kim Huffman (Waterford Councillor), and Councillor Chris VanPassen.

Melissa Colver, Norfolk's Manager of Heritage and Culture, greeted the crowd and welcomed everyone to the afternoon of recognition. Also on hand were Jame Christisen, WHAM Curator

and member of the selection committee and Angela Ferreira, Assistant Curator.

Christisen explained "Since 2014 we have been honoring those in the farming community who have made a lasting impact on agriculture in this area". Nominations were open to the public during the selection process.

This year's inductees are the late Jacob Proracki and Tom Haskett. Both are well known and respected in all of Norfolk County.

Mayor Martin thanked both recipients and families on behalf of Norfolk County Council. "Their contributions to our community are far reaching".

MPP Brady added "They both helped to put food on our tables and shaped our area in

agriculture. I am impressed and grateful". Brady described the late Proracki as innovative farmer and described both Proracki and Haskett as true leaders who 'took the bull by the horns.'

Proracki was born in Manitoba in 1918, the son of hard-working Ukranian immigrants. His family moved to Round Plains in 1923 and he worked alongside his father growing asparagus and strawberries before transitioning to tobacco. Jake, Olga and their five children took over the farm when his father passed away.

Recognizing the time that it took his wife to water the tobacco plants in the greenhouses, by hand, he began to experiment with green

Please turn to page B2 →



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house watering applications to save hours of work. He first purchased a watering machine from Spray-Rite, modified the design and re-configured its hose and spray nozzles. These changes solved a number of challenges, the biggest of which was the intensive labour of greenhouse operations. He approached his friend Keith Andrews, a drafting machine expert, and the two entered into a business partnership where they created a travelling water system and it quickly became an industry staple for tobacco growers and flower and vegetable growers as

Proracki's dedication to advancements was far reaching and used across the country to this day. His family continues to be an integral part of the local agricultural community and are well known and respected for their contributions to agriculture.

Tom Haskett was born in Simcoe in 1941 and was driven, at a young age, to become a farmer. After graduating high school Haskett apprenticed as a millwright in Delhi and Simcoe. In 1966 he married his wife, Joan, a nurse at Norfolk General Hospital, and together they saved enough money to purchase



→ Tom Haskett accepting his Agricultural Hall of Fame award

This year's inductees are the late Jacob Proracki and Tom Haskett. Both are well known and respected in all of Norfolk County.

well.

Their new overhead system and company was rebranded "AndPro", a combination of both names, and from there the two made huge improvements and time-saving innovations. Proarcki would also become involved with AgroSpray and a dealer for Argo, a manufacturer of multiuse farm vehicles.

Tom's grandparents' farm near Victoria. They raised their family there while continuing their careers... he at Borg Warner and she at the hospital...and invested everything into the 50 acre farm. T & J Haskett Farms Inc. continued to grow, with the help of family and friends, into a diverse 200 acre operation.

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Haskett also took on several leadership roles in Norfolk County including the board of directors at Norfolk Fruit Growers Association and as the provincial representative to the Canadian Horticultural Council for the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association. As if that wasn't enough, he also worked with the University of Guelph and the Ontario Horticultural Institute on best practices and development. He chaired the Processing Strawberry Research Corp. and formed a partnership with local berry farmer Gary Cooper and together they established Granny's Best, a strawberry puree, that they supplied to E.D. Smith.

Haskett continued his education with courses that led him to a long-standing involvement with the Long Point Region Conservation Authority and the farm's expansion of apple production...leading to the creation of Uncle Tom's Farm Inc.

The family always enjoyed making apple cider and developed their own recipe. In 1990 Haskett opened The Cider Keg, which provided a direct market for the farm's produce, using his skills developed as a millwright. It provided an outlet for their farm's produce and carbonated non-alcoholic drinks. The brand soon became a household name and put Norfolk County on the map. One of Haskett's claims to fame is when the Prince of Wales toasted the nation with a glass of his Cider Keg sparking cider during the 150th. Anniversary of Confederation.

The Cider Keg continues to operate with his children Mike, Cheryl and Tracy playing important roles within the operations. "I tried at least one new thing each year. Some have paid off and some have been duds, but you keep trying."

Haskett adds "There are a great number of innovators in Norfolk County...a lot of other people deserve this besides me. Our county is fortunate to be along the north shore of Lake Erie because you always get a good crop".

Haskett left the crowd with a very personal, closing remark..."The very best crop I ever produced has been my wife, Joan, and our three children... Cheryl, Tracey and Michael." 🍏



Donna Lotus and Bob Proracki accepting on behalf of their late Father, Bob Proracki

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Now is the time for soybean harvest preparation

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



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The Problem with Wild Parsnip

Ontario has become the home of several invasive plant species; while most are threatening to local biodiversity, they are not directly harmful to humans. However there are some which can cause serious burns when touched, and everyone should be aware of these dangerous plants.

One of these is Wild Parsnip, a plant originally from Europe and Asia, where it was cultivated for its root. Very likely brought over for that purpose, the plant escaped from cultivated gardens and has spread widely across North America. It has been reported in all Canadian provinces and territories with the exception of Nunavut.

These plants- stem, leaves and flowers - produce sap that contains toxic compounds that can irritate human (or animal) skin, producing a burn like rash when exposed to sunlight. Mild cases are like a bad sunburn; in severe cases the skin goes red, develops large blisters and can feel like it is scalded. People or animals with white or light coloured skin or coats are more seriously affected than those with darker colouring.

The plant produces dense stands which reduce biodiversity by outcompeting native plants. It is a problem agriculturally if it gets into forage crops, as chemical compounds can reduce weight



gain or infertility and can even be toxic if eaten by livestock. This impacts the quality and salability of these crops. Their presence on the farm can also be a problem for workers or children playing in the fields.

Supervisor of Forestry in Norfolk County Adam Biddle explained that wild parsnip is considered a noxious weed in the Ontario Weed Control Act. These are defined as plants that can negatively impact livestock, crops or farm workers. Biddle admits that wild parsnip will likely never be fully controlled, but he says it is next on Norfolk's 'hit list,' with mapping occurring to identify areas to target.

He stated that it is, "Very difficult to provide adequate long term control," adding that it requires planning and long term commitment. Mostly the plant is being handled on a complaint basis, with control targeted mainly where people are most likely to contact it. He mentioned the trails near Port Rowan and Waterford and the Long Point area as being the most problematic. Biddle feels that, "Most farms in Norfolk are pretty tidy," so that the weed is not a major problem on most farms. He feels that Norfolk has a good finger on the pulse, with wild parsnip definitely on the radar for early detection and control.

Adam Chamberlin, Project Manager, Forestry, Haldimand County, explained that the goal in Haldimand is to control the plant in areas where people are likely to encounter it. It is, "Impossible to eradicate ... like trying to eradicate dandelions," he stated. Haldimand does mowing along county roads, but wild parsnip is a recurring problem, as seeds disperse and new plants come along. Large stands of this weed can be seen in several areas of Haldimand, particularly along the Grand River. It is very thick by the Hwy 6 bypass along the bridge and in other areas along the river.

Nancy Davis, Manager of Parks, Capital Planning and Forestry for Brant County, explained that her county manages this weed with mechanical or pesticide means on public lands, but it is up to individual land owners on private property. She recommends that stands of less than 100 plants can be handled mechanically. Weed inspectors respond to complaints on agricultural land. She doesn't feel that Brant has a huge problem with this weed, although it does exist along the river. She added that wild parsnip is often misidentified or confused with giant hogweed or angelica. 🌿

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Norfolk Farms Seed and Sapling Feature

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Today, we're excited to continue that 140-year-old legacy of innovation," said Mark Kerry, Head of Sales for Syngenta Seeds in Canada. "We're bringing more reliable and high-performing corn genetics

to our customers faster than ever — with profit-protecting traits such as insect and drought resistance and improved genetics for better standability and disease tolerance."

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

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Picard Peanuts Limited expanding operations in Norfolk

New Chip Nut plant expected to be operational in late 2025



A new plant being built adjacent to Picard Peanuts Limited's Windham Centre store and chocolate manufacturing facility is expected to be operational by the end of 2025.

Picard Peanuts Limited is on the precipice of a major expansion.

"We're desperate for space today, because we have a very busy Christmas season in our (six) retail stores," said the company's owner, Jim Picard.

That's on top of the "tremendous" business the company does through online orders, at farm markets, and wholesale businesses throughout the year, besides being "in most major grocery store chains today."

The company offers products like flavoured peanuts, peanut brittle, specialty popcorn, and confectionary, but far and away, the most popular treat shoppers are looking for is Chip Nuts, which have been a staple in the company's product lineup since the early 1990s, when James Picard Sr., the family patriarch and founder of the company, combined peanuts and chips to create Chip Nuts.

These crunchy coated nuts come in a wide variety of flavours, like smokey maple bacon, dill pickle, ranch and chili lime.

"You've seen more Chip Nuts in the market-place because we want to make it the focus of what we do. We want to expand the market we're in," Picard said.

To that end, construction is underway on a new facility behind the company's Windham



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While growing peanuts isn't the main focus for Picard Peanuts Limited, company owner Jim Picard noted, "We have a farm, and we have a crop every year."

Centre store; it's expected the new plant will be operational by the end of 2025.

"We currently have about 400 pounds an hour of production; the new plant will produce 2,000 pounds an hour," Picard said. "It's a very big expansion. There will be local jobs created from it."

The increased capacity in the company's Chip Nuts production is needed. This year, Picard Peanuts Limited started shipping Chip Nuts into the USA, and "Of course, that market's quite large," Picard said. "With the plant up and running in late 2025 ... this will allow us to grow the USA market."

The new facility is being built adjacent to the company's existing retail store and chocolate manufacturing facility in Norfolk County.

Picard Peanuts Limited is a proudly Canadian company, with agricultural roots in Norfolk County.

In the 1979, James Picard Sr. "was looking for an alternative crop" from the tobacco and other cash crops he'd been growing on his farm in Simcoe, Picard said. "He'd been working on growing peanuts at the research farm in Delhi for a while."

Generally speaking, peanuts are a warm climate crop – the majority are grown in places like Florida and Georgia.

However, there are some varieties of peanuts that will grow in Southern Ontario, including the Valencia.

"The seed comes from New Mexico, (where) the climate is very similar to Canada's, because it's so high," Picard explained, adding, "Dad was there once when it actually snowed."

While Valencia peanuts can be grown in Canada – and indeed, "We have a farm, and we have a crop every year," Picard said, noting that it's a high quality, high flavour type of nut that is ideal

for products like chocolate covered peanuts – it's a crop that has challenges. It's very sensitive to the weather; an early frost can limit the yield.

While there is opportunity to use Valencia peanuts in other parts of the operation, when it comes to Chip Nuts, there's no question. "We needed to have a consistent, uniform peanut," Picard said. "The only thing we can use is a Jumbo Runner from the USA."

Meaning that in Picard Peanuts Limited's products, "We have Ontario grown, and we also have imported (nuts)," Picard said.

Wherever they're sourced from, the company makes sure that all the ingredients used to make its products are high quality with the best flavour, to continue on the tradition that's now over 40 years strong.

For more information about Picard Peanuts Limited, its products and where to purchase them, visit picardpeanuts.com. 🌱

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MORE INFO

‘We’re at a stage right now where honey bees can’t survive without human intervention’

130 years of learning at Honey Bee Research Centre at University of Guelph



Paul Kelly is the research and apiary manager of the Honey Bee Research Centre (HBRC) at the University of Guelph.



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If not for the internal combustion engine, modern beekeeping wouldn’t exist today.

While the two seem completely disparate, it makes sense once you consider the fact that horses are very averse to getting stung, noted Paul Kelly, research and apiary manager of the Honey Bee Research Centre (HBRC) at the University of Guelph under Dr. Ernesto Guzman.

The centre was established in 1894, well before the University of Guelph itself. Kelly explained that the university was founded in the 1960s with many new programs being offered in addition to the original three colleges: the Ontario Agricultural College, Ontario Veterinary College, and MacDonald College (which was focused on domestic sciences, nutrition, textiles, etc.)

In the late 1800s, when students came to the agricultural college, “They would have been coming from mixed farms, because that was typical then, and bees just fit in as part of that. On a mixed farm, it was common to have a small orchard, and bees were necessary for pollination. Honey produced on the farm provided a natural sweetener at a time when sugar was less available. So, beekeeping has been taught here since that point.”

As time and technology have progressed, agricultural producers were able to specialize, and “it

became possible to keep bees as a primary income source. ... When trucks first became available in the early 1900s, that made it possible to be moving colonies and beekeeping equipment from place to place without using horses.”

Kelly noted that it’s generally believed that the world’s first commercial beekeeper was from Ontario; certainly, D.A. Jones is one of the world’s best-known beekeepers.

“He manufactured beehives to sell to people; he had a factory set up for that. He was a very influential person,” Kelly said, adding that Jones’ apiary in Simcoe County is credited with inspiring the name of the town of Beeton, and his practice of transporting bees up to islands in Georgian Bay for bee breeding purposes is how Honey Harbour got its name.

Kelly said breeding bees on islands is still practiced today by the centre.

“We keep bees on two islands in Lake Simcoe, because when we put our colonies there, we can control who our queens are mating with; they can only mate with the males that are on the island,” he explained.

There are a number of benefits to the practice.

“We breed bees for beekeeper-friendly characteristics,” Kelly said. “So, a low tendency



to sting; nice, calm bees to work with; healthy; productive; and more recently, we've added in breeding for resistance to a parasite (Varroa destructor) that's our number one bee health problem."

Kelly said from 2007 to 2008, the centre did studies tracking over 400 colonies, measuring all of the different health parameters to determine which were the most severe, "so we could learn how to focus our efforts on what were the worst problems. And we were able to show very clearly that Varroa mites were our number one problem."

He explained that the parasite actually co-evolved with a different species of honey bee in Southeast Asia. Through this co-evolution, these honey bees developed a natural resistance to the mites. Our western honey bees became exposed to Varroa mites in the mid-twentieth century, and "because our bees had no shared history with this parasite, they had no resistance to it."

Kelly and the team of researchers at the centre, as well as numerous other researchers around the globe, have been working to help the bees in their fight for survival against the mites.

So far, the Guelph team has found that the most promising long-term defence for the honey bees is breeding from colonies that exhibit "grooming behaviour."



The Honey Bee Research Centre (HBRC) was established in 1894, well before the University of Guelph itself.

"It's much as it sounds," Kelly said. "It's the ability of the bees to groom the mites off their body, so they're not parasitizing them anymore. Ideally, they also kill them by chewing their legs off! The original host species is very good at grooming behaviour, and some of our colonies are good at it, too. We just have to find which ones, and then breed from them."

Kelly said some researchers have compared the approach to "trying to breed sheep that are resistant to wolves."

While that may sound like a lofty goal, the work to date is very promising, and the grooming behaviour is proving to be "quite heritable; we've found that over four generations, we have a tenfold increase in mite resistance. So we know we're on the right track with this."

One of the other approaches the HBRC is currently testing is the miticide effect of naturally occurring chemicals, such as essential plant oils and organic acids.

"They can be quite effective, once you figure out a good way of applying them inside the hive,"

Kelly said, adding, "We're trying to kill one little critter that lives on an insect, that lives inside a box full of food, people are going to eat. So, it's a bit of a challenge there."

The HBRC has developed effective products based on essential oils from the plants thyme and oregano.

With Varroa destructor being such a widespread problem, multiple Canadian researchers are looking at how to combat the mites. Through the national organization, the Canadian Association of Professional Apiculturists, the different teams are able to communicate about their work with each other and find which approaches and skill sets are complementary.

"When you collaborate, you can get more done," Kelly said.

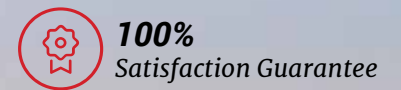
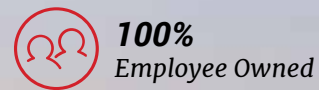
The HBRC also studies hive management techniques, learning which approaches are best for hive productivity, health and longevity.

The information gathered is then imparted.

Through its apiary courses, the centre teaches 800 undergraduate students each year; "It's one of the most popular courses at the university," Kelly said.

There's also weekend courses for people to get hands-on experience with beekeeping, and almost-daily tours of the centre for the general public, school children, etc.

The centre's educational reach has extended well beyond Guelph.



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About seven years ago, as a supplement to the beekeeping courses, the HBRC started to film 'How-To' beekeeping videos. The student videographer suggested that the centre post the videos on YouTube. Since then, a collection of over 75 HBRC videos have been produced and posted. The videos have been translated into 12 languages and viewed approximately 30 million times.

Kelly said the information is helpful for all beekeepers.

"Most beekeepers around the world work with the same honey bee species," and when it comes to tending to a hive, "A lot of the basics are the same, no matter where you are: how to open up a hive, how to use a bee smoker, how to inspect a colony. Much of what we do is the same, no matter where you are."

While it's easy to be impressed with the scope of the centre's work, it's even more so when one realizes that the team currently works out of a converted house.

A decade ago, the team started to look at how to improve its facility.

"(We) pretty quickly realized that it wasn't going to be possible to make it more accessible," Kelly said. There's stairs to get to the meeting room and office spaces, and the hallways are too narrow for a wheelchair – or to effectively move beekeeping equipment.

What that means is, "We're carrying hundreds of pounds of honey up and down the stairs almost every day."

As they looked at their facility, it became apparent that they "really needed to start from scratch."

Thankfully, "We were lucky to very early on find a donor that wanted to help us, Lydia Luckevich and her family. She had a grander vision than we did, and was impressed with our engagement with the general public and ... wanted to help us create space that was better for that side of things."

The new facility – a \$17 million project – is about three quarters done; it's expected that the team will be able to move in late January 2025.

"The whole building, and the entire site, has been designed for our needs. A great deal of

thought has been put into creating an ergonomically efficient facility," Kelly said.

The HBRC's new facilities will include a visitors' centre, a classroom, a research laboratory, and state-of-the-art beekeeping and honey production spaces.

"That's really going to allow us to broaden our mandate. We will be doing the same mix of activities, but at a larger scale," Kelly said.

The new centre will also be set up so that it can be rented out for special events, which will help to generate some income for the HBRC program.

The centre's work is important, and needs to continue on, Kelly said. Helping beekeepers protect their hives has positive impacts on multiple fronts – agricultural, environmental, economic, and more.

"Beekeeping isn't a simple activity. And you're not really just managing the bees; you're managing all the other problems that they have, too, and that's the complication."

Some might wonder why there's such a focus on helping the honey bees. The fact is, "We're at a stage right now where honey bees can't survive without human intervention," Kelly said. "It's pretty black and white; they're entirely relying on us to keep them alive."

This isn't something to be taken lightly, as humans and honey bees have a symbiotic relationship.

"A third of the food that we eat as humans benefits from bee pollination, and of that bee pollination, 80 per cent of it is done by honey bees," Kelly said. Without honey bees, farmers wouldn't be able to grow things like fruits, berries, seeds, nuts, and many vegetables. Honey bees even pollinate coffee plants.

"Beekeepers earn a sizable portion of their income from providing pollination services to growers that need to have their crops pollinated," Kelly said. "One of the most important crops that we pollinate isn't even grown in Ontario. We have about 100,000 hives in Ontario, and of those, on average 40,000 hives are moved out of the province to Eastern Canada to pollinate lowbush blueberries. ... These growers are 100 per cent dependent on honey bees being moved in for pollination."

Kelly explained that the bees are transported east for pollination and back again to Ontario for honey production. While the colonies have plenty to forage on when blueberries are blooming, there isn't sufficient forage available afterwards for colonies to thrive.

Closer to home, many beekeepers partner with farmers, who allow the hives to be kept on their properties.

"The foraging range of bees from any particular hive is over 7,000 acres," Kelly said. "Commercial beekeepers keep the majority of their colonies on other people's property; you couldn't possibly have enough land to keep them all on your own farm."

These arrangements are mutually beneficial, because some of the farmers' crops get pollinated by the bees.

"We're really appreciative of the farmers that host our hives, and the fact that our bees are able to work on their land, and gather up the nutrition that they need. We're just very grateful for other parts of the agriculture community, because we all need each other," Kelly said.

The centre has a wealth of information on its website, HBRC.ca, including beekeeping education, research activities, and product sales. 🌱

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Latest intake for Ontario Agri-Food Research Initiative funds more than 100 projects

Applications for next stream open Oct. 15

The provincial and federal governments will help fund dozens of research projects through the latest round of the Ontario Agri-Food Research Initiative.

In a press release sent out in September, the provincial government said more than 100 research and innovation projects and activities received funding in the most recent intake. That includes 67 applied research and pilot and demonstration projects, as well as 10 commercialization projects. More than 30 businesses also received specialized expert mentoring through the Grow Ontario Accelerator Hub.

Locally, groups such as the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre, Brock University's Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute, and the Ontario Grape and Wine Research group received money.

"This additional intake will support innovation and research across a wide range of diverse commodity groups across Niagara and the province," said Sam Oosterhoff, MPP for Niagara West.

"Adapting new technologies on farms and at food processing sites is key to the success of our local agri-food sector."

Applications for new rounds of funding open up in October. The Bioenterprise Canada Corporation will open up its next commercialization stream intake on Oct. 2, while its Grow Ontario Accelerator Hub is open on a continuous basis until all spots are filled.

Meanwhile, the funding streams for the Ontario Agri-Food Research Initiative will open for applications next month as well. The applied, pilot and demonstration, as well as the knowledge translation and transfer streams will open on Oct. 15.

"Our farmers and food processors must continue to innovate to compete. Our investment in the Ontario Agri-Food Research Initiative will supercharge their innovation efforts," said Rob Flack, Ontario Minister of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness.

The two levels of government are investing an additional \$3.5 million in the initiative, which is part of the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a five-year, \$3.5-billion investment by provincial, federal and territorial governments.

More information on the Agri-Food Research Initiative can be found at ontario.ca/page/ontario-agri-food-research-initiative, and more information on the accelerator hub can be found at bioenterprise.ca.



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'On The Farm' magazine for and about about the offshore worker community

On The Farm, a glossy, full-colour bi-lingual (English and Spanish) magazine launched July 12th of this year, is both about and for Ontario's offshore worker community.

"They are more than the people we see working in the fields as we drive by, or are shopping Friday nights in town," said publisher Leanne Arnal. "They are a valuable part of our community and make a big difference to our local economy."

On The Farm's launch was celebrated in downtown Simcoe at a community event which drew an estimated 1,000 people, including offshore workers, local politicians, farmers and community members. A five-farm tug-of-war competition featured a healthy dose of viral video pre-match chirping between teams. A tight and highly-competitive challenge was finally resolved as workers from Koteles Farms narrowly prevailed over Ryder Farms representatives in the final.

"We had everyone there from kids to seniors on scooters," said Arnal. "The whole community came out - it was awesome."

Arnal has worked in many positions supporting the Caribbean community in the past 18 years, currently as the Director, Norfolk Community in Action, organizing culturally-inclusive events in the county, as well as as a Settlement Navigator with Catholic Community Services of York Region, a Simcoe-based satellite office serving temporary foreign workers, international students, refugees and other newcomers.



The Koteles Farms tug-of-war team prevailed in the On The Farm launch event Friday, July 12 in Simcoe, narrowly prevailing over Ryder Farms representatives in a competitive final.

It has been 58 years says Arnal since the first offshore workers landed and began working in Canada, providing necessary labour to support the nation's fresh fruit and vegetable industries among others. In the past five years in particular she continued, there has been increased interest in improving temporary foreign worker

programs and heightened recognition around the crucial contributions individuals make to Canadian food security and local and national economies.

"To be a part of that positive change is really exciting and overdue," says Arnal.




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Her approach is to find positive solutions, says Arnal, and rather than focussing on the small minority who she considers problematic, highlighting the 95 per cent of farmers she believes are quality employers.

“We should be focussing on them and shining a light on them so the others will be weeded out.”

On The Farm strives to entertain and educate, both among offshore and local communities. Its content combines features on individuals like Dwayne, whose time in Canada has allowed him to buy property, build a house and support his family in Jamaica, shepherd Timothy who takes care of 1,500 sheep, talented saxophonist Jeremiah, or ‘Bass Boss’ DJ Serious.

It also carries informative articles on, for example, the rules of the road, first aid in the field, mental health, navigating pregnancy away from home, explanations on payroll deductions, or suggestions on how to get along with one’s bunkhouse mates (avoid stinky feet) in a shared accommodation setting.

“There is a lot of information they want to know and deserve to have,” said Arnal.

She considers the magazine also provides a sense of security for employers, knowing the information contained within comes from legitimate sources.

“And the workers are not being scammed or misinformed.”

Complexities around her decision to print in both English and Spanish did delay launch, however she considered speaking to a significant percentage of the offshore community in their own language was well worth the effort. A fall edition is scheduled to come out at the end of September.

“And then we’ll be on track for the spring issue.”

A total of 6,000 editions were printed in the first run, half of which were mailed to farmer-owners to distribute among their employees. The fall edition will carry a cost, which Arnal hopes will, along with advertizing and community support, represent ongoing viability.

“I think it has sustainability,” she concluded. 🌱



Publisher Leanne Arnal launched On The Farm Friday, July 12th with a community celebration in downtown Simcoe. The magazine is both for and about the offshore worker community.

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Horse barn mascot inspires a 40-year show goat and breeding career

Lynn Lightbody of Shar-Lyn Dairy Goats of Walsingham Township bred and exhibited purebred dairy goats in Canada and in the United States for approximately 40 years. Yet she admits that she originally snubbed the idea of keeping goats.

Lightbody preferred horses. She originally operated a horse boarding facility near Caledon which she began in 1976; sometimes, she participated in shows and rodeos as far away as Michigan, Timmins and West Virginia.

Then, in the early 1980s, a woman who boarded a horse insisted that Lightbody buy a Nubian cross named Charlotte that was for sale at a nearby sales barn. The border wanted Charlotte as the stable's mascot.

Lightbody rejected her suggestion.

"I told her that I don't want that goat for my soul!" said Lightbody. "Eventually I agreed. I fell in love with Little Charlotte. And then I got a friend for her and then I had to breed her for babies and that's how it all started."

Charlotte became the base name for Lightbody's purebred dairy goat registration name – Shar-Lyn Dairy Goats --- the "Char" in Charlotte changed to 'Shar' for its softer pronunciation.

The Shar-Lyn herd features dairy goats as opposed to meat or wool-producing breeds. The Goat Society of Canada – which maintains the herd book for purebreds -- recognizes six dairy breeds: Nubian, Saanen, LaMancha, Toggenburg, Oberhasli and Alpine.

Lightbody began exhibiting Nubians, LaManchas and Saanens at goat shows, starting at the now-defunct Bolton Fair and then at others across Southern Ontario and in Moncton, New Brunswick; Shar-Lyn goats even competed at the American Dairy Goat Show in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where one doe placed eleventh amongst several hundred goats.

By 1988, she began taking goats to the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair, and has shown



Lynn Lightbody plays with Manuka, a two-year old Saanen who won third place in class at this year's Paris Fair.

there every year, excepting during the pandemic shut down.

"I got hooked and I like the prize money," said Lightbody.

Hanging in Lightbody's living room is a prize quilt consisting of ribbons from all 40 show locales. Her larger championship ribbons hang on her bookcase, including the Royal Winter Agricultural Fair's recognition for of her becoming the Premier Breeder and having several Permanent Champions.

Lightbody also chronicles her favourite goats in poems and essays; for instance,

there's Touchstone Malahyde, a Scotland, Ontario-bred La Mancha that frequently escaped from her pen to turn lights on and off and steal bags of apples and carrots from the horses.

Nevertheless, Lightbody tossed out several boxes of decades-old ribbons explaining, "You can't keep them all."

As the herd grew, Shar-Lyn Dairy Goats moved to different locations; first to Priceville and then Markdale in the Grey County Highlands, before relocating to Norfolk County in 2017.

Lightbody currently focuses on Nubians—known for their soft, floppy ears, vocalizations and milk with higher butterfat content -- and the Saanen --a white or cream-coloured breed which is loved for its companionable nature, strong udders and high milk production.

Shar-Lyn's breeding strategy focuses on producing strong healthy animals that show well and put milk in the pail. It prioritizes structural soundness with level top lines, strong feet and legs and well-attached mammary systems and lots of what Lightbody calls "dairy character".

Although she doesn't milk commercially, Lightbody breeds her females to keep them in milk—a show-ring requirement. Lightbody co-owns breeding bucks with a dairy goat operator near Melbourne: "When I need them I just get them, let them do their job and then get them out."

Lightbody machine-milks three females, using the milk for the kids or for her own consumption. She sells the bucks for meat or for breeding; usually locally, although breeding stock went as far as New Brunswick.

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Still showing off her personality and good looks after showing in the ring: two-year old Shar-Lyn ATB Bianca, a Saanen, placed second in the Paris fair class for milkers aged 2 years.

This veteran show woman currently shares a barn and some other resources with another goat breeder, a situation which she says works well.

The lone setback to Lightbody's Norfolk County arrangement occurred in August, when someone broke into the barn and stole two of her associate's one month-old goats.

One of them, a buck, was recovered by an alert person who found a man who called himself Bill and claimed to live near Jericho, selling live kids from a pickup truck near the Hagersville Livestock Exchange. But the animal was so malnourished that he never lived beyond a week, said Lightbody.

"He only weighed 20 pounds and was unweaned. He still needs mother's milk at that age, not grass!"

To date, the other kid was never recovered, said Lightbody. The theft was reported to the OPP, she added.

The barn has since been padlocked with security cameras installed, said Lightbody, adding that she has since heard of other recent goat thefts from barns and pastures throughout Southwestern Ontario.

Lightbody's 2024 show circuit is localized with eight shows, beginning with the Paris Fair and ending with the Royal. She also provided the Norfolk Fair's goat display this year.



Kidding around before going home: Shar-Lyn kids Melona (white) and Nubians Melinda (left) and Meadow placed well at the 2024 Paris Fair goat show.

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Douglas family barn to live on in different forms

'It's better to see it being reused'

The old green barn may be gone from its longtime home on the Douglas family farm along Highway 54 near Brant County 22, but it will soon be enjoying a new lease on life – in several forms.

Don Douglas grew up on the farm; he's the fifth generation of his family to live and work on the land with his wife, Lois B., and their daughters, Dawna and Pam.

The barn on the farm dated back to 1902, just over 40 years after Don's ancestor, William Douglas, first settled on the land. It was a working structure though the years, mostly used for housing livestock and storing hay.

The latter became a particularly prevalent use starting in the 1960s, when Don's father, Wallace Gilbert, started a company marketing extra hay and straw from his two farms, and friends and neighbours' farms. The small, square bales were used at agricultural enterprises such as racetracks and horse, dairy and beef farms, as well as other purposes, such as erosion control along highways and winter protection in construction.

"We always had (the barns) painted to keep them looking good. Most of the dairy farmers around here painted their barns red. And I think a lot ... of the pig farmers, they had theirs painted as orange. I guess that was the reason – we were growing hay – that we painted the barns green," Don said.

Processing and selling hay was a lot of work.

Lois recalled, "We would bale and bale and bale."

"And fill (the barn)," Don added. "We filled it full of hay every year."

Even when the pair retired from their hay business, they still kept the barn in good repair.



It took less than a week for the crew to remove the historic barn from Lois B. and Don Douglas' farm on Highway 54 near Brant County 22. Now the old structure is gone, a second living space – a 'barndominium' – will be build there instead so one of their daughters and her husband can live on the farm as well.

"It wasn't falling down; the wind wasn't blowing it down ... We kept it in good shape, so there wasn't stuff falling off all the time," Don said, though he noted from time to time, "We had barn boards to nail on sometimes, or a door might blow off and you had to get it back on."

Lois added with a laugh, "They were heavy." She also noted, "The roof was always good, because you didn't want the hay ruined."

The old barn had a place in the family's history. Besides being the centre of their livelihood, it was also incorporated into the family's celebrations.

When the Douglas' daughter Pam got married about two years ago, the wedding was held in the backyard of the farmhouse, and the barn was used as a site for some of the photos, including a few with Pam "swinging on the rope in the barn," Lois

said. (The reception was held in the barn on the family's other farm).

Don shared that as they were preparing for Pam's wedding, he looked at the barn and thought it was looking a bit shabby.

"The south and the west side get all the sun and wind pretty well, and they were fading," he said.

So, he called for an estimate to get the two barns and the grainery painted, and was told it would be around \$12,000.

Before the Douglasses committed to the job, the wedding planner visited the farm.

"She walked around the barn and said, 'You don't want to paint those; that's rustic,'" Don said with a laugh.

It ended up being money well saved, because in fall of 2023, the family started working on a plan to tear the barn down.

Lois said, "We always said we would not let it collapse in on itself; it was too sad," and the time had come that the barn "had outlived its usefulness and had problems."

Through a friend, the family was able to connect with a Mennonite community that was interested in getting the barn.



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Don said he was told that they plan to re-build the barn, likely in spring 2025, on a farm outside of Linwood, Ont.

“They’ll store the barn on a farm or something over the winter, throw tarps over it. They marked every beam.... They knew every cross beam and every post up and down, every one wherever it came from. When they loaded it, they’ve got everything put together; they can put it back up the same way it was taken down,” he said, adding that he hopes to visit the barn once it’s reconstructed, and that it will be “nice to see it used again, renovated and (people) making use of it.”

The barn came down in early August.

Lois said she was impressed with how quickly and efficiently the crew worked.

“They don’t miss a second,” she said, adding that on the first full work day, “They drove in the lane at 8:06 a.m. Saturday morning; 8:08 a.m., two machines were running; and 8:10 a.m., two guys were on the roof.” Don added, “These guys, they all knew their jobs. They don’t have to be told ‘Do this’ and ‘Do that.’ They had a young fella out underneath the spruce tree ... he stood there and he pulled nails all day.”

In total, it took the crew five days to get the barn down to its stone foundation.

While the Mennonite crew took most of the barn, there were some pieces that they didn’t want, because of damage, wear, etc.

Pam and her husband, Jay, put a post on social media for people to come and get some of the leftover beams, timber, etc. Within hours, the first interested parties showed up, and a stream of others followed over the course of several days.

These included a couple from St. Thomas who took some of the beams for their horse shelters; a man from Hamilton who said he was planning to use the wood to make furniture, including tables and benches; and one person who said they were shooting a movie in the Bolton area, and wanted some of the wood for their set.

Don was pleased to see the barn would continue on.

“It’s better to see it being reused as burned or just dumped in the landfill someplace,” he said. Interestingly, it’s possible that the Douglas family farm wasn’t actually the barn’s first home.

Don said one of the crew leaders told him that “this barn had been up someplace else before, because it had already been what they call mortise-and-tenon, where they put the pieces together, but they’re not nailed together.”

Lois added that while they couldn’t say for sure that that was the case, it was interesting to think that “The barn might have had a previous life.”

Whatever the barn’s possible previous history, it was still a big part of the Douglas family’s story.

Lois said, “It was sad. That Saturday when it was finally gone, it was a hard day.”

Soon, though, a new chapter will begin for the family where the barn once stood – they’re planning to build a second living space – a ‘barndominium’ – so that Pam and Jay can live on the farm, too.

The family kept a few pieces from the old barn, including the dormer window, some hardware and some wood, that they plan to incorporate into the new building as decorative accents.

And so the barn’s legacy will continue on on the Douglas farm, too.



The Douglas family’s iconic green barn had been on the property since 1902.



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Norfolk Farms founder retires

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

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

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

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

Douglas started thinking there was an opportunity.

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

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

The resulting publication caters to what Douglas calls the row crops—the horticulture crops in Norfolk—plus stories that include



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



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general interest rural stories, cash crop farming, horses, and livestock. It is delivered by mail to more than 2,300 farm addresses.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Grant Haven Media purchased Norfolk and Brant Farms, effective Jan. 2, 2023. Douglas stayed for a transition period, which will end with the publication of the fall issues of Norfolk and Brant Farms.

"David started Norfolk Farms in 2017, which was about the time that the broader newspaper industry began to really suffer, with closures of many small-town newspapers across the province," said Grant Haven

Media owner and publisher Stewart Grant. "Despite the industry downturn, David was able to achieve remarkable success because he continually filled his papers with interesting local stories."

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

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

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

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

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

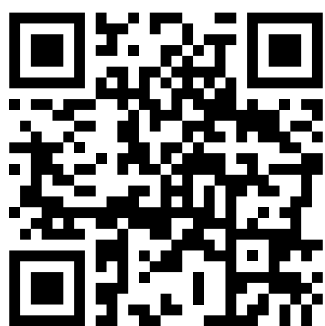
"What Dave accomplished should not be underestimated," he said. "The stories of Norfolk and Brant Farms will become an integral part of the agriculture history of Brant and Norfolk Counties."

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

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



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Dwarf apple rootstocks have pricey upfront costs but they provide faster returns than traditional, free-standing orchards

In their quest to meet changing consumer demand while remaining profitable, many Norfolk apple growers have replaced their traditional, low-density free-standing trees with smaller, single-stemmed trees planted in densities ranging from 900 to 1500 trees per acre.

Today, apple trees are “dwarfed” from specialized rootstock and grow using a high-density training technique called a tall spindle system. The trees are supported by a wire trellis with tree spacing being approximately a meter apart.

The density of these “dwarf” or “semi-dwarf” orchard plantings create a continuous Fruiting Wall or 2-D Planar Wall of “feathered” trees that enable better pruning, product application and the training of new hires, says Erika DeBrouwer, an apple specialist with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAF).

“Medium to high-density are umbrella terms,” said DeBrouwer, “They are used with different varieties, rootstocks and management systems. With Ontario apple growers, anything over 1200 trees per acre is considered high density; and any tree less than 15 feet is considered to be dwarf.”

A grower’s choice of training system depends upon each farm’s management factors, including the size of orchard equipment, affordability and initial labour needs for young trees, in addition to desired market varieties, said DeBrouwer.

These systems differ with every orchard that DeBrouwer visits: “I’ve



OMAF apple specialist Erika DeBrouwer

never been to an apple orchard that is the same --every orchard is different; therefore growers are choosing different way to grow apples.”

But all of these orchards share the same advantages that dwarf tree rootstocks and their assorted training techniques provide.

“High density orchards have narrower canopies allowing for better light inception, better colouring and air movement and easier product application.” said DeBrouwer. “It permits narrower row spacing, utilizing land more effectively with potential for mechanization integration.”

Moreover, added DeBrouwer, such trees are early-fruiting or “precocious” – producing fruit in its second or third year, depending up the variety. This advantage gives high-density orchardists faster turn-around times and higher yields per acre with proper management. This rootstock precocity allows growers to change cultivars quickly with less lost production time to meet changing consumer demands.

“Growers can harvest in the second year after planting, although it is not recommended for certain varieties as it can lead to lower yields and stunting the tree’s growth in the long-term. It is more common in Ontario to wait until year three or four.”

Different rootstocks provide different benefits to the tree that they are grafted upon, allowing growers to preselect types that meet each grower’s specific soil and cropping conditions, including the desired size of the tree they want to crop.

“There are multiple reasons regarding rootstock choice, most of which include: dwarfing, variety, the grower’s management style and training systems, along with insect and disease resistance,” said DeBrouwer.

Researchers develop dwarfing rootstocks for variables such as winter hardiness, pest resistance and bear names of where there were developed, such as: “M.9” (Malling 9) – developed by the East Malling Research Station; G.214,



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G.935, G4 (Geneva) 214, Geneva 935, developed by the Cornell University breeding program; or B9 (Budagovsky 9), developed by Michurinch College in Russia; or the Ontario-created "V.3" (Vineland 3) Vineland breeding program.

These research institutions then sell rights for rootstock propagation to contracted nurseries for sale to growers.

The most common rootstocks grown in Ontario apple orchards are those listed above, although there is strong influence by New York State due to its comparable climate and proximity, said DeBrouwer.

DeBrouwer said that the average cost of creating high-density orchards in Ontario is approximately \$100,000 per acre, depending upon the farm and its selected production system.

"These orchards require larger initial investment due to the additional expense of more trees

per acre," said DeBrouwer. "There is also the cost of training dwarfing rootstocks within their first three years, although if trees are trained well initially, it will be offset by reduced pruning costs in the long-term."

Another drawback is that Ontario growers must order new rootstock two to three years in advance, added DeBrouwer. "Coupled with the fact that it takes three years to get into production, it takes six years to earn returns from a selected cultivar. It's a big decision and should be well thought out. You have to do what is effective and efficient in your business."

When asked, "With high-density orchards now dominating the Norfolk landscape, will the old traditional apple tree still exist?" DeBrouwer responded, "If you want to grow them, but commercially, high density provides better yield, better quality, better colouring and efficiency." 🌿



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Norfolk's southern cousins

By Andrew Moore, Curator Delhi Tobacco Museum and Heritage Centre

The tobacco connection with our neighbours in the southern regions of the United States runs deep in Norfolk County. Although tobacco has been grown by Indigenous communities and used in the area for thousands of years, it wasn't until after the First World War that we see it profoundly change the agricultural landscape of Norfolk.

North Carolina's Henry Freeman and William Pelton are largely credited with introducing flue-cured tobacco to the local farming community. Freeman, a soil specialist for the Dominion Experimental Farms, which operated experimental stations run by the federal government, happened to collect soil samples from Lynedoch, Ontario during his travels in the area. Recognized the similarities with the soil of his homeland he knew it could be a prime location

for the flue-cure tobacco that was so prevalent in the southern United States.

William Pelton met Freeman at the University of Wisconsin where he was conducting research on disease resistant strains of tobacco, while Freeman was completing his studies on soil chemistry. In 1923, the two combined their money to buy the Chrysler farm and started the flue-cure industry in Ontario. A few years later, Freeman bought up more farms around Simcoe and Pelton supervised tobacco production in the Lynedoch community.

Over the next several decades hundreds of southerners came to work in Canada's tobacco belt. One of the men responsible for encouraging the migration of this labour force was Robert "Ed" Mann. He was from the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina where his family had been farming tobacco for more than a hundred years. Unfortunately, like many places around the world, the Great Depression took a huge toll on the southern tobacco belt and stories began to circulate amongst farmers that higher wages were being paid in Canada.

Ed and his wife Ann sold almost everything they had and moved to Norfolk in 1931. They got a place in Simcoe and Ed took a job for the Vittoria Tobacco plantations. He was later promoted to managing director of their 15 farms. Part of his job was to find enough skilled labour and Ed knew his homeland had plenty that knew the job. The thousand-mile distance was daunting, but high Canadian wages and free room and board provided enough of an incentive that many southerners took part in the journey.

During the 1940s, he recruited between 700 and 1000 curers and harvesters to Ontario each year. Getting the men to Norfolk could be difficult. At the beginning, many workers affected by the Depression were willing to endure bumpy rides on wooden benches in the back of trucks. By 1938, however, a deal with Greyhound bus lines was able to make the ride much easier and safer.

After a season or two, many of these decided to stay in Canada permanently, contributing to the diverse culture of Norfolk County through food, music and their experience in flue-cure tobacco.

Ed's wife Ann was known for her culinary expertise and contributed recipes to The Canadian Tobacco Grower Magazine. Stop by the Delhi Tobacco Museum & Heritage Centre and pick up a copy of her "Southern Corn Bread Dressing" in our Feeding the gang's exhibit.

I would like to dedicate this article to my late uncle Charles Kimball. His family moved to Delhi from North Carolina in the 1930s after the state expropriated their tobacco farm to make way for a new dam. The Kimball family went on to prosper in the Ontario tobacco industry for many years. 🌱



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The Civic holiday weekend saw the museum grounds open for Heritage Days, with admission by donation. Displays of various items and demonstrations of old ways of doing things were available for visitors to see. Several events were also available to keep the kids interested. Little ones could play in the corn box, loading toy trucks to their heart's content. A petting zoo offered kids and adults alike the opportunity to interact with various animals.

People could view the various collections and demonstrations, saunter through the marketplace or sample the tastes of the season for lunch. 🌿



Abigail Balag, 12, from New Jersey enjoyed the Heritage Days at Jarvis while in the area. Here she is visiting with an alpaca.



David Perry demonstrated the old art of rope making at Heritage Days.

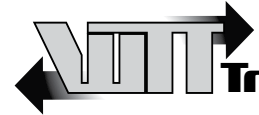


Xander Donison, 20 months, was too busy loading his truck with corn to look up. Xander is the son of Alex and Heather Donison of Selkirk.



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

cutting-edge products that improve growth and profitability.

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

“When it comes to new products, we’re focused on quality solutions that solve real problems,” says Rick Bradt, who co-manages A.M.A. Horticulture along with wife Connie Bradt. “These racking solutions tick that box more than once. They keep your plants upright, preventing damage and






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making better use of your staff's time. On top of that, they can be transported by forklift. Instead of slugging heavy containers across the yard, now you're moving up to 70 plants at once. That's a massive savings in time and labour."

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

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

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

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



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2018 Manitou, 1550 Hours, Deutz Engine, Heat and AC, Air Seat, 2 Speed, JSM Joystick Hydraulic Quick attach....\$118,900



2022 Merlo TF33.7, 2376 Hours, Deutz 115HP Engine, Has Heat/AC, Air Seat, 2 Speed, Joystick Controls....\$118,900